HER MAJESTY’S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, MP, JULY 2016)

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§ Members of the Government listed under more than one Department

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—The Rt Hon. Dame Caroline Spelman, MP
23 January 2017
THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 18 MAY 2015]

SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES
VOLUME 620
TENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2016-2017

House of Commons
Monday 23 January 2017
The House met at half-past Two o'clock
PRAYERS
[Mr Speaker in the Chair]
BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS
New Writs
Ordered,
That Mr Speaker do issue his Warrant to the Clerk of the
Crown to make out a New Writ for the electing of a Member to
serve in this present Parliament for the County Constituency of
Copeland in the room of Jamieson Ronald Reed, who since his
election for the said County Constituency has been appointed to
the Office of Steward and Bailiff of Her Majesty's Manor of
Northstead in the County of York.—(Mr Nicholas Brown.)

Ordered,
That Mr Speaker do issue his Warrant to the Clerk of the
Crown to make out a New Writ for the electing of a Member to
serve in this present Parliament for the Borough Constituency of
Stoke-on-Trent Central in the room of Tristram Julian William
Hunt, who since his election for the said Borough Constituency
has been appointed to the Office of Steward and Bailiff of Her
Majesty's Three Chiltern Hundreds of Stoke, Desborough and
Burnham in the County of Buckingham.—(Mr Nicholas Brown.)

Oral Answers to Questions
HOME DEPARTMENT
The Secretary of State was asked—
Immigration Rules
1. Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): If she
will make an assessment of the potential merits of
applying different immigration rules to Scotland and
other constituent parts of the UK.

10. John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): If
she will make an assessment of the potential merits of
applying different immigration rules to Scotland and
other constituent parts of the UK.

11. Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): If she
will make an assessment of the potential merits of
applying different immigration rules to Scotland and
other constituent parts of the UK.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department
(Amber Rudd): Immigration remains a reserved matter
and we will consider the needs of the UK as a whole.
Applying different immigration rules to different parts
of the UK would complicate the immigration system,
harming its integrity, and cause difficulties for employers
who need the flexibility to deploy their staff across the
UK.

Tommy Sheppard: That is a very disappointing response,
infused with arrogance and complacency. Many large
countries, such as Canada and Australia, have regional
variations in their immigration and visa policies in order
to take account of diverse and complicated local economic
circumstances. Is it not foolhardy for the Government
at this very early stage to rule out the prospect of doing
that in the regions and nations of the United Kingdom?

Amber Rudd: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman
shares my view that any policy changes should be
informed by the facts and by assessments, which is why
we consulted the Migration Advisory Committee to
look at regional issues, and it was unequivocal in its
conclusions. I urge him to look at its report.

John Nicolson: Does the Secretary of State not
understand that Scotland needs more immigrants? Given
that, why does she not give us the power to choose our
own targets, for our own needs, for our own country?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman must surely share
my view that Scotland has sufficient powers; it has its
own powers to do many things—perhaps to improve its
education system and its health system. Immigrants will come to a place where they see an improving education system and an improving health system. Perhaps the Scottish National party should spend a little more time applying itself to those important issues, rather than constitutional ones.

Stephen Gethins: During the EU referendum campaign, we were told that Scotland should have control over immigration. We have already been told that leaving the EU is meant to be clear in what it means, so why is it that the Home Secretary can keep commitments that will cost us jobs but not one that might create some jobs?

Amber Rudd: I am afraid I do not share the hon. Gentleman’s views about the outcome of the referendum. The fact is we have an immigration policy that works for the whole of the United Kingdom, and that is the one we will continue to support. As I said to the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson), I urge the SNP to apply itself to making Scotland an attractive place for immigrants to go to.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while it is right that we seek to take account of different labour market concerns and demographic pressures in all parts of the United Kingdom, any separate immigration regime for Scotland—or Wales, for that matter—would undermine the coherence of the United Kingdom and risk creating softer, alternative entry points for the rest of the UK?

Amber Rudd: Of course my right hon. Friend puts it so well. Any immigration policy will take into account needs driven by industry and by our skills, but it will not be regionally based, because the fact is that people like to be able to move around, and it is right that they should be able to do so.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): During the Commonwealth games in Glasgow in 2014, steps were taken at the border to ensure that Commonwealth citizens visiting the UK could easily transit our borders. Will the Home Secretary look at such measures for all citizens visiting the UK could easily transit our borders?

Amber Rudd: That was a serious matter. We are taking forward actions immediately, to ensure these things do not happen. We will be having conversations with Eurostar and Border Force to ensure certainty going forward.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): May I remind the Home Secretary that it was the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) who said during the EU referendum campaign that immigration should be devolved to Scotland? A starting point might be to allow EU nationals residing in Scotland to stay. Last week, the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union heard evidence from witnesses representing EU nationals living in the UK and witnesses representing British citizens living elsewhere in the European Union. Every single one of them said that it is their desire for the British Government to make a unilateral declaration of the continued rights of EU citizens in the UK. Will the Home Secretary now persuade the Prime Minister to do that?

Amber Rudd: I remind the hon. and learned Lady that nothing has changed: we are still in the European Union, and those citizens still have the same rights. In terms of their ongoing rights, the Prime Minister was very clear last week when she made her speech: she said it was going to be an early priority to give them the security they seek. I would urge all colleagues here to reassure their constituents that that is our intention, and we need to make sure that it is reciprocal for UK citizens as well.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Across Scotland, in common with other Europhile parts of the UK, there has been a huge upsurge in applications for indefinite right to remain from people such as Mrs Fabiola Power, who is Spanish by birth, but who got married and has been resident in Acton for decades. These people are dismayed that they have been rejected because they cannot prove that they have five years’ continuous service with the same employer or that they have paid into private health insurance. Will the Home Secretary revisit these rigid requirements, which penalise EU nationals such as Mrs Power, who have been homemakers, students, on short-term contracts or self-employed, and end this bureaucratic nightmare?

Amber Rudd: There is no penalising of people such as the lady the hon. Lady referred to. We continue to value the important contribution that EU nationals make to this country, and I urge the hon. Lady to follow the advice I previously set out, which is to reassure constituents such as the one she referred to that, in fact, we are doing our best to ensure that their future will be secure, and the Prime Minister says it will be an early priority to do so.

Police Funding

2. Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that police funding is fairly distributed.

Amber Rudd: The Government remain committed to reforming the current police funding arrangements to ensure a fairer, more up-to-date and transparent formula.

3. Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that police funding is fairly distributed.

4. Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): May I urge the Home Secretary to make sure there is consistency of border security and immigration policies across the United Kingdom? In that connection, will she tell the House what conversations have been had with Eurostar and Border Force to put an end to the Lille loophole, which seems to have been going on for six years? Does she agree that we cannot have a situation where profits are put before protection?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that serious matter. We are taking forward actions immediately, this week, to ensure these things do not happen. We will be having conversations with Eurostar and Border Force to ensure certainty going forward.

5. The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): The Government remain committed to reforming the current police funding arrangements to ensure a fairer, more up-to-date and transparent formula.
We are currently undertaking a period of detailed engagement with the policing sector and relevant experts, including academics. Any new formula, of course, will be subject to public consultation.

**Will Quince**: The current formula for allocating funding to our police forces uses data that are 14 years old. Does the Minister agree that it is time to update that formula?

**Brandon Lewis**: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, on which I know he has lobbied on behalf of his authority. I have spoken to the police and crime commissioner for Essex as well. It is true that the data are very much out of date. That is why it was in our manifesto to deliver a fairer funding formula review. That is what we are doing, and we will deliver on it.

**Nigel Mills**: The Minister will know that Derbyshire’s police force is also disadvantaged by the current formula. When can it expect to have the fair level of funding that it deserves?

**Brandon Lewis**: Derbyshire will get an increase in funding this year. I appreciate, having spoken to my hon. Friend and other colleagues who have spoken to me on behalf of Derbyshire, that there is a feeling that the formula is not currently fairly weighted with regard to a number of areas across the country. That is why it is important that we go through this process methodically. I am not going to give a timescale now. The sector and experts are working with us on this, and I am confident that we will get to the right position to have a clear, fair and transparent formula in good time.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that the current proposed funding settlement for police forces is below the level of inflation? That means that the cost is going to fall on local taxpayers, with a 3.8% rise in my area of north Wales. Is that not just a transfer from central Government to local government?

**Brandon Lewis**: The Government have put in a flat cash funding protection for police funding during this spending review period, and that is a good thing to do. This situation partly results from the fact that we inherited such an awful economic legacy from the previous Labour Government, who spent money that the country simply did not have. We have to make sure that this country works to live within its means—that is an appropriate and sensible thing to do. I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman and Labour Members should look at doing that in order to have a sensible funding formula in future.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): We owe a debt of gratitude to the office of the police and crime commissioner for Devon and Cornwall for having discovered the mistake that led to the pausing of the review, but that was 15 months ago, and there really is no excuse for such a delay. I appreciate that the Minister inherited this problem, but can we please have a timetable so that local police forces and PCCs can know when they can get their funding?

**Brandon Lewis**: I am as keen as the right hon. Gentleman clearly is to see the new funding formula review work completed so that we can get into place a fair and transparent formula, but it is important that we do this correctly and work with the sector. I thank everybody across the sector, including PCCs and chief constables from whom I have had feedback individually and in the wider groups, and whom I meet regularly. They are very happy with the process we are following and the timescale we are working to. I do not intend to rush anything; I want to make sure that we get this right.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Northamptonshire police are leading the way in combining the delivery of their frontline services together with the local fire brigade. Will the Minister ensure that forces that are undertaking such radical new initiatives to improve local efficiency are rewarded through the new funding formula?

**Brandon Lewis**: My hon. Friend highlights a really important point. Following the Policing and Crime Bill, emergency services will have the opportunity—in fact, a duty—to collaborate. Bringing together police and fire services provides huge opportunities for rewards in terms of savings by working together more collaboratively to deliver for the frontline. He is right that Northamptonshire has been a leading light in this over the past few years.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Scottish Police Authority is the only territorial police authority in the United Kingdom that is unable to recover the VAT it pays. That has cost the Scottish public purse £75 million since 2013, and it has consequences for investment and resourcing. The First Minister and the Finance Secretary raised that with the Chancellor earlier this month. What discussions has the Minister had with the Chancellor about this very important issue?

**Brandon Lewis**: In terms of the work we are doing around police funding, I have regular conversations with the Chief Secretary and the Treasury more generally. I am happy to feed back to the hon. and learned Lady more detail on this issue once we have had our next round of conversations.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): Whichever way you cut it, the cake is just too small. More than 20,000 police officers have been cut since 2010, and now we know from the Office for National Statistics that crime is twice as high as the Government say. When will the Minister recognise that the combination of high crime and low police numbers leaves the public at risk?

**Brandon Lewis**: I would respectfully say to the hon. Lady, who I know would want to be giving a very clear and transparent set of figures, that what she has said is not accurate at all. The reality is that the ONS has, for the very first time, included cyber-crime and fraud in its figures. It has recorded those figures for the first time, so it is not true to say that the figures have doubled. I am just sad that Labour, when in government, never gave these kinds of figures and had that kind of thing done, which is the right thing to do. I would also congratulate people for recording more crime more generally—[Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker**: Order. The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) does not have to provide us with a passable imitation of Bruce Forsyth. There is no requirement for that. She has asked her question with her usual pugnacity, and should now await the reply.
Brandon Lewis: Thank you, Mr Speaker. People can look for themselves at those ONS figures and see the reality. It is also clear, and I am proud of the fact, that I am part of a Government who have overseen a fall in overall crime since 2010.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The resort area of Cleethorpes has suffered from a spate of vandalism and antisocial behaviour in recent weeks. Will the Minister assure me that adequate resources will be provided to Humberside police and other forces to deal with that sort of antisocial behaviour?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend raises an important point about making sure that there is local accountability through the police and crime commissioners and that they look at where the crime is in their area and where they want to focus their resources, working with excellent chief constables around the country. Of course, we also have the fair funding formula, and agreement on its principles across the sector will contribute towards making it even fairer in the future.

Leveson Inquiry

3. Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on when to commence the second part of the Leveson inquiry.

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): Ministers recently sought views through a public consultation on whether proceeding with part 2 of the Leveson inquiry was appropriate, proportionate and in the public interest. The consultation allowed all interested parties to make clear their views and will help to inform the decision to be made jointly by the Home Secretary and Culture Secretary. Sir Brian Leveson will also be consulted formally before any decision is taken.

Julie Elliott: I thank the Minister for that response, which bore no relation to my question. More than 30 police and public officials have gone to prison as a result of the Leveson inquiry. How can it be appropriate to even consider cancelling Leveson 2, which would look at the question of police corruption and the role of politicians in it?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Lady will know that the consultation finished on 10 January and there were 140,000 responses to it. I do not know about her, but it takes time to go through them. The Government also have to deal with a current court case, which makes it much harder for us to respond to the consultation until that hearing is complete. Once it is complete, I assure her that we will be happy to meet her and discuss further the Leveson recommendations.

Vulnerable Syrian Families

4. Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): What progress the Government have made on placing vulnerable Syrian families in the UK.

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): The resettlement programme is on track to deliver the commitment to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Syrians during this Parliament. Between the start of October 2015 and the end of September 2016, 4,162 people have been resettled under the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme across 175 different local authorities.

Helen Whately: My constituents have been deeply moved by the refugee crisis and have asked me what they can do to help. I welcome the launch last year of the community sponsorship scheme. Will my hon. Friend update the House on the scheme’s progress and what more he is doing to harness the generosity of the British people?

Mr Wallace: The community sponsorship scheme was launched on 19 July 2016. The scheme embodies the commitment that the Prime Minister made when she was Home Secretary to allow individuals, charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to support refugees. My hon. Friend’s constituents are, indeed, part of that generous giving, because they want to help some very vulnerable people. A “help refugees in the UK” webpage has been developed to make it easier for any member of the public to support refugees in the UK, and to allow local authorities to focus support on the goods and services that refugees need.

19. Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Those from Syria and elsewhere who are granted refugee status can apply for immediate family members to join them here. Since the Home Office stopped funding DNA tests for such relatives, refusals from many countries have shot up. By what date will the Home Office review on this matter have been completed and published?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman makes some valid points. I will come back to him with the exact details of the timescale, and I will help to inform him about refugees from further afield than just Syria on that scheme.
James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Will the Minister congratulate councils such as Kingston Council that have come forward to host vulnerable Syrian refugees, and also the families who have done so? Will he explain that it is still the case that refugees require individual housing, rather than joining a family in an existing house, for very good reasons? Lots of these people are victims of the most terrible atrocities.

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is important, if this scheme is to work, that people do come forward. Many local authorities and, indeed, the Scottish Government have been incredibly generous in offering support and holding out the hand of friendship. We do need more, and we need more community groups to come through. I warn hon. Members that when charities and the third sector come forward, we do the correct due diligence to enable us to ensure that very vulnerable people are given exactly the support that they need, to make sure that the scheme is sustainable.

Fire and Rescue Response Times

7. Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): What assessment she has made of trends in fire and rescue response times. [908284]

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): We published the latest statistics on average response times to fires in England on 19 January, and they show that response times continue to increase gradually. There were reductions in some areas, such as house fires and commercial buildings fires. Fortunately, because of the good work done by the fire and rescue service, fires and fire-related fatalities have been on a downward trend for a number of years, reaching historically low levels recently.

Paula Sherriff: I thank the Minister for his response, but continued cuts are having a profound impact on firefighter and public safety. Response times have increased, there are unsafe numbers of staff on appliances and those appliances are having to travel further afield, which means that they are reaching more serious fires. Does the Minister agree that these cuts have gone far too far?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Lady mentioned house fires. There has been a reduction in the response times to fires in homes and, indeed, in buildings more generally. In terms of the finance issue that she raised, there has been an increase of 154% in fire service reserves over the last few years. In the fire service in her constituency, the reserve has increased from just over £7 million to some £29 million, all of which is money that can be used to find those efficiencies and provide those frontline services.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Fire-related deaths have gone up by 15% in England and 14% in Scotland over the last year. That is clearly unacceptable, and it must surely send a signal that the cuts have gone too far. Will the Minister look at the funding and at reorganisations, which are taking fire crews further away from the areas that they need to service?

Brandon Lewis: As I said in response to the previous question, the response to house fires and building fires has improved in the last year. It is important that we all bear in mind that any death as a result of fire is unacceptable. We all want there to be no deaths whatsoever, which is why the work done by fire authorities, and the health and safety work in our homes and on products over the years, which has improved safety, is important. We must always stay vigilant, which is why people should have, and test, smoke alarms. I say to all fire authorities that they must be sure to find those efficiency savings, so that they can make sure that the money is in the frontline to deliver for people every day.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): According to the Home Office’s own figures published last Thursday, deaths from house fires are up by 18% on previous years and response times are slower. Fire crews are being deprived of resources and fire service jobs are being lost. Will the Minister now accept that the current round of cuts is putting the public at risk and demoralising hard-working, dedicated fire officers?

Brandon Lewis: As I said earlier, we need to be very clear about the actual figures. The reality is that there has been a 52% reduction in the total number of reported fires over the last few years. Fire-related fatalities are down 22%, while response times to house fires and building fires are also slightly down and improved. We need to be vigilant on this, but we also need to be clear about the facts.

Online Child Sexual Exploitation

8. Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): What steps the Government and UK law enforcement agencies are taking to tackle online child sexual exploitation domestically and internationally. [908285]

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): The Government’s response includes law enforcement agencies taking action against online offenders, developing new capabilities to find and safeguard victims, and working with the internet industry to remove illegal images. We have led the global response to online child sexual exploitation through the WePROTECT Global Alliance, working with countries, companies and civil society organisations to develop a co-ordinated response.

Michelle Donelan: The latest Government statistics show that in 2015, over 500 children in Wiltshire were victims of online abuse and became the subject of a child protection plan. What impact is the child abuse image database having in helping to catch those who perpetrate this vile crime in Wiltshire?

Mr Wallace: The database makes it much easier for our National Crime Agency and our other assets to tackle the threat posed by paedophiles online. We are determined that the powers given to us in the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 will add to that to make sure that we catch these people. Child sexual abuse is horrific, and carries on on the internet across the country. I urge hon. Members to recommend to their constituents that a process to contribute to keeping their own children safe is to take time out to look at the Thinkuknow campaign on the National Crime Agency website, because all parents—as I do—have a role in making sure that their children know what is safe online.
Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): But actually, do not children need to be educated about how to help themselves stay safe online? If we had compulsory sex and relationships education, would not every school be able to make sure that every child knew how to be safe online?

Mr Wallace: May I ask the right hon. Lady to go on to the website of the National Crime Agency and look at the Thinkuknow campaign? The online tutorial is tailor-made for children and is broken down by age, so my young children have an appropriate curriculum to look at; it makes a real difference. There is even a tutorial for her, so that she may follow it and understand how she can be safe online and make sure children are as well.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I was concerned to hear from my colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), that there are 500 cases in Wiltshire. Does the Minister agree that the Wiltshire constabulary might be better spending the £1 million and deploying the 18 full-time officers currently looking into possibly bogus allegations against Sir Edward Heath, on looking into those 500 cases?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend will know that priorities for the police are set by the police; it is not for Ministers to interfere with the decisions they make. It is of course very important that we investigate all allegations of sexual abuse without fear or favour, and that we get to the bottom of it and put away those people who are causing such harm.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is being far too glib. All the research shows that the best intermediary for teaching children is someone they trust in a school—that is the truth—and online work is not actually very effective. Is it not the truth that bullying and exploitation are rampant, and is it not about time that we stopped making excuses and took on the Googles and the people who allow this to be transmitted?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman misses the point: we are taking on the Googles and the big internet companies, but he should spend time in schools. In the primary schools that my children attend, they are given classes on how to stay safe online. This is not done in a silo, with just a website; it is a combination of the website with teachers and parents—everyone has a role—and that is being delivered. Our challenge in the world of the internet is to keep pace with the huge numbers of referrals that we get every month of international paedophiles who abuse the internet to exploit our children and take advantage of the latest technology, and to ensure that our law enforcement agencies constantly go the extra mile to catch them.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I gently remind the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who nodded sagely at me to denote her interest in this matter, that on the whole it is prudent to stand, as the Speaker has many qualities but is not psychic.

23. [908301] Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I apologise, Mr Speaker. I thought my question had been grouped with this one, but I was clearly quite wrong.

We have had a dreadful local case in which an international paedophile ring, such as those the Minister mentioned, infiltrated a chatroom aimed at nine-year-olds, with really dreadful consequences for those children. Will the Minister tell us what investment the Government are making to help the police and other law enforcement agencies deal with and stamp out this sort of abuse?

Mr Wallace: The National Crime Agency’s child exploitation and online protection command received an extra £10 million this year, and in November 2015 the NCA joined up with GHCQ in a joint operations cell to ensure that we tackle some of the most complicated crimes online. Those two things are just part of the whole process, and I would be happy to brief my hon. Friend further on the whole spectrum of efforts that we take against paedophiles and online abuse. The key is that we can all contribute to that online safety—teachers, parents, law enforcement agencies and community leaders—to ensure that we are aware of how paedophiles operate, and can shut them down and put them away.

Domestic Abuse

9. Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that all forms of domestic abuse are recognised and investigated.

17. Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that all forms of domestic abuse are recognised and investigated.

Amber Rudd: The Government are absolutely committed to tackling all forms of domestic abuse. This morning I chaired the domestic abuse national oversight group, which oversees the delivery of important recommendations from Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary. Victims who experience extreme psychological and emotional abuse can now bring their perpetrators to justice. The College of Policing has updated its guidance, and every police force now has a domestic abuse action plan.

Ben Howlett: I thank my right hon. Friend for her response; that is welcome news. In Bath, a charity called VOICES provides support to those who are victims or survivors of domestic violence, helping them to recover and thrive. What is she doing to ensure that, where there is violence against women and girls both at home and abroad, they can get similar support?

Amber Rudd: I welcome the work of VOICES in helping women and girls. We are a global leader in tackling violence against women and girls both at home and overseas. Since 2010 we have invested £184 million, and we have nearly doubled our violence against women and girls campaigns overseas from 64 programmes in 2012 to 127 in 2016. We have hosted various important international conferences, such as the global call to action on protecting women and girls in emergencies, the global summit to end sexual violence in conflict, and the groundbreaking Girl Summit.
Oliver Colvile: May I add my thanks to my right hon. Friend for her answer?

Operation Encompass, which helps fight domestic violence through the school system, began in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend join me in praising the retired sergeant David Carney-Haworth, who set up Operation Encompass, and will she ensure that it is spread to as many police forces across the country as possible?

Amber Rudd: I am of course delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating David Carney-Haworth on his work. My hon. Friend has brought to our attention a really good example of local practice, and it is local practice, local initiative and local momentum that will really help the women and girls we want to reach.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): Will the Minister update the House on the violence against women and girls strategy, with particular reference to the promised £80 million of additional funding? How can that funding be accessed, and what are the criteria?

Amber Rudd: Yes, I am happy to update the hon. Lady on that. Some £40 million of that money is apportioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government, particularly for accommodation. We have access to most of the rest of it, and I particularly draw her attention to the £15 million that a combination of commissioners and local organisations are bidding for. She may like to access that money to support her constituents.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The SNP Scottish Government are strongly committed to ending gender-based violence, including through our proposed all-encompassing criminal offence of domestic abuse. They have also urged the ratification at the earliest opportunity of the Istanbul convention on ending violence against women and girls. Will the Secretary of State commit to a timetable for the Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Bill—the private Member’s Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford)—and for that long-awaited ratification?

Amber Rudd: I am always delighted to work with the Scottish Government on this important subject. I know that they have put aside £20 million to work on the topic, and I welcome that initiative. If the hon. Gentleman would like to see me or one of my colleagues, we can discuss his proposal.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Any victim of domestic violence should receive equal support and respect, regardless of their heritage and faith. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the reports that the Crown Prosecution Service is dropping so-called honour cases for fear of offending Asian communities?

Amber Rudd: I share my hon. Friend’s commitment to ensuring that so-called honour-based violence is not neglected. The Government will not shy away from tackling any type of violence against women and girls, and I am certainly happy to work with her on this important matter.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): What progress her Department has made on enabling closer working between the police and fire services.

Amanda Milling: I thank the Minister for his response and the fact that we will be changing the name of police and crime commissioners. Where there is a strong case for police and crime commissioners to take responsibility for the fire and rescue service, such as in Staffordshire, what will be the process and timeframe for implementing this very important change?

Brandon Lewis: I know that the police and crime commissioner for Staffordshire is keen to move forward with this. Following Royal Assent, it will be for a police and crime commissioner to put forward a business case outlining a proposal. If it has local agreement, as I hope it will, it can move forward; if it does not, the proposal will be assessed by an independent group under a process to be agreed with the Local Government Association to make sure it is clear and transparent. I hope that by the end of this year we will see the first areas coming forward with police, fire and crime commissioners.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): In Staffordshire, Matthew Ellis, the police and crime commissioner, has identified £10 million of savings if only the two can co-operate, as I am sure will be the case—and, incidentally, welcomed by firefighters throughout Staffordshire, as I am sure is the case in other parts of the UK. What does my right hon. Friend think the timetable will be for such mergers?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point and highlights the considerable efficiency savings that could be found through collaboration and which could allow extra money to go back into the frontline for both police and fire. On the timeframe, it will be down to the speed with which the police and crime commissioner can present a business case. If there is local agreement, I would hope to see the first police, fire and crime commissioners coming forward a matter of months after Royal Assent.

Forced Marriage

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that people subjected to forced marriage are encouraged to report that crime to the police.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising such an important matter. We made forced marriage a criminal offence in 2014 to...
better protect victims and send a clear message that this abhorrent practice will not be tolerated in the UK. We want to see more victims having the confidence to come forward to report this often hidden crime, and that is why we are introducing lifelong anonymity for victims through the Policing and Crime Bill.

Mike Freer: I am glad that this country is leading the way on tackling violence against women and girls, but does the Minister agree that we need to keep up the pressure to eradicate child marriage, as it is a particularly pernicious form of violence?

Sarah Newton: I do indeed. The UK is a world leader in the fight to stamp out forced marriage, and I am clear that to end these crimes in the UK we must end them overseas, too. That is why we are pursuing an ambitious programme of work at an international level, including with the Department for International Development, through its £36 million programme to end child, early and forced marriage.

International Students

14. Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): What representations she has received on the economic value to the UK of international students studying at universities. [908291]

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): The Government recognise that international students make an important contribution during their time here and help to make our education system one of the best in the world. We are in regular contact with the sector, and there is no limit on the number of genuine international students who can come here to study in the UK.

Christina Rees: International students bring academic and cultural benefits to our universities, contribute billions of pounds to the economy, support the creation of tens of thousands of jobs and enable these institutions to innovate, build links with businesses and invest even more in every student in every region and country of the UK. Will the Minister assure the House that the Government have no plans to reduce the number of international students coming to every UK university, and tell us what steps they will take to increase numbers?

Mr Goodwill: I agree with the hon. Lady absolutely. As I mentioned, there is no limit on the number of students who can come here. Since 2010, we have seen a 17% increase in the number of university applications from outside the EU, while the Russell Group has seen an amazing 47% increase.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The whole House knows that it is vital to maintain our global reputation as an open and fair place to study, but in mid-December last year the Home Office lost a major test case against international students. The Home Office claimed that the students had made bogus claims about English language skills. What were the total legal costs in this test case against Sharif Majumder? How many other cases were initiated and had to be dropped? What estimate has been made of the potential liability arising from students who were deported on the basis of evidence-free claims, but might now have a right to sue for wrongful deportation?

Mr Goodwill: I am slightly surprised that the hon. Lady has the brass neck to refer to bogus students in bogus colleges. We had to take away the sponsorship licence from 920 colleges that were recruiting students to take bogus courses. I will certainly get back to her in writing if I can provide some of the information she asked for specifically on that legal case.

Widows of Police Officers

15. Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Whether she is taking steps to ensure that widows of police officers are not financially disadvantaged by remarrying. [908292]

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): In January 2016, this Government changed legislation to the benefit of widows, widowers and civil partners of police officers in England and Wales who have died on duty. As a result, those survivors who qualified for a survivor pension will now continue to receive their survivors’ benefits for life, regardless of remarriage.

Richard Graham: I welcome the changes made after the police widows campaign, which I supported, but of course they apply only to widows who remarry or cohabit after April 2015, whereas elsewhere in the UK, police widows’ pensions have been reinstated regardless of the date of their remarriage. Does my right hon. Friend agree that police widows should be treated the same, regardless of where police officers served in the United Kingdom? Will he agree to meet me and other colleagues to discuss this further?

Brandon Lewis: I know that my hon. Friend has campaigned hard on this issue, and I would be happy to meet him and others to discuss it. He will be aware that the clear position taken by successive Governments is that changes should not apply retrospectively. As I say, I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend and colleagues to discuss the issue further.

Migration

16. Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): How many foreign students from (a) EU and (b) non-EU countries were included as part of the net migration figures in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [908293]

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): Long-term migration statistics are produced by the independent Office for National Statistics. The most recent figures estimate that in the year ending June 2016, 113,000 non-EU nationals came to the UK to study; in that same year, 45,000 non-EU nationals who were former students left. For EU nationals, the corresponding figures are 34,000 and 18,000 respectively.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Minister for that detailed response. I accept that students are classified as immigrants internationally, but when the immigration figures are
published, would it not be a good idea to state how many of the people in the figures are students bringing money to this country?

Mr Goodwill: I can confirm to my hon. Friend that these statistics are produced and presented by the ONS, and that figures for students are clearly identified separately within those statistics.

Mr Speaker: On this immigration-related matter, I would call the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) if he were standing, but if he does not stand, I will not.

21. [908298] Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): This Government’s immigration policies are separating rather than uniting families because of the ridiculous financial thresholds and restrictive rules on evidence of financial support. When will these rules be changed to support the real needs of family units?

Mr Goodwill: It is certainly very important for family reunification, particularly for spouses, that rules are in place to ensure that these people are not a burden on the taxpayer. Indeed, the levels set are such that if there were a separate figure for Scotland, it would be higher, given that average incomes in Scotland are higher than those in the UK overall.

Topical Questions

T1. [908318] Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): We are determined to protect children and vulnerable people. That is why today the Government have tabled an important amendment to the Digital Economy Bill. The amendment will give the police the power to go to the courts to compel phone companies to shut down phone lines being used by county lines gangs to sell illegal drugs. These gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money to and from the urban area. Once caught up in county lines, people are at risk of extreme violence, trafficking and exploitation by those behind this despicable crime. Closing the phone lines will seriously disrupt this criminality and the exploitation that is an integral part of county lines drug dealing.

Craig Whittaker: During a recent delegation as part of the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism, it became clear that international parliamentary colleagues are concerned about the rise of hate crime, and in particular anti-Semitism from the left in UK universities. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me, and indeed with Baroness Royall when she said that Labour does not take antisemitism seriously, as seen by the inaction against members of Oxford University who were accused of anti-Semitism, and that this has, of course, a wider impact on hate crime in general?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important matter, particularly during Holocaust Memorial Week. As he will know, the Government published a hate crime action plan to drive forward action to tackle all forms of hate crime, and to enable Departments across the Government to work with police and communities. However, I completely agree with him that all organisations, including universities and political parties, have an obligation to stamp out anti-Semitism wherever it is encountered.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Recent revelations from the Public Law Project indicate that country guidance in Eritrea was altered to suggest diminished risks of human rights abuses when there was no evidence to support that, solely in order to lower the number of refugees allowed entry. In a significant case in the upper immigration tribunal last October, it was found that the new Home Office guidance on Eritrea was not credible. We know that the guidance has since been withdrawn, but was the then Home Secretary involved in the issuing of that wholly misleading guidance, and can the present Home Secretary say how many refugees may have been wrongly denied entry and how many of them were children?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady has raised an important part of our immigration policy, whose purpose is to ensure that we keep all countries to which we are returning people under review. Quite rightly, Home Office staff will visit appropriate countries—and, indeed, they visited Eritrea in 2014—to make their country assessments. I am confident that Home Office processes are delivered in the correct way, but the hon. Lady can rest assured that we will always keep the position under review.

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): My hon. Friend has made a good point about the excellent work that is being done by Chief Constable Simon Cole and his team in Leicestershire. We are working to ensure that we achieve a fair, transparent review funding formula, and that all the chief constables and the police and crime commissioners feed into it. I assure my hon. Friend that we will deliver that work as quickly as we can.

T6. [908323] John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Waffle, Mr Speaker—waffle is all that we get in answer to questions about dealing with hate crime on Facebook and Twitter and on the internet. If Germany can fine these companies half a million pounds every time they fail to take down hate speech posts within 24 hours, why can we not also take practical action to hold them to account for their failure to deal with hate speech?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): The hon. Gentleman has made a very important point. Hate crime has no place whatsoever in our society. It destroys communities and people’s lives, and we are taking every possible action against it. We have the strongest legislative framework in the world, and that includes working with internet providers. I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman
that we have agreements with internet providers, and that when hate crime is identified, they will take the horrendous stuff down.

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend has highlighted a very good example of the use of modern technology to fight crime. I congratulate Cheshire police on their forward-thinking work. We are supporting such work through the police transformation fund when innovative ideas come from the police themselves to ensure that crime-fighting is efficient as well as effective in the future.

Nick Smith: Them too, sometimes.

Off-road bikers often go where the police cannot. Will the Home Office look into the possibility of resources, agreement and licensing to enable drones to be used to help us to tackle the problem?

Brandon Lewis: I recognise the challenges involved in dealing with those who use bridle paths and footpaths inappropriately and ruin them for the majority of other people. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and both he and the police deserve credit for wanting to crack down on such practices. The use of drones is another good example of modern technology. Police forces and fire brigades are sharing them, and I would encourage the hon. Gentleman’s local police force to consider doing the same. It might be possible to make a bid through the police transformation fund.

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) has outlined, the benefit that international students bring to cities such as Bradford cannot be overstated. What will the Minister do to reverse this trend and ensure that one of our greatest assets can continue to attract students?

Amber Rudd: I share the hon. Lady’s view about the importance of overseas students, particularly perhaps at the University of Bradford. Some universities have seen an increase, some have seen a decrease; we have seen more students coming over from China, fewer from India. This is the market on the move, and I urge the hon. Lady perhaps to work with her university and to come back to us with any suggestions she might have to try to improve the outcome for it.

Brandon Lewis: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and it was useful to meet him and colleagues last week. I also want to thank his police and crime commissioner, as well as his chief constable, for feeding into the work we are doing to ensure that the new police funding formula is fair and transparent and has input from forces right across this country.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Violence against doctors, nurses, paramedics and other health workers has been on the rise in England and Wales over the last few years. Scotland has a specific criminal offence for such violence; is it not time that we had the same in England and Wales?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and it links in very closely with the work we are doing around making sure that offences against police officers are dealt with in the strongest possible terms. The punishments are there, but we must make sure that the Sentencing Council has these things working correctly, and we are working with colleagues at the Ministry of Justice to look at this issue at the moment.

Sarah Newton: I am absolutely delighted to commend the work of this multi-agency Halcon One Team, which operates in my hon. Friend’s constituency. It is, indeed, a marvellous example of where the police and local agencies work together in their communities with vulnerable
people, tackling environmental issues and providing young people with a constructive alternative, to avoid them being dragged into a life of crime and antisocial behaviour.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): In the light of Holocaust Memorial Day this week, will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust Educational Trust, which remind us of the worst example we have ever witnessed of where anti-Semitism can lead? In the light of the publication of the Community Security Trust 2016 anti-Semitic incident report next week, and bearing in mind the fact that last year saw the third highest annual level of anti-Semitic hate incidents in the UK, what are the Government doing to combat rising levels of anti-Semitism?

Amber Rudd: I thank the right hon. Lady for giving me this opportunity to join her in thanking the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust Educational Trust for the extraordinary work that they do in reminding us all of what took place. I am one of the MPs—I am sure that there are many here—who took the opportunity to visit, and I will always remember the impact of that. I work closely with the Community Security Trust, and I made the hate crime action plan my priority. We will continue to work with the trust to ensure that we do what we can to stop any form of anti-Semitism.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): More than 30,000 unaccompanied child refugees arrived in Greece and Italy last year. Building on the good work that we did in Calais, can the Minister give me an update on when we expect the first children to come from Greece and Italy under the Dubs criteria and whether he has a sense yet of how many there might be?

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): In 2016, we transferred more than 900 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to the UK from Europe, including more than 750 from France as part of the UK’s support for the Calais camp clearance. Following consultation with local authorities, I remind the House that the Government will transfer “a specified number” of children, in accordance with section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016, who reasonably meet the intention and spirit of the provision. This will include more than 200 children already transferred from France. We will announce in due course the basis on which the remaining places will be filled, including from Greece and Italy, and the final number.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): This afternoon we have been talking about police funding in the abstract, but there is also a human cost to policing. This weekend in the Crumlin Road area of north Belfast, a police officer was shot and badly wounded. Will the Home Secretary please pass on to Chief Constable George Hamilton the unqualified support of the whole House for the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and our deepest sympathy to the friends and family of the police officer who was shot this weekend, who has not been named?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I spoke to my new French counterpart just this morning about the actions that we are taking together to ensure that the correct assessment of the children who would like to come to the UK continues. A substantial number of centres are still open, and we still have a number of staff out there. We will be reducing our work there, as the Calais camp has largely dispersed, but we will continue to have an interest and ensure that we work closely with the French to stop a new camp coming up.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): My constituent Eann McInnes has twice tried to get his family to visit Scotland from Morocco while they sort out their visa arrangements, but twice the Home Office has frustrated the process, stating: “The right to a family life could be enjoyed in Morocco, and does not necessarily have to be in the UK”.

However, my constituent has a genetic disorder that can be treated only in the UK. Will the Minister commit to looking into this case again, and will he meet me to work out how the family can be reunited so that they can live together?

Mr Goodwill: I would be more than happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss that specific case and to see what can be done.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service aware of the stark warning that was given to his predecessor by the chief constable of Cumbria, Jerry Graham, about the failure of the previous funding formula to take into account “the cost premium for the sparsity, rurality and geographical isolation of Cumbria”?

Will the Minister meet all Cumbria’s MPs to discuss this important issue before his new proposals come out?

Brandon Lewis: I am very aware of the changes and, despite the encouragement of some of the hon. Gentleman’s colleagues, I think it is important that we do this work methodically rather than rushing into it. I have been liaising with Cumbria’s chief constable, and I will be talking to him and the police and crime commissioner. Indeed, I am happy to take input from any source to ensure that we have a clear and transparent process.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we must move on.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Mr Speaker, as the matters we are about to discuss are of the utmost confidentiality and may give succour to Her Majesty’s enemies, I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163), and negated.
Trident: Test Firing

3.34 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the test firing of a Trident nuclear missile in June 2016.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): In June last year, the Royal Navy conducted a demonstration and shakedown operation designed to certify HMS Vengeance and her crew prior to their return to operations. It included a routine unarmed Trident missile test launch.

Contrary to reports in the weekend press, HMS Vengeance and her crew were successfully tested and certified as ready to rejoin the operational cycle.

We do not comment on the detail of submarine operations, but I can assure the House that the safety of the crew and public is paramount during any test firing and is never compromised. Prior to conducting a Trident test fire, the UK strictly adheres to all relevant treaty obligations, notifying relevant nations and interested parties. Here, the Chair of the Defence Committee, the Opposition Defence spokesperson, and the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee were informed in advance.

I can assure the House that the capability and effectiveness of the UK’s independent nuclear deterrent is not in doubt. The Government have absolute confidence in our deterrent and in the Royal Navy crews who protect us and our NATO allies every hour of every day.

Mr Jones: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. He will know that I am a strong believer in this country’s independent nuclear deterrent. Major inroads have been made in recent decades in public transparency on nuclear issues, on which is important to maintain a consensus and support for our nuclear deterrent. That has included openness and publicity about test launches in Florida.

The Secretary of State will have seen claims in the press at the weekend that in the latest test the missile veered towards the United States. Will he confirm whether that was the case? Will he tell the House when he was first informed that there was a problem with the test and when his Department informed the then Prime Minister, David Cameron? Was it the Secretary of State or the then Prime Minister who decided to shelve the Department’s customary practice of publicising test launches and ordered a news blackout?

What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the present Prime Minister about the test, and why news of it was not relayed to Parliament before the debate on the Successor submarine programme last July?

Finally, I pay tribute to the members of our armed forces who for the past 48 years have maintained Operation Relentless and the UK’s continuous at-sea deterrent.

Sir Michael Fallon: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman not only takes a close interest in defence but has borne responsibility for the defence of our country and supports the deterrent. However, I must disagree with his call for greater transparency. There are few things that we cannot discuss openly in Parliament, but the security of our nuclear deterrent is certainly one of them. It has never been Government practice to give Parliament details of demonstration and shakedown operations. There have been previous examples where some publicity has been decided on a case-by-case basis and informed by the circumstances at the time and by national security considerations.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is absolutely no evidence of systemic failure anywhere in this system? Will he confirm that he, like me when I was Minister for the Armed Forces, has total confidence in our Trident defences as being both deadly and reliable?

Sir Michael Fallon: I can certainly confirm that. I repeat to the House that HMS Vengeance was successfully certified and passed the test that was set, and therefore rejoined the operational cycle and is part of that operational cycle today.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his answers; I am just sorry that it has taken allegations in a Sunday paper and an urgent question to bring him to Parliament this afternoon. Let me be clear: we are not asking him to disclose any sensitive or inappropriate detail. All we want is clarity and transparency, because yesterday the Prime Minister refused four times on live television to say when she became aware of the details of this missile test.

Today, No. 10 admitted that the Prime Minister was told about this incident as soon as she took office, yet when she came to this House on 18 July 2016 to call on Members to back the renewal of Britain’s nuclear submarines she did not say a word—not a single word. This is just not good enough. The British public deserve the facts on a matter as important as Britain’s nuclear deterrent, and they deserve to hear those facts from their Prime Minister, not in allegations sprawled across a Sunday paper.

May I ask the Secretary of State a simple question? Why was this information deliberately kept from Parliament and the British public? Who made the decision to keep this incident quiet? Was it his Department, or was it No. 10? While respecting the limits of what he can disclose, can he at least set out what investigation his Department has carried out into what happened in June? What assurances can he give that there will be no future cover-ups on important matters such as this?

At the heart of this issue is a worrying lack of transparency and a Prime Minister who has chosen to cover up a serious incident, rather than coming clean with the British public. This House and, more importantly, the British public deserve better.

Sir Michael Fallon: Let me just be very, very clear: neither I nor the Prime Minister are going to give operational details of our submarine operations or of the systems and sub-systems that are tested through a demonstration and shakedown operation.

The hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) asked
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Is the Secretary of State telling us that nothing went wrong on this particular launch? While accepting that the nuclear deterrent needs to be shrouded in secrecy, it also needs to deter. Once stories get out there that a missile may have failed, is it not better to be quite frank about it, especially if it has no strategic significance, as, in this case, it probably has none?

Sir Craig Oliver vehemently denies that he or any other member of David Cameron’s media team ever knew about the aborted Trident test, so will the Secretary of State tell us when Mr Cameron was told about it and when he himself was told about it? Will he accept an invitation to attend the Defence Committee tomorrow morning—in closed session for some questions, if need be—to resolve any outstanding issues?

Sir Michael Fallon: As I have said, I am not going to discuss publicly on the Floor of the House the details of the demonstration and shakedown operation. All I can do is repeat that HMS Vengeance has successfully been certified again to rejoin the operational cycle. I think I have already answered on the responsibility of the Prime Minister and made it very clear that the previous Prime Minister and this Prime Minister were, of course, informed about the maintenance of the nuclear deterrent, the outcome of the test and the successful return of HMS Vengeance to the operational cycle.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The basic rule of deterrence is that it has to be both credible and capable. After yesterday’s sensational revelations, it is safe to assume that Trident is neither. Given that one of the UK’s nuclear missiles veered off towards the United States, it is an insult to our intelligence to try to claim, as the Government have, that Trident’s capability and effectiveness are unquestionable.

An equally serious matter that arises is the deliberate withholding of information from the House ahead of the crucial Commons vote on renewal last July. It is absolutely outrageous that the House had to rely on a leak to a Sunday newspaper to find out about this incident and the subsequent cover-up. When did the Secretary of State first find out about this missile failure? Was it he who informed the new Prime Minister about the failure? Who took the decision not to inform Parliament of the incident?

Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Gentleman is, of course, opposed to the Trident deterrent that has kept this country safe for so many years. First, let me caution him against believing everything he has read in the weekend press. Secondly, let me repeat that the Government are in no doubt about the capability and effectiveness of our deterrent and would not have asked this House to endorse the principle of the deterrent and our plans to build four new submarines if there had been any question about its capability and effectiveness.

Sir Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that secrecy and transparency are simply incompatible, and that it is right that every British Government—as well as, indeed, every Government of our nuclear allies, the Americans and the French—have always put secrecy first in this area?

Sir Michael Fallon: I agree with my hon. Friend. As I said to the House earlier, there are very few issues that cannot be discussed openly in the House, but the security of the nuclear deterrent is clearly a prime example of something that cannot be discussed in detail.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, whether through the notice to airmen system or other warning systems, our enemies would have been aware of the failure of the test? Does he agree that for Members of this House to be able to debate effectively the merits of Trident or its like-for-like replacement, we need timely and security-appropriate information, and that we did not get that in this case?

Sir Michael Fallon: On the first point, the right hon. Gentleman may be aware that, under our international treaty obligations notice of any test firing has to be given to other countries and interested parties. In the case of the June test firing, that was done. I do not agree with his latter point. The Government would not have put the motion to the House last July had we had any doubt about the continuing capability and effectiveness of the deterrent.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I remind the House that the Russians not only contemplate using nuclear weapons but practise their employment on their exercises. Is it not crucial, therefore, that we retain our own independent nuclear deterrent, to ensure that our potential enemies, such as Russia, are deterred and think twice before they even contemplate using such weapons of mass destruction?

Sir Michael Fallon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That indeed was the proposition put before the new Parliament last July and endorsed by 472 Members of this House against a vote of only 17—the latter number included, of course, the Leader of the Opposition.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Have the Government instigated a leak inquiry to find out the source for The Sunday Times? If not, do they intend to do so?

Sir Michael Fallon: As I said to the House earlier, I am not confirming the speculation in the weekend press, and I caution Members against believing everything they have read in the weekend press.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Have the Ministry of Defence and our US partners shared information about the test firing and subsequent evaluation, because it is important to reassure our service people and the public about the validity of the nuclear deterrent?

Sir Michael Fallon: I understand why my hon. Friend asks that question, but I am afraid that I have to say to him that it takes us into the detail of the operation of the nuclear deterrent and I am not going there.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Following on from that, the Government continually refer to Trident as the UK’s independent nuclear deterrent, yet the missile involved in the malfunction was designed, manufactured and owned by the US, with a US guidance
[Caroline Lucas]

system and leasing arrangements. It is not an operational issue to tell us whether the Secretary of State has known that the malfunction last year was reported at the time to the US President, nor whether the new President has been briefed about it, and nor who decided to cover it up—the UK Government or the US.

Sir Michael Fallon: Let me be very clear about this: our Trident nuclear deterrent is completely operationally independent of the United States. In our country, only the Prime Minister can authorise the firing of these weapons, even if they are employed as part of an overall NATO response.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the approach he has taken on this issue? The whole area of our independent nuclear deterrent is of crucial importance, and the arguments he has made very strongly about not being as open as he might perhaps at times like to be on the operational side is absolutely correct.

Sir Michael Fallon: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Earlier Governments in different situations—indeed, in more benevolent times—might have taken different decisions about how much information they were prepared to reveal about demonstration and operations. These are not, of course, such benevolent times, and the decision we took was not to release any information about the testing of all the systems and sub-systems involved in the return to the operational cycle of HMS Vengeance.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): There is no doubt about why the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) wanted this to be held in private. It was not to keep our secrets from the Russians, but to save the embarrassment of Ministers and the Prime Minister. In Talleyrand’s words: “It’s worse than a crime, it’s a mistake.”

Mr Speaker: Order. I have known the right hon. Gentleman long enough to know of his naturally pugnacious and combative spirit, but that must not elide into impugning the integrity of another hon. Member. He has had his bit of fun, but he must now wash out his mouth, withdraw those words and put a question, for which the nation will be grateful.

Mr Spellar: I certainly withdraw any implication that the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) was worried about embarrassment to the Minister.

Will the Minister confirm that in Lord Hennessy’s book “The Silent Deep” there is a full description of a previous firing? How is it an operational matter or a security threat merely to ask when the Minister and Prime Minister were made aware of the problem and why they decided to keep it quiet?

Sir Michael Fallon: On the first point, I have already made it clear that, of course, earlier Governments in different circumstances took different decisions not to share details with Parliament, but to release information publicly about the completion of tests. We have to take our decision in the light of the circumstances that prevail at the time and the national security considerations.

On the right hon. Gentleman’s second question, I have made it very clear that both I and the Prime Minister are of course informed of nuclear matters at all times and in particular of the successful return of HMS Vengeance to the operational cycle.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I very much welcome the Secretary of State’s tone and approach so far. These things should always be secret, in my view, but will he go further and speculate on why, when last year’s debate was on the renewal of the Vanguard-class submarines and had nothing whatsoever to do with Trident missiles, there is any suggestion that the Prime Minister should have announced this failure?

Sir Michael Fallon: As I have said, the Government would not have brought the motion before the House last July had there been any doubt about the safety, capability or effectiveness of the Trident missile system. However, my hon. Friend is right to remind the House that the vote, and the huge majority it secured, was of course on the principle of our deterrent and the Government’s plan to renew our four submarines.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The essence of deterrence is uncertainty—about when, whether or if missiles will be fired. Can I take it that the purpose of the Secretary of State’s statement today is that he wishes to add to the uncertainty and therefore increase deterrence?

Sir Michael Fallon: To take the hon. Gentleman’s question seriously, he of course is right that one of the principles of deterrence is to leave one’s adversaries uncertain about the circumstances in which one would employ it. I have simply made it clear to the House today that the outcome of the tests was a successful return by HMS Vengeance to the operational cycle, but I am not prepared to go into further operational detail about the tests themselves.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I welcome the Government’s approach and thank my right hon. Friend for his reassurance about the effectiveness of the Trident system. Will he confirm that there have been 160 successful firings of the missile? Surely that should reassure the British people rather more than the prospect of the Leader of the Opposition having his finger on the button.

Sir Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend is right to draw the House’s attention to the previous testing regime. The House might want to know that the demonstration and shakedown operation is critical at intervals for demonstrating the effectiveness of the deterrent. It comprises a comprehensive series of system and sub-system tests, as I have said, and it provides a period of intensive training for the submarine’s crew. It evaluates the complex weapons system involved in Trident, including the performance of the crew, and it concludes each time with an unarmed missile firing. HMS Vengeance successfully concluded that shakedown operation.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I am a supporter of the deterrent, but does the Secretary of State not understand that a leak to a Sunday newspaper, followed by, frankly, Government stonewalling, does not enhance support for the deterrent, but undermines it?
Sir Michael Fallon: I understand why the hon. Gentleman, who is a supporter of the deterrent, says that, but the security of our deterrent is absolutely paramount at a time like this. Whether he likes it or not, I am not going to respond to speculation about the tests that occurred last June or give details of the particular operations of HMS Vengeance during that test.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent has kept us free from aggression day in, day out since 1968, and that we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the men and women who operate it?

Sir Michael Fallon: I wholeheartedly endorse what my hon. Friend says, and I hope that that at least would be common ground. The nuclear deterrent has played its part in keeping this country safe through a series of continuous at-sea patrols seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. I join him in paying tribute to the crews of all four of our nuclear submarines.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): There is now a question about the effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent—[Interruption.] There is in terms of what is in the papers. That in itself undermines our national security. We need to send a clear message that our deterrent is still able to do its job. I urge the Secretary of State to accept the invitation of the Chair of the Defence Committee and appear before it to reassure us and the House that our deterrent is fit for purpose.

Sir Michael Fallon: Let me reassure the hon. Lady, who follows these matters extremely closely and is on the Defence Committee, that there is absolutely no doubt about the effectiveness of our deterrent. Again, had the Government any doubts about the continuing capability or effectiveness of the deterrent, we would not have brought the motion before the House last July.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Would my right hon. Friend agree not only that the Prime Minister was absolutely right not to discuss this issue on national television but that a 98% success rate in testing for a weapons system is phenomenal? Once it has been tested, all boats that go out are fully operational and 100% capable, and that is something for which we should pay huge tribute to Her Majesty’s Royal Navy and the sailors who serve on those boats.

Sir Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the importance of these tests and to hint at the complexity of them and of the systems and sub-systems that are involved in maintaining the Trident deterrent. It is to the credit of the crew of HMS Vengeance that they were able to complete these tests last June, and they now take their place again in the operational cycle.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Since the Minister is not prepared to confirm very much at all, can I ask him to confirm whether each test of a Trident missile costs at least £17 million?

Sir Michael Fallon: No, I am not able to confirm that either.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is regrettable that the phrase “cover-up” has been used, when this issue concerns our national security. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if things go wrong, the last thing we should do is give succour to the enemy by telling them that that is the case?

Sir Michael Fallon: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is important that we maintain the secrecy of our deterrent, and it is important for our adversaries to understand that we attach paramount importance to making sure the operational details of the deterrent are as closely guarded as possible.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I look forward to meeting the Secretary of State tomorrow at the Defence Committee, if he is available.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that credibility lies at the very heart of this urgent question? Will there be an official inquiry into the malfunction and the overall credibility of how the UK would deliver its weapons of mass destruction? Will there be a further inquiry into why the Prime Minister could not answer a question on four separate occasions on “The Andrew Marr Show” yesterday? Our nation really does deserve better, as do our serving personnel.

Sir Michael Fallon: On the first point, I am pondering the invitation that I have received to answer questions again tomorrow as fully as I have been answering them today. I will give that further thought. The Prime Minister, of course, did answer questions yesterday; she did not give the answer that the hon. Gentleman may have wanted, but she did answer that question. I want, again, to be clear with the House that the Prime Minister, who retains the ultimate responsibility—and an awesome one at that—for our deterrent, is kept informed as to how that deterrent is maintained, and was informed, of course, as her predecessor was, of the successful return of HMS Vengeance to the operational cycle.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): As these missiles get older, there are bound to be increasing maintenance programme costs, as well as costs from emerging and yet unforeseen threats to the system. What is the United Kingdom’s exposure to these costs of maintaining and protecting the Trident missile system this side of 2060?

Sir Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend draws attention to the relative age of the Trident system, which he has had some doubts about in the past, and he probably continues to do so today. That, of course, is one reason why these tests are conducted every four or five years to make sure that our submarines are able to fire the Trident missile when they return from long periods of maintenance. Perhaps my hon. Friend would allow me to write to him on the very specific question of cost.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): As an accident is the most likely cause of the nuclear catastrophe that we all fear, either because of misunderstandings between the nations, human error or technical failure, now that President Trump has his impulsive finger on the nuclear button, should not our prime cause be to persuade him not to encourage South Korea, Japan and other small nations to acquire nuclear weapons, thus magnifying the risk of war by accident?
Sir Michael Fallon: I agree with my hon. Friend on the vital importance of keeping this work secret. Let me also pay tribute to the secret work that is done by my constituents working at Aldermaston, and indeed Burghfield alongside it, as part of the essential importance of verifying the deterrent.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Having been in Florida for the 2009 DASO—demonstration and shakedown operation—firing, I know that this is not the first time there has been a media blackout to suit a particular Government’s agenda. That firing was of course carried out by my own husband. The MOD press statement says that the crew and boat were successfully tested, but what about the missile? How could the nuclear deterrent be certified for operational use when the system has catastrophically failed?

Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Lady, who I know has family connections in this area, must not believe everything she read in the newspapers yesterday. I am not going into particular operational details except to confirm that HMS Vengeance successfully concluded her demonstration and shakedown operation.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): There is a huge difference between subjects that are of interest to the public and things that are in the public interest. Does my right hon. Friend agree that while operations relating to intelligence, counter-terrorism, special forces and, indeed, nuclear submarines are of massive interest to the public, it is not in the public or national interest to discuss them openly in this or any other place?

Sir Michael Fallon: I completely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Secretary of State has advised us not to believe everything we read in the Sunday newspapers, but should we believe the Whitehouse official who, while we have been debating, has confirmed to CNN that the missile did auto-self-destruct off the coast of Florida? If that is the case, why are the British Parliament and the British public the last to know about it?

Sir Michael Fallon: As I have said, we do not in this House—and nor did any previous Government—give operational details of the demonstration and shakedown operation of one of our submarines conducting a test with one of our Trident missiles.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the most important conclusion from this particular missile test is that our excellent submariners on HMS Vengeance proved that they can deal with unexpected technical challenges with a ballistic missile system known to be the most reliable in the world, and that that should be of enormous reassurance to the British people?

Sir Michael Fallon: I congratulate the crew on completing their test and returning, as I have said, to the operational cycle of the submarines that discharge this duty on our behalf, but I say again that I am not going into operational details.
Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): How can this be an independent nuclear deterrent if Donald Trump, the President of the United States of America—a man who is as thick as two short planks—is given the information, but nobody on the Opposition Benches is allowed to see it?

Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that the nuclear deterrent that has served us so well is independent, because its operational control rests with our Prime Minister, not with the President of the United States.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the full debate that we had in this place six months ago, on 18 July, which was endorsed by 472 right hon. and hon. Members, was on the principle of our deterrent and replacing the Vanguard-class boats, not on a routine test?

Sir Michael Fallon: I can confirm that. It was an overwhelming majority and that has allowed us to proceed with the construction of the Dreadnought submarines. I had the honour to cut steel on the first of those four submarines in October 2016. I repeat that had the Government any doubt at that time of the safety capability or effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent, they would not have brought the motion before the House.

Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State tell us what further Trident missile tests are planned, and will he keep the House updated on the outcome of future tests?

Sir Michael Fallon: These particular demonstration and shakedown operations take place when each of our submarines emerges from a period of long-term maintenance, so they tend to take place every four or five years. It follows from that that there is not likely to be another one in the immediate future, but, as on this occasion, we will, of course, keep interested parties informed. We wrote to the Chair of the Defence Committee, the shadow Defence spokesman and the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): In certain theatres of war, such as Ukraine, Russia has been testing and refining its electronic and cyber-warfare techniques. Although I am not blaming Russia for this incident, will the opportunity now be taken to review the system’s protections against possible electronic countermeasures?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes. I was in Ukraine last week and we discussed this, among other matters. Of course, we are taking very good care to ensure that our deterrent is properly protected against any new technologies that our adversaries might get hold of.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Does not the Secretary of State realise that just because the Trident programme was approved by the House as a whole, that does not mean that thereafter there should be total silence from either Members of Parliament or the media? As far as the failed test is concerned, is it not ironic that if the information had been given at the time and there had been no cover-up, there would be far less publicity, and far less of a row, than there is now? The Government should learn from that.

Sir Michael Fallon: I do not accept that. Previous Governments that the hon. Gentleman supported have not given operational details of previous demonstration and shakedown operations, which comprise the major tests of the systems and sub-systems that we have been dealing with today.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I commend my right hon. Friend for his reticence about getting drawn into this, and may I also commend the Prime Minister for her reticence, which was entirely appropriate given the subject at issue? Is it not rather ironic to hear right hon. and hon. Members complaining about the possible lack of credibility of the deterrent when some of them do not actually believe in the doctrine of deterrence at all? It would be unwise of the Russians or any other potential adversary to suggest that they could take the risk of invading this or that country on the basis that we might have a misfire of one of our missiles.

Sir Michael Fallon: Again, I agree with my hon. Friend. We should not forget that there were many in that particular debate who took the opposite view—the view that we no longer need the deterrent. I am particularly pleased that the overwhelming majority of Members of this House, on both sides of this House, voted in favour of renewing the deterrent that has kept us safe for so long.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): We now know, despite her refusal to answer on “The Andrew Marr Show”, that the Prime Minister did know about this. May I ask the Secretary of State what specific discussions took place with the Prime Minister about whether to disclose this malfunction to Parliament, when these discussions took place, and how it was determined that the information should not be shared? Does the Secretary of State realise how woefully inadequate his responses today have been, both to this House and to the watching public?

Sir Michael Fallon: It might well be that the hon. Lady and members of the watching public would like to know further operational details of our nuclear deterrent, but I am not going to assist them. On her specific point about the Prime Minister, this Prime Minister, like her predecessor, is kept informed about how the nuclear deterrent is maintained, and she was fully aware of the successful return of HMS Vengeance to the four-boat operational cycle.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend followed the argument made by some Opposition Members that perhaps we would have voted differently had this information been given to us back in July? May I tell my right hon. Friend that that is not the case? We would not have been influenced by the result of one out of many tests. Indeed, is there any Conservative Member who would have voted differently had this information come out? No.
Sir Michael Fallon: As my hon. Friend knows, I have not confirmed any information today. I have been rather careful to try not to confirm any particular information today, except to warn the House repeatedly not to believe everything that was in yesterday’s newspapers. Again, he is right to remind us that the vote in July was on the principle of the deterrent and our plans to replace the current Vanguard boats with the four new Dreadnought submarines.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): When we voted in July last year on funding Trident, unfortunately the official Opposition were split. Properly informed scrutiny of such decisions is vital to the effective and accountable operation of the Secretary of State’s Department, so is he satisfied with the level of scrutiny from the official Opposition on this matter?

Sir Michael Fallon: I have been disappointed for some time by the scrutiny of the official Opposition, but perhaps my fifth Defence shadow will improve on the record of her four predecessors—I am sure that she will.

There is clearly a balance to be struck. Parliament is, rightly, keen to know details of the expenditure involved in replacing the four submarines, and that was a big part of the debate. We will make sure that the Defence Committee and the Public Accounts Committee are kept fully informed as the boat replacement programme continues.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): The House will know of my special interest in the Royal Navy, which many of my constituents share. After more than 160 successful Trident missile tests, is it not ridiculous for some people to claim that this system does not work?

Sir Michael Fallon: Let me reassure my hon. Friend, who takes a close interest in these matters, that the Trident system certainly does work. We are in absolutely no doubt about its capability and effectiveness.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It will come as no surprise to the Secretary of State that those of us who live within the blast zone of Faslane do not share his confidence. If he has absolute confidence in the capabilities of HMS Vengeance and of the system, what steps is his Department taking to rectify the errors in the aborted launch itself?

Sir Michael Fallon: As I have already said, HMS Vengeance completed its demonstration and shakedown programme, in which boats come out of the deterrent are of course underlined by the testing and shakedown programme, in which boats come out of the aborted launch itself.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that while Devonport dockyard in my constituency was responsible for refitting and refuelling HMS Vengeance, the dockyard is not responsible for the missiles and weaponry, as some ill-informed people might think?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes, I can confirm that.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): So far today in this mother of all Parliaments, we have had the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box telling us that he does not believe in greater transparency and his Back Benchers agreeing with him. If this test was so successful, why did the Prime Minister not just give such an answer yesterday? Does he not understand that his just standing there and telling us that everything is okay—that everything will be okay for the rest of the duration of Trident—is not good enough, and that that is why I have constituents demanding an inquiry?

Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Gentleman and I disagree. I do not believe in greater transparency in this House when it comes to our nuclear deterrent.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): With a resurgent Russia and an unstable world, does the Secretary of State agree that nothing that we have heard in today’s exchanges undermines the clear rationale for the renewal of our continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent to secure the long-term security of our country?

Sir Michael Fallon: The security and effectiveness of the deterrent are of course underlined by the testing and shakedown programme, in which boats come out of their long-term refit and are tested again to see whether they are fit and ready to rejoin the operational cycle, which is what HMS Vengeance has now done.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Does not the Secretary of State’s characteristic “Name, rank and serial number—don’t tell him, Pike” approach actually make no sense at all given that, following the reports we have had, our American counterparts in Congress will certainly be given full details of what happened in the test? Does not his stonewalling do nothing to strengthen our security and everything to undermine the credibility of this House?

Sir Michael Fallon: This is our deterrent carried by our submarine. The secrecy that we—I think rightly—put around it is in our national interest.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that ever since Clement Attlee sought our first nuclear deterrent without a debate in Parliament, and even without a debate within the Labour party, successive responsible Governments have always treated these issues with the utmost discretion, and that we must not allow the present tortured relationship between the Labour party and the nuclear deterrent to change that?

Sir Michael Fallon: I do agree. Previous Governments have been very careful to maintain the secrecy of the deterrent; I think it is important that we keep to that.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Have there been any other missile test failures of this type that the Government have chosen not to share with the House of Commons, and am I better off asking that question or watching a White House briefing if I want to get that kind of information?

Sir Michael Fallon: I am not confirming particular details of the operation and testing of the various systems and sub-systems involved. All I can do is remind the hon. Gentleman that, overall, the demonstration and shakedown operation was concluded successfully, allowing HMS Vengeance to take its part in the four-boat operational cycle.
Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): To clear up any confusion, will the Secretary of State share with us whether there has been any change in the Government’s approach to informing the House of the demonstration and shakedown operation?

Sir Michael Fallon: No, there has not. Previous Governments have not given details of previous demonstration and shakedown operations to Parliament.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The replacement of the Trident submarine system enjoys the support of not only the majority of Members of Parliament but, so polls tell us, the majority of people in every one of the four nations of the United Kingdom. Does the Secretary of State recognise that the way in which information is coming out—more has been revealed by the US Defence Department than in this Parliament in the past hour—massively undermines confidence in the system, which we need all the public to have?

Sir Michael Fallon: No, I do not agree, and I do not think that members of the public agree either. I think they understand that the effectiveness of the deterrent depends on the secrecy that is needed about the detail of its operation.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the continuing effectiveness of the system depends upon its routine testing? That testing is not a secret—in fact, the Opposition spokesperson was informed in advance. What would damage national security would be to give a running commentary on the success or otherwise of those tests.

Sir Michael Fallon: I agree with my hon. Friend. Senior Members were informed of the forthcoming demonstration and shakedown operation. As I have described, the operation involves a series of complex tests of all the systems and sub-systems involved. That operation was concluded successfully.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What the Secretary of State has been saying today is that members of the public in this country have no right to know about a nuclear missile misfiring, but the people and the elected politicians of America do. How does he believe that that brings about any trust in the system?

Sir Michael Fallon: It is our deterrent, carrying our missile, and it is for us to decide its level of security. That is why I am not going into particular operational details. Again, I caution the hon. Gentleman against believing everything that he has read in the weekend newspapers.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): May I have an assurance from my right hon. Friend that if there is an investigation into the successful certification of HMS Vengeance last year, that information will remain classified for the sake of British national security?

Sir Michael Fallon: It will remain not simply classified but top secret, as any information regarding our nuclear deterrent properly should.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister is ultimately responsible for our deterrent, but yet again she is not here to account to Parliament or to reassure the public and our allies.

The Secretary of State has now been asked eight times who knew what when. On what date was the Prime Minister told, on what date was the former Prime Minister told, and on what date was the Secretary of State told? I am not asking for operational details; I am asking for dates.

Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) addressed the question to me, which is why I am here answering it.

I have made it very clear that both Prime Ministers, who separately had ultimate responsibility for the nuclear deterrent, were kept fully informed as to how that deterrent is maintained. Both were made aware of the successful return of HMS Vengeance to the operational cycle.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with Steve Aiken, an experienced former submarine commander, who told a goading BBC this morning that this makes absolutely no difference to the case for renewal, and that the Government are correct in not commenting on matters that could prejudice our national defence, certainly on live television?

Sir Michael Fallon: I completely agree with that.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Given that, as the Secretary of State has admitted, the Russians had to be informed in advance of the testing, and given that they clearly would have had the capability to monitor the test, is he seriously trying to tell us that our enemies and allies can know what happened, but this democratically elected Chamber must be kept in the dark?

Sir Michael Fallon: Under our international treaty obligations, notice of a future test firing is given to other nuclear powers, including in this instance to France and, as the hon. Gentleman says, Russia, but operational details are obviously not disclosed.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): Without reference to any particular test and the necessary security that must surround each test, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the very point of the testing process is not only to certify the crews of Her Majesty’s submarines, but to allow Lockheed Martin to maximise the reliability and lethality of the weapons system?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes, in essence, that is right. The system is tested to ensure that each of its complex parts and the various systems involved are fully understood and that the crew of the submarine concerned is ready to operate it. As I have said several times now, that operation was successfully concluded.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Many Opposition Members share the Defence Secretary’s commitment to the deterrent and, for that matter, his concern about national security, but the logic of what he is saying is that there was a security breach, and it happened this
weekend, as American officials are now briefing CNN and British officials are secretly briefing The Guardian and The Sunday Times. Surely, according to his own logic, there must now be a full investigation.

**Sir Michael Fallon:** We certainly deplore the leakage of any information about the nuclear deterrent, but it is not for me to comment on what might be said by the United States Administration. This is our submarine and our deterrent, and it is our responsibility to apply to it the very highest security classification.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that no Government have ever routinely reported on operational matters relating to our nuclear deterrent, because to do so would be not only irresponsible but dangerous?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Secretary of State says that decisions on media publicity are taken on a case-by-case basis. Was the decision not to publicise this test taken before or after the test? Was any footage taken and were any journalists present in case a decision had been made to publicise it?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** The decision on what publicity to give to any particular test—these tests take place every four or five years—is taken by the Government of the day in the light of the circumstances of each test and the national security considerations applying at the time. Of course those matters influenced the decision taken last June.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Since we have to notify other nuclear powers every time a missile test takes place, the number will not be unknown to them, so can the Secretary of State confirm to the House that there have been 160 tests of the Trident missile system? If he can, will that not give our constituents full confidence that the system provides us with the deterrent that we need?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I think that my hon. Friend is broadly correct about the number, but if I am wrong, I hope that he will allow me to write to him with the correct figure. The Government have every confidence in the Trident deterrent system. As I have said, we would not have brought the motion before the House if we had had any doubt about it.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Despite the Secretary of State’s refusal to clarify, it is commonly understood that the missile went the wrong way. I am no expert, but that strikes me as a major flaw; friendly fire with a nuclear weapon is not exactly what he might be looking for. Will he at least tell us whether the new Trident missiles will have better guidance systems?

**Sir Michael Fallon:** I am not able to confirm the speculation in which the hon. Lady is indulging regarding the route of the missile that was fired.
the Department to account on this issue if it will not even take up the generous offer that the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) has already made?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I say simply that the Secretary of State will have heard the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Select Committee, who is extremely diligent, extraordinarily intelligent and persistent—and I have known him a damn sight longer than the Secretary of State has known him. How the Secretary of State wants to deal with the right hon. Member for New Forest East is entirely a matter for him and his judgment, exercising it to the best of his ability. We will leave it there for now.

Industrial Strategy Consultation

4.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): This is a hugely important moment for the United Kingdom—a moment when we must prepare a new strategy to earn a prosperous living in the years ahead. Leaving the European Union allows, and requires, Britain to make long-term decisions about our economic future. We will, of course, be ambitious in the upcoming negotiations and will secure the best possible access for firms to trade with, and operate in, the European market. While the terms of trade with other economies is important, so is the competitiveness of our own economy. That is why the Government are committed to a modern industrial strategy, whose objective is to improve living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country. Today’s Green Paper is part of an open dialogue to develop that strategy as the enduring foundation of an economy that works for everyone.

We start from a position of considerable strength. We are the fifth biggest economy in the world, despite having the 22nd highest population. We have achieved higher levels of employment than ever before in our history—in fact, 2.7 million more than in 2010. We have businesses, research institutions and cultural achievements at the very forefront of global excellence. For all those reasons, we attract investment and talented individuals from around the world, but there are challenges that Britain must face up to, now and in the years ahead.

The first challenge is to build on those strengths and extend excellence into the future. British excellence in key technologies, professions, research disciplines and institutions provides us with crucial competitive advantages, but we cannot take them for granted. If other countries invest more in research and development and we do not, we cannot expect to keep, let alone extend, our technological lead in key sectors, or the world-beating performance of our universities. The same goes for our record as Europe’s leading destination for inward investment, or our position as a centre of international finance.

Our competitors are not standing still. They are upgrading infrastructure networks and reforming systems of governance, and therefore we too must strive for improvement. In industrial sectors, from automotive and aerospace to financial and professional services and the creative industries, the UK has a global reputation, but the competition for new investment is fierce and unending. The conditions that have allowed UK investment destinations to succeed include the availability of supportive research programmes, relevant skills in local labour markets, and capable supply chains. If our success is to continue, those foundations must be maintained and strengthened.

The second challenge is to ensure that every place meets its potential by working to close the gap between our best-performing companies, industries, places and people and those that are less productive. For all the global excellence of the UK’s best companies, industries and places, we have too many that lie too far behind the leaders. That is why, on average, workers in France, Germany and the United States produce about as much in four days as UK workers do in five. It is also why,
[Greg Clark]

despite having the most prosperous local economy in northern Europe—in central London—we also have 12 of the 20 poorest among our closest neighbours. We must address those long “tails” of underperformance if we are to build a strong economy and ensure sustainable growth in living standards. To do so will provide a huge opportunity for the whole nation to benefit from improved productivity—that is to say, earning power—in all parts of the country.

The third challenge is to make the UK one of the most competitive places in the world to start or grow a business. A fatal flaw of 1970s-style industrial strategies was their dominant focus on existing industries and the companies within them—and then mostly the biggest firms. Too often, they became strategies of incumbency. It is worth noting that many of the most important companies in the world today did not even exist 25 years ago. Unlike those past strategies, our industrial strategy must be about creating the right conditions for new and growing enterprise to thrive, not about protecting the position of incumbents.

In order to meet those challenges, we have identified 10 pillars around which the strategy is structured: that is, 10 areas of action to drive growth right across the economy and in every part of the country. They are to invest in science, research and innovation; to develop our skills further; to upgrade our infrastructure; to support businesses and help them to start and grow; to improve public procurement; to encourage trade and investment; to deliver affordable energy and clean growth; to cultivate world-leading sectors; to drive growth across all parts of the country; and to create the right institutions to bring together sectors and places.

In all those areas, the Government are making strategic decisions to keep British business on the front foot. For instance, we have given the go-ahead for major upgrades to our infrastructure, such as Hinkley Point C, Heathrow and High Speed 2, and, in the autumn statement, for the biggest increase in research and development spending since 1979.

In conjunction with today’s Green Paper, we are launching a range of further measures. They include: a new approach to enabling existing and emerging sectors to grow through sector deals, with reviews taking place regarding life sciences, ultra-low emission vehicles, industrial digitalisation, nuclear and the creative industries; deciding on the priority challenges and technologies for the new Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund; and an overhaul of technical education, including £170 million of capital spending can even begin to close the skills gap?

Nor will the Government themselves be equipped to support an industrial strategy if the Secretary of State’s predecessor’s cuts are implemented. Can he confirm that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2020 project has now been thrown in the bin, along with the rest of his predecessor’s legacy?

The Secretary of State rightly sets the goal of developing a competitive edge in the industries of the future, but how does he reconcile this with his Government’s plan to privatise the UK Green Investment Bank? If the Secretary of State is serious about tackling our productivity crisis, will he go beyond piecemeal offers and finally bring investment in R and D and infrastructure into line with the OECD average? Will the Secretary of State promise a fundamental rethink of business rates, which many businesses say would help them much more than any other single measure? Does the Secretary of State agree that a successful industrial strategy must include partnership and co-operation with the workforce? Yet the Green Paper does not mention trade unions once; surely now is the time to promise that the toxic Trade Union Act 2016 will be repealed.

Steel is a critical sector for our future economy, but it is mentioned only once in the Green Paper. Will the Secretary of State commit to implementing the recommendations on procurement and supply chains contained in the all-party group on steel and metal related industries report out today?

We cannot limit our focus to high-tech manufacturing. An industrial strategy that narrows its focus to a few chosen sectors will let down the majority of businesses in this country and the people they employ. So can the Secretary of State tell us what this industrial strategy will do for small and medium-sized enterprises, which are huge employers, and for financial services, which are
our main exporters, as well as for foundation industries, or for the retail outlets that shape our high streets up and down the country?

Finally, there is a glaring inconsistency between the noble aims of this Green Paper and the threats made by the Prime Minister to turn Britain into an offshore tax haven if she fails in her Brexit negotiations. Until now, the industrial strategy has seemingly consisted of one deal, made in secret, with Nissan. If the Nissan deal did not last six months, how can businesses be confident of the other commitments in this Green Paper?

It is often said, correctly, that an industrial strategy is a long-term project and that, if it is to work, it must outlast particular Governments. With this in mind, I can pledge our support for its broad aims from this side of the Chamber, but I feel compelled to ask whether the Secretary of State can count on the same support from his own side. When we previously debated the industrial strategy here, one of his own hon. Friends said that they had two problems with it: one was “industrial”, the other was “strategy”. I hope that he faces down such attitudes, because now is not the time for half measures. The BBC reported this morning that the Government wished to be in the driving seat but not have two hands on the wheel. I know that Conservative Members do not much like safety legislation, but that is not an approach I would recommend, especially if the Government keep making U-turns. If the Secretary of State finds himself isolated in the coming months, my party will be happy to help. We, too, are ambitious for a proper industrial strategy, but it will succeed only if the means match the ends.

**Greg Clark:** It is true that an industrial strategy wants to help all parts of the United Kingdom, and I look forward to engagement with colleagues from all parts of the House who wish to represent the views of their constituents. I am relieved that the hon. Gentleman has given his grudging support for this statement, given that the last time he appeared at the Dispatch Box, he said:

“Is it simply a case of ‘public good, private bad’? That is what we think on the Opposition Benches”.—[Official Report, 11 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 319.]

That would send a disastrous signal to investors in this country, and I am pleased to be on the other side of that argument.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions. Our commitment to transforming technical education has been widely welcomed by the business community up and down the country today. Also, it is highly unusual for a Green Paper to commit any funds. This is about the consultation on the direction, and the fact that the Chancellor has announced £170 million for new institutes of technology is a great step forward. The hon. Gentleman asked about increasing the level of research and development. He might have missed what I said about the Chancellor having committed to the biggest increase in research and development since 1979. I recall that the period since then has included several years of a Labour Government, so by implication this is a bigger increase than any that took place during Labour’s 13 years in office. He also asked about business rates. We are legislating this very afternoon to introduce 100% retention of business rates by local councils so that the interests of local businesses and councils can be aligned.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the workforce. I was clear in my statement that the consultation would involve employees as well, and I am looking forward to a roundtable with the TUC and its member organisations. On steel, he will see in the Green Paper an approach to sector deals. I have already met the chief executives of the steel companies and I am about to meet representatives of the trade unions again. I look forward to that being one of the deals that is being put forward.

The hon. Gentleman asked about involving small businesses. The chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses has said today:

“FSB has appreciated being part of the discussions with the business secretary…to help shape the Industrial Strategy.”

He said that the proposals “fit well with the UK small business community.”

As far as the hon. Gentleman’s position on the fiscal arithmetic goes, he should reflect on the fact that the first foundation of any credible industrial strategy is confidence in the public finances, which were left in such a disastrous state during the time that Labour was in government. The hon. Gentleman made a point about unanimity of purpose. We are having a consultation on the industrial strategy, but I understand from reports in recent days that he is having a consultation with himself about whether he can support his own party’s position on triggering article 50. We will be looking forward to the responses to our consultation from all parts of the House as we form a strategy for the years ahead.

**Mr George Osborne** (Tatton) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the intelligent approach set out in the Green Paper, building on what has been achieved over the past six years but taking it much further in skills, science and, in particular, the northern powerhouse.

The university sector is a jewel in the British economy’s crown. The Higher Education and Research Bill will open up the sector to new entrants, just as it was opened up in the 19th and 20th centuries through the arrival of London University and the red-brick universities. The Bill now faces significant opposition in the House of Lords from people who represent the existing players in the sector. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that he will see off that opposition?

**Greg Clark:** My right hon. Friend will see in the approach we are setting out a vigorous continuation of many of the measures, such as the northern powerhouse, that he championed in his time in government that are making such a big difference in the north and other parts of the country. I can confirm that with the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson), and colleagues in the House of Lords we will drive the reforms that have proved so successful in the past when expanding the institutions that contribute to our excellence in higher education. The standard and standing of higher education in this country have never been higher, which is a reflection of the soundness of the policies that have been pursued in recent years.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I give this proposal a cautious welcome. It is honest in some ways in its reflection of the state of the economy. In many ways it is brutally honest about some problems, including regional disparity and productivity. Likewise, it recognises some successes, such as the automotive and aviation
sectors and, on page 90, Aberdeen as an oil and gas hub. The problems are not new, so how will the Secretary of State ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated? How will he ensure that existing industries are not sacrificed in the quest to support new ones?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the allocation of new research and development money will be in addition to anything that would have come from the European Union and that he will provide long-term commitments to match EU funding? How much of that R and D spend will be outwith London and south-east England? Imagine how much worse regional disparities would have been without EU structural funds. Will he commit to long-term replacements for those funds?

On renewables and carbon capture and storage, the right hon. Gentleman will be unsurprised that I am a little disappointed by the lack of ambition in an industry that will be worth hundreds of billions, if not trillions, of dollars in the near future. Will he consider a sectoral deal for renewables? If so, will he work with the Scottish Government on how that could be done in Scotland? Access to finance is identified as a problem, and I share the concerns about the Green Investment Bank. It is short-sighted to sell it off when this key sector needs access to funding and when the bank is the perfect vehicle for that.

How will the consultation process work with the devolved Governments? However good this industrial strategy may be, we must accept that the biggest threat to the economies of both Scotland and the UK is lack of access to the single market and to skilled people that comes through our EU membership. Will the right hon. Gentleman seriously consider the Scottish Government’s plan that would see Scotland maintain its membership of the European single market?

**Callum McCaig**

**Greg Clark:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his thoughtful remarks. I am impressed that he has reached page 90 already, which shows his diligence. He says that we are brutally honest, but if we are to look forward and have an industrial strategy that reflects the challenges we face, we need to be clear-eyed. On technical education levels and the imbalances, some areas are prosperous and some can catch up, so it is right to be ambitious in that.

The research and development money that the Chancellor announced in the autumn statement is separate from whatever might be decided on the European funds. It was independently granted and is available to universities and research institutions. The consultation on how that money is spent is part of the consultation on this exercise, and the money is for research and development. One of the points we make is that we have often been excellent at producing brilliant new ideas but less successful at commercialising them. Pushing further on how we translate good ideas into practice is an important feature of addressing that.

The hon. Gentleman mentions renewables, which of course are important in Scotland. The emissions reduction plan, which is currently being prepared, will particularly address that but, on the green economy, a chapter of the Green Paper has a big commitment to doing what we can to make sure that we obtain industrial advantage from the investments we are making in green technology.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman says that the biggest threat to the economy is the exit from the European Union. The United Kingdom has been very successful in recent years, and I would say that the biggest threat to that is if the successful alliance of our nations in the United Kingdom were broken up by the independence of Scotland.

**Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con): There is so much to welcome in this very thoughtful report, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his team on delivering it. Will he say a little more about how the Government’s unprecedented investment in infrastructure will deliver export growth? I am sure he will not be surprised, but he may be disappointed, to know that our export potential, particularly from our rail industry, is far outstripped by that of our neighbours in continental Europe. We are spending a lot of money. How can we turn that money into exports and jobs?

**Greg Clark:** From her experience in the Department for Transport, my hon. Friend knows how important it is to make connections between places—it is an important means of underpinning growth. She will be aware that, through the national infrastructure fund, funding will rise by 60% from this year to 2022, which is a huge investment, and an appropriate one to make sure that the quality of our infrastructure keeps pace with the investments that our competitors are making.

**Mr Iain Wright** (Hartlepool) (Lab): I warmly welcome and support the Government’s endorsement of a long-term, interventionist industrial strategy. I hope the strategy will play an active role in ensuring that workers are upskilled and receive higher wages and that British firms can scale up and become more enterprising, more competitive and more productive.

What is different this time from previous iterations of industrial strategy, including industrial strategies for which he was a Cabinet Minister? What will be the short-term, medium-term and long-term metrics by which the success or failure of this industrial strategy will be evaluated?

**Greg Clark:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. He says that it is an interventionist strategy, and it is true that the Government should be engaged with the economy to make sure that we have the right conditions for success, but I also point out that openness for competition to have its full run in our economy is vital to our success. As Chairman of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, he will reflect that point. I look forward to the Select Committee’s inquiry on the strategy.

The hon. Gentleman asks how the strategy is different from its predecessors, and I would suggest two ways in particular. First, as he will have observed, many of the themes that I have discussed are not about investing in particular companies or subsidising particular businesses but are cross-cutting. The themes are horizontal in that they look at skills right across the economy, infrastructure—looking at the importance of place and the differences between places—science and research. These are cross-economy measures, which is a different approach from those taken in the past.

Secondly, a lot of efforts in previous industrial policy were correctly about innovation, but they concentrated just on new discoveries and new inventions. That is
important—as I have made clear, we need to extend our excellence into the future—but there is a big opportunity to make differences for the companies that follow and in the regions that are not competing at the top level. If we can really increase productivity there, we can make a big difference to the whole economy. That has not been the focus of previous industrial strategies.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on a bold and ambitious statement and give him a unique, once-in-a-lifetime chance to get his new training plans for technical colleges off to a tremendous start? In Haywards Heath in my constituency there is a sixth-form college that was bankrupted by Labour’s ferocious education cuts and by corporate governance that would have done credit to Al Capone. It will shortly be empty, and would be a perfect starting place for one of his excellent new colleges.

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that early pitch. He highlights the important point that we should have throughout the country a better and more reliable ability to provide technical education to those who can benefit from it. Many jobs are available in West Sussex but are not accessible for people who do not have the right skills. Our plan will help to solve that.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Government finally accepting that we have a skills challenge in this country, particularly with the long tail of under-achievement. How does the Secretary of State square that with the huge cuts faced by further and adult education over the past six and a half years of his Government? Why is there not more emphasis on what can be done to close the productivity gap by investing in childcare and getting more women back to work, which is not even mentioned in his report?

Greg Clark: I shall say two things to the hon. Lady. First, as I said to the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), the Conservative-led Government’s task in restoring sanity to the public finances was absolutely foundational to any successful public life. Absolutely, we will be aware that this Government have been particularly innovative in extending childcare to many people who previously were not able to access it. That is an important foundation on which we build.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the highly impressive propositions on technical education in the Green Paper owe their origin to the work undertaken by our hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) who made a massive contribution. In fact, I texted him yesterday to flag up the fact that many of the proposals in the Green Paper owe their origin to him. We wish him well in his recovery.

Greg Clark: I commend very warmly the examples of the maths schools mentioned by my right hon. Friend. To expand maths schools throughout the country so that people with a real flair for maths can be pushed further and be equipped to go even higher in their ambitions is a fantastic thing. Whether in Exeter or London, that is a good template for others to follow.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) pointed out that one of the things that have held back industrial strategies in this country for decades has been the skills gap. There is mention in the Green Paper of an overhaul of technical and vocational education; what this country needs is a cultural change—a shift to valuing technical, vocational and skills education as highly as academic education. Until that changes, the Secretary of State will not achieve what he wants, however much we all want him to.

Greg Clark: I agree with the hon. Gentleman’s analysis. I hope he will join us in making that change and approach this matter with a spirit of optimism and determination to make the change that the country needs.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): I welcome this common-sense statement. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the pillars will provide the ideal opportunity to enable regions to use their assets to the best effect for a more balanced UK economy, and to further grow the Midlands engine for growth?

Greg Clark: I do agree with my hon. Friend. We are one of the most centralised countries in the world, but it is patently the case that our levels of prosperity are not uniformly high. We should learn from other countries and from what has worked well when we have devolved powers and given people who know what will make a difference locally a better ability to take those decisions.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The Minister is right to make upgrading infrastructure a pillar of his industrial strategy, and I welcome the investment in HS2, but how can he claim to be providing greater certainty and a clear long-term direction when the east Midlands’ top transport priority—electrification of the midland main line—has been paused, unpunished, delayed by four years and now dropped altogether? Does he not understand—that follows up on the previous question—that this uncertainty damages our economy, damages the east Midlands rail industry and harms the region’s potential to grow exports?

Greg Clark: I expected the hon. Lady to welcome the commitment to upgrading infrastructure across the country. This is a Green Paper that is proposing priorities for the years ahead, and I had hoped that she would welcome that and the fact that the Chancellor has provided a 60% increase in infrastructure investment, which will benefit the east Midlands and other parts of the country.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): I strongly welcome this Green Paper, particularly three elements of it: Mark Walport’s battery review; the special sector deal for new ultra-low emission vehicles; and the considerable efforts to create a hub for autonomous vehicles. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those
three together should give the UK the opportunity to become one of the world’s leading producers of the electric and autonomous vehicles that we will all be driving 20 or 30 years from now?

Greg Clark: I do agree with my right hon. Friend. An industrial strategy offers us the opportunity to align policies that reinforce each other. We have some of the world’s best researchers in energy storage, and one of the world’s most effective, efficient and innovative automotive sectors. We are one of the leaders in renewable energy through offshore wind. If we bring them together, one will reinforce the other to give us this chance to be a world leader in a set of technologies that, under any reasonable estimate, seems likely to be taken up around the world in the future.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The last thing we need is 10% tariffs imposed on autonomous vehicles. The Secretary of State is right to make the point that we have been the leading destination in Europe for overseas investment, but much of that was from companies outside Europe wanting to gain access to the single market, which the Prime Minister has now told us we are going to leave. Does he believe that the UK can remain Europe’s leading destination for inward investment outside the single market?

Greg Clark: Yes, I do. I said at the beginning of my statement that, as a Government and, hopefully, a country that believe in free trade, we want to have the best possible access to the single market. We continue to believe that that is where we can even more attractively, which is why we have set out our commitment to upgrading science and research, building better technical skills, and improving our infrastructure. Those are investments and policies that will enhance the reputation and attractiveness of the British economy.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): When reviewing procurement, will the Government ensure that, under this new strategy, we will find all those areas where British companies can supply goods better and cheaper and give them the contracts? At the moment, we are importing large quantities of military vehicles, building materials, steel for submarines and medical equipment, all of which we could make competitively here if we had an intelligent Government customer.

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend is right. He will see that there are various proposals on procurement that I hope will have his support. One in particular opens up Government procurement to smaller and medium-sized enterprises, which, too often, have found that the bureaucracy associated with procurement regimes has kept them off the list. That is something that we can reform.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The Green Paper rightly identifies the crucial role that better connectivity to regional airports could play in growing economies and highlights the vital importance of the Emirates route from Newcastle airport, which has significantly increased exports from the north-east. What discussions is the Secretary of State having with Treasury colleagues about the impact on airports such as Newcastle of devolving air passenger duty to the Scottish Government?

Greg Clark: In the context of a Green Paper on industrial strategy, I will await the representations from the hon. Lady, but I am pleased that she acknowledges the emphasis that we have placed on connections to every region of the country—not just by road and rail, but through airports—and the importance of establishing links to other nations with which we can have good trading relationships.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): How much priority does my right hon. Friend give to the establishment of a digital railway? Will he encourage Network Rail in its plans to bring this technology to the Great Eastern main line, and hopefully to the West Anglia main line as well, because then the new trains that are on order could be equipped to take advantage of this in advance, rather than retrospectively at greater expense?

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is one of the proposals in the Green Paper that I hope will have his support through the consultation.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): The Green Paper rightly focuses on productivity, but there is one area of infrastructure where Britain lags enormously behind all our competitors: the cost of childcare. Childcare costs more in Britain than it does in every other OECD country apart from Switzerland—it takes up over 40% of the average wage—yet it is hardly mentioned in the Green Paper. That is the way to liberate the talent of women. What is he going to do about it?

Greg Clark: The Green Paper invites comments and proposals, so I look forward to seeing the right hon. Lady’s response to it. As I said earlier, the Government have taken very seriously the importance of childcare in allowing women and men to return to work in good jobs, and we have made great progress. I will be interested to read her response to the consultation.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): I welcomed the opportunity to join the Secretary of State on Friday for his visit to the Warwick Manufacturing Group, an institution that represents many important elements of this industrial strategy. Does he agree that the midlands can play a leading role in the development of such a strategy, as it is home to world-class research, advanced manufacturing and a skilled workforce?

Greg Clark: I agree with my hon. Friend. One of the things that I found striking when visiting the National Automotive Innovation Centre, a fantastic centre that is being built, is the fact that as well as having research and development facilities that will be available to large companies and small challenger firms, there is on the same site a school that will take in 1,000 apprentices a year to equip them with the skills the motor industry across the west midlands can benefit from. That is a very good example of how research and development can tie in with the agenda of driving improved standards of technical skills.
Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If the Secretary of State is serious about building an industrial strategy that works for the whole country, and that encourages and maximises the opportunity for research and innovation, there must be space in it for the development of marine renewable energy—wave and tidal power. World-leading work on that is being done in my constituency at the European Marine Energy Centre. Will he visit and see for himself the way in which our island communities can help to build the strategy that he says he wants to create?

Greg Clark: I would be delighted to visit the right hon. Gentleman’s constituency—it is quite a time commitment, but I am sure it would be worth it. He will see when he reads the Green Paper that there are a number of sources of support for innovation. Obviously, in a competitive way, the research and development funding is available for scientists and researchers to bid for. There is also a chapter on the green economy that makes suggestions on how we can ensure that we get industrial advantage as well as keeping costs low for renewables. Both routes might be applicable for wave and tidal technologies.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): I have been calling for ambitious, bold and visionary redevelopment plans for the Rugeley B power station site to attract businesses that will create highly skilled jobs, so I welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement and the Green Paper. Does he agree that the new, modern industrial strategy will provide the framework and conditions to help deliver this vision for Rugeley?

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. I remember visiting that site with her, and it has great potential not just to be a home for the start-up businesses that are very important in our economy, but as a place where technical skills can be imparted to the next generation of her constituents so that they can have good, well-paid and satisfying jobs.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I welcome some of the things in the Green Paper on the future of industry and our strategy moving forward, but to tackle those things, we have to secure what industry we have now. On Friday, Carlos Ghosn, the chief executive officer of Nissan, said he was going to revisit the competitiveness of the plant in Sunderland. What is the Minister’s view on that and on securing the jobs that already exist in Sunderland?

Greg Clark: The decision to back Sunderland and to build the two new models here was a significant moment for the hon. Lady’s constituents and for the country. It is true that all investors, whether domestic or international, constantly look to make sure that they are competitive, and what every page of the Green Paper does is show our determination to make sure that this economy is competitive now and into the future and to take the actions that will make it so.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I welcome this wide-ranging discussion of Government policies at this time, even if the broad buffet of good things outlined will unleash a torrent of insatiable demands, not least from the Davos business leaders jetting back with their Government advisers to barge their way to the table. Will my right hon. Friend therefore assure me that his agenda will be set by entrepreneurs? Will he be honest about the fact that, for every sector that is favoured, other sectors of the economy will be shunned? Will he assure me that he understands that there are no magic levers in his Department saying “raise productivity” or “improve skills”? Those things eluded his predecessors, and they will likely elude him.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deuty Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. What I would say to everybody is that we still have a lot of people standing, and we still have a lot of business. In order to get everybody in, can we have brevity, both in questions and answers?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is right. The essence of our strategy has to be to support the ability of people to compete and to make life difficult for the incumbents. There are no cosy clubs for the incumbents, and the test of our support in sectors is whether it helps new businesses to emerge. That is extremely important.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The Federation of Small Businesses reported last year that significant numbers of women are starting small businesses and enterprises. Is the Secretary of State not therefore surprised, as I am sure the rest of the House is, that there is no mention of women in this industrial strategy, no mention of inclusion and very little mention of diversity? Will he undertake to review that?

Greg Clark: Throughout this document, we want to close the gaps that mean that we do not achieve our full performance, and that is absolutely the case when it comes to the position of women at the highest levels in science, for example, and in research. As the Minister in the Department, I have been successful in the past in driving the appointments under my gift to increase the proportion of women at the top level. However, the hon. Lady is absolutely right that, when there is under-representation of people of talent, the whole economy suffers, and that should be corrected.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I strongly welcome today’s statement and the consultation paper. When we visit large innovative manufacturers such as JCB, Toyota and Airbus, they all speak about the importance of the relationship with their local further education colleges. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the objectives of the strategy should be to replicate examples of excellence and to drive up standards in the FE sector so that even more workers and employers share in a picture of world-class skills education?

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the proposals on which we are consulting is to have much better connections between local employers and further education to make sure that the skills that are being provided are those that can be taken up immediately in these industries.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I very much welcome the statement by the Secretary of State and his indication that he will work across the country, including with the
devolved Administrations. On skills and low carbon, he and I both want to see a successful lower-carbon energy sector; in particular, he mentions nuclear. One of the concerns that nuclear workers have is that their conditions are being undermined by this Government. Will he agree to work with me and meet me to discuss this issue, because we need those skills bases to build on for the future?

**Greg Clark:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s welcome. I should mention that I did not say to the hon. Member for Aberdeen South that as part of our proposals we will work very closely with the devolved Administrations in all parts of the United Kingdom, and I look forward to doing so. I am always happy to meet the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen).

**Neil Carmichael (Stroud):** I take great pleasure in welcoming the character and ambition of this industrial strategy, which is exactly the right direction of travel. I also salute the focus on technical skills. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is very important to create the right pathway through our schools system to these institutions so that we encourage young people to consider from the very start the STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—which he has focused on, because that is a combination that will lead to high wages and high skills?

**Greg Clark:** The Chair of the Education Committee is absolutely right. I hope that he and his Committee might make a contribution to the consultation to help us as we establish precisely that pathway, which starts in school but goes beyond people’s commencement of work, because people often need to retrain and take on new skills during their working life.

**Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston):** I welcome the desire to transform technical education—something of a recurring theme ever since the days of Prince Albert. In trying to help the Secretary of State to make it a success this time, may I ask him to pay greater attention to the 14 to 19-year-olds at university technical colleges like the one at Aston University? Could I persuade him to give the training levy to the newly elected regional mayors, who can then make strategic training decisions that are appropriate to the regions they represent?

**Greg Clark:** The right hon. Lady makes two important points. First, as others in the past have recognised, it is vital to recognise the importance of technical education and to improve it, and that is certainly our intention. On the particular proposal that she mentions, if she would care to discuss it with me, we could feed it into the consultation.

**Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West):** Where does the crucial role of free markets sit in this strategy?

**Greg Clark:** It runs through every page of the strategy.

**Paul Flynn (Newport West):** Newport has suffered grievously from the neglect of steel, but it is now having a mini-revival with the reopening of the site. Steel does not travel well or cheaply. Does the Secretary of State agree that if a new prosperity for manufacturing industry is to be created, it must be constructed on foundations of steel?

**Greg Clark:** Steel is a very important sector, and it needs to compete in the world in which we find ourselves. The discussions that I have been having with the steel industry are based around a strategy that it is pulling together to make British steel competitive in the years ahead.

**Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire):** The New Model in Technology and Engineering, or Hereford University as it should properly be known, has received tremendous support from the Secretary of State’s Department, but will the £170 million that he has promised in this statement be too late for Herefordshire, as we only have until 28 January to apply for new funding?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend is right to point out the presence of his friends and neighbours in Herefordshire in making their proposal. This is a very good example of precisely the sort of reform that we need, and I think that its prospects are pretty bright.

**Gloria De Piero (Ashfield):** We heard no mention of former coalfield communities such as Ashfield that still mourn the loss of well-paid jobs in the pits. I understand that this is a Green Paper, but what new jobs or tangible differences does the Business Secretary hope to see in communities such as mine, and by when?

**Greg Clark:** There is very much a reference to communities such as those that the hon. Lady mentions. When I talk about parts of the country that have fallen behind the best performing places in terms of productivity, they are the areas and towns that we have in mind—that is essential. It seems to me that one of the foundations for future prosperity is to ensure that the level of skills is higher than it has been for the industries that are expanding. It is particularly in areas such as hers that that transformation can have the greatest effect.

**Graham Evans (Weaver Vale):** I was delighted earlier today to welcome the Prime Minister and, indeed, the Secretary of State to the marvellous Sci-Tech Daresbury in Weaver Vale to unveil the Government’s industrial strategy for the UK. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the £556 million boost for the northern powerhouse, alongside the £4.7 billion fund for science, technology and innovation, will help to create high-skill, high-wage jobs, helping to close the north-south divide?

**Greg Clark:** I was delighted to be back in Daresbury, which I have visited several times with my hon. Friend.

**Christian Matheson (City of Chester):** I was born there.

**Greg Clark:** Clearly lots of good things happen in Daresbury—[Interruption.] Some better than others, it is pointed out—that is a little mean. My hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) mentions two things. The first is the devolution through the local growth fund, which is making a big difference across the country by putting more funds in...
the hands of people with the knowledge of what is needed locally to make a difference. The second, of course, is the big investment in research and development, of which impressive facilities such as that in Daresbury will make good use.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Mobile technology is a very important part of modern infrastructure, but may I urge the Secretary of State to be cautious when he looks at Ofcom’s figures? I suspect that many of us in the Chamber have looked at its maps that say, “Yes! Universal coverage with 3G and 4G—no problems at all,” only to find that the situation on the ground is phenomenally difficult. According to Ofcom, Port— and this building, for that matter—have perfect access to all four mobile signals, but that is not true, is it?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. When we talk about infrastructure, digital infrastructure, whether it is mobile or broadband, is very important. For businesses that depend on it, it is about dependability and reliability, not theoretical availability. That is very important, so it forms part of our approach.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Secretary of State rightly pointed out that 1970s’ industrial strategy was flawed by the fact that it almost exclusively focused on big industry. Will he ensure that his industrial strategy does not repeat that mistake by focusing exclusively on large, mature economies at the expense of medium-sized, emerging economies? Together, they represent the future.

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is one of the reasons why much of the proposals are cross-cutting, rather than about particular firms. It is also why there is a particular emphasis on helping small businesses to grow and new businesses to be set up.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Steel is a key product for all the infrastructure projects that the Secretary of State mentioned, including Hinkley C, Heathrow and High Speed 2, so I welcome his statement that there is likely to be a sector deal for steel. What does the steel industry need to do to make sure that it achieves that deal?

Greg Clark: The steel industry is already embarking on a consideration of how it can plan out its future. I have encouraged it to do that—although it needed no encouragement, because it is keen to do so—and I look forward to seeing the fruits of that during the weeks ahead.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I welcome the recognition that rural broadband is particularly important for increased GDP growth. Will the Secretary of State make a commitment that no small rural business will be left behind when it comes to digital connectivity?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. We want to help everywhere to achieve its potential. We know that the prosperity of many rural areas is held back if they do not have good digital connectivity, so that is one of the ambitions that we set out in the Green Paper.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Given the vital nature of steel as a foundation industry, it is pretty astonishing that it gets only one passing mention on page 100 of this Green Paper. May I recommend to the Secretary of State the report “Steel 2020”, which was produced by the all-party group on steel and metal-related industries? May I ask him to read it and perhaps come to a future meeting of the all-party group so that he can explain why steel has not been given a sector deal in the Green Paper, and why it seems to have been airbrushed out of the strategy so far?

Greg Clark: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman talks nonsense. I have had very cordial and successful meetings with the steel industry, and it is excited about the prospects of working strategically for its future. I have had the pleasure of attending meetings of the all-party group in the past, and I look forward to doing so again.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Last Tuesday, the Chancellor described the roll-out of ultra-low emission vehicles as “disappointing”. We have 87,000, and the Government want 1.6 million by 2020. Will the Green Paper lay out a reliable road map to enable us to hit that target, as it is also a key part of improving our air quality?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is right that there are significant opportunities in the roll-out of electric vehicles, not just in the transport sphere but in our energy systems. An electric vehicle is, among other things, a unit for storing electricity. Combining and making connections between these sectors is good for consumers, industry and the resilience of the country.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): As the Secretary of State knows, the automotive industry is a major contributor to the greatness of the industrial heartland in the north-east, yet the Prime Minister’s indication that there will be a hard Brexit has made many businesses across the country and in the north-east nervous, including Nissan in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the consultation fully addresses those concerns, and supports the success of—and, hopefully, with regard to electric vehicles and batteries, the future expansion of—this vital industry?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady is right to emphasise the importance of being at the cutting edge of research and development in the automotive sector. That is one of the reasons why many car companies find Britain an attractive place to base, which is important. When it comes to the discussions about Brexit, we are clear—the Prime Minister has been clear—that we want to have a free trading relationship with our friends and neighbours in Europe, and that is the way in which we will approach the negotiations.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): As you are only too well aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, the north-west of England is very much the hub of the nuclear sector in the UK. Can the Secretary of State shed some light on what thinking he has given to ensuring that people in the
north-west of England are the prime beneficiaries of the new supply chain that will be emerging in the nuclear sector?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there are huge opportunities through the development of new nuclear, which will require the training of a new generation of nuclear engineers and technicians. It is important that that is in place. There are also opportunities, not just in this country but around the world, to use our expertise in decommissioning to earn income for the UK and to create good jobs. There are big opportunities in the sector with regard to skills and the expansion of industries.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Prime Minister’s strategy lacks concrete proposals for Wales. Considering our £5 billion of trade and good net surplus with the EU, Wales is set to suffer most from the pursuit of a brutal Brexit. Does the Minister accept that doing nothing to counter the loss of EU convergence funding will serve only to exacerbate the already significant geographical wealth and earnings inequalities that characterise the British state?

**Greg Clark:** I urge the hon. Lady to read the Green Paper, in which she will see an absolutely crystal-clear commitment to making sure that all parts of the United Kingdom are able to share prosperity. That is good for those places and good for the UK as a whole.

**Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): I welcome the Green Paper’s recognition of the vital role of the creative industries, the one sector that grew throughout the whole of the last recession. Will the Secretary of State reassure me that that extends to the TV and film industry? The recent hit Netflix series “The Crown”, which was filmed in my constituency, is a wonderful example of how jobs, investment and exports can be generated by the sector. Does he agree that that requires not only the right skills, but the requisite supply of commercial space, particularly in the south-east?

**Greg Clark:** I agree with my hon. Friend. The creative industries, together, have some claim to be Britain’s most successful sector in recent years—they have been growing very strongly. Sir Peter Bazalgette has agreed to work with the industries to look at what they need to build on that success in the future and to continue to create the great jobs they have produced. I look forward to that work.

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I warmly welcome the Government’s new industrial strategy Green Paper, although it implicitly admits that the past six and a half years without an industrial strategy have been wasted. Having said that, the Materials Processing Institute has made a bid to be a metals catapult, and there is no mention of carbon capture and storage. Those issues are critical to the ability of any energy-intensive industries to go forward. Of real concern is certain BEIS civil servants’ views of virgin steelmaking capacity, and certain advice going to Ministers in relation to importing steel, rather than relying primarily on British-made steel, whether that is from Scunthorpe or Port Talbot. Will the Secretary of State please get up at the Dispatch Box and rule that out?

**Greg Clark:** I do not recognise the issue that the hon. Gentleman mentions, but if he speaks to me later, I will be able to find out more about it. I am grateful for his welcome to our approach. I argue strongly that it builds on some of the successes we have enjoyed in recent years, not least by devolving powers and funds to local areas and looking to create institutions that can conduct research and development that now has a worldwide reputation. However, we cannot be complacent; we need to continue that and build on it in the future.

**David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his impressive industrial strategy, which works hand in glove with the Government’s Brexit plans to strengthen business confidence further. The new strategy also underpins the Government’s commitment to the life sciences. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend accept an invitation to come to Macclesfield to see AstraZeneca’s site—the largest pharmaceutical site in the UK—to find out more about its exciting growth plans for the future?

**Greg Clark:** I will, indeed. Talking about the life sciences in the north-west touches on one of the themes of the Green Paper, which is the interaction between sectors and places, and how we can build institutions that can encourage smaller businesses to benefit from the presence of a range of other businesses in that sector. We have further work to do, and my hon. Friend will be expert adviser on it.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): A Green Paper should set out the Government’s ambitions in a particular policy area, and the central focus of an industrial strategy should be on jobs. I asked the Secretary of State on 13 December 2016 about the disability employment gap and how the industrial strategy could help to support the Government’s ambition to halve that gap by 2020. Will he explain why the words “disability” and “disabled” do not feature in the Green Paper?

**Greg Clark:** The Green Paper does mention the fact that we will set out further measures on employment policies. I have agreed with the hon. Gentleman in the past that, just as I said in relation to the question from the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell), when people’s contribution is not adequately made use of, it is a loss and an injustice for not just the individuals concerned, but the whole of the country and the economy.

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): This is a very welcome and ambitious Green Paper. In Swindon, we have embraced development to attract new businesses and jobs, but to be able to reach our full potential, we need to unlock additional land and infrastructure funding quickly. How can that process be speeded up?

**Greg Clark:** I am keen that we should be agile and fleet of foot. It is important that land and premises are available, not least for businesses that are expanding, or those that are being founded or located for the first time. My right hon. Friend the Communities Secretary has that very much in mind as part of his reforms to the planning system.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): UK manufacturing and exports are benefiting greatly from the more sensible and appropriate parity of sterling, but much more needs to be done to rebuild Britain’s industrial strength.
Will the Secretary of State therefore give serious consideration to re-establishing the National Economic Development Council to provide a forum for employers, trade unions and Government to consult and advise on how British industry may be promoted for the future?

**Greg Clark:** I am interested in the hon. Gentleman’s proposal. I had not thought of reviving a body that I think was associated with a different type of industrial strategy. The council was about the big employers sitting down with Government. As some of my hon. Friends have pointed out, the approach that we want to take is more about creating conditions in which insurgents, new businesses and challengers to existing businesses have a central place. I am not sure that his suggestion would be the right approach, but I would be interested in hearing from him about it.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** Small and medium-sized enterprises are the bedrock of local economic endeavour in Northamptonshire, and light industry, small-scale manufacturing and engineering firms are the backbone of the local economy. How can the Secretary of State best demonstrate to my constituents that his new industrial strategy is relevant to them?

**Greg Clark:** In a number of ways, I think. My experience of such businesses is that sometimes what constrains their ability to fulfil growing order books is a lack of skilled staff whom they can employ. The big focus on technical skills, and on improving the standard of technical education by working closely with employers, will make a big difference, especially to small and medium-sized business that cannot operate large training institutes themselves.

**George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP):** How does the Secretary of State reconcile his commitment to innovation and insurgency with the wholesale pillage of the cream of British high-technology firms through foreign takeover, not least the current takeover by Mastercard of Vocalink and the prospective sale by the Government themselves of the Green Investment Bank to Macquarie?

**Greg Clark:** I regard it as a badge of pride that this country is open to overseas investment, from which we have benefited hugely. When I was with my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) in the west midlands on Friday, we met the chief executive of Jaguar Land Rover, which is owned by an Indian company and has been a force for great good in the area. I want to be open to overseas investment.

**John Glen (Salisbury) (Con):** I warmly welcome the vigour of the analysis underlying the Green Paper. When the Secretary of State considers the future of the aerospace growth partnership, will he think about what happens across Government, particularly at Boscombe Down with the long-term relationship between the Ministry of Defence and QinetiQ, and look for opportunities to grow such areas of real expertise?

**Greg Clark:** The aerospace growth partnership has been a success, and we are committing not only to continuing that now very successful institution, but to learning lessons for how other sectors might create similar institutions themselves.

**Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab):** I absolutely support the need for an industrial strategy, so I welcome the Green Paper on that basis, but the proof of the pudding will be in investment and whether the money is there to support the proposals. May I invite the Secretary of State to Oldham College in my constituency so that he can hear from the principal and the governing body about how the lack of funding in schools is undermining the efforts that are pointed out in the industrial strategy?

**Greg Clark:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take the opportunity, through a consultation that seeks to establish as much common ground as possible on our priorities for the future, to work with colleges and employers to ensure that the reforms that are needed are put in place so that we can equip his and all our constituents with the skills that they will need to get good jobs in the future.

**Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con):** I applaud the Secretary of State for putting life sciences front and centre of his industrial strategy and point out that the industry’s largest customer is the national health service. Will he therefore confirm that, as part of his review of procurement, the NHS’s inflexible and unimaginative procurement processes will fall within the scope of the review, not least in relation to drugs, devices, therapies and diagnostics?

**Greg Clark:** It is evident that this is a whole-Government Green Paper; not just my Department but all Departments are joined in it, and the Health Secretary is an enthusiastic participant and will want to be part of those conversations—advised, I am sure, by the expertise that my hon. Friend brings to the subject.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** When the Secretary of State met the four Ayrshire MPs to discuss the Ayrshire growth deal, we had a very positive and encouraging discussion, and we welcomed that. He suggested that the growth deal aligned with the Green Paper, and having now seen the 10 action points, I agree. Will he confirm that he still believes that the Ayrshire growth deal aligns with the industrial strategy? If so, will he also commit to working with his Treasury colleagues to secure some money for it?

**Greg Clark:** I strongly believe in the city deals and growth deals, and I thought the presentation from the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues showed a very good ambition, bringing together the industrial strengths and opportunities of their area, so I wish it every success. These deals need to be negotiated, but he will know that in Scotland we have a good record of making progress on city and growth deals.

**Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con):** I welcome the statement. As the Secretary of State knows, the east of England enjoys an excellent ecosystem for life sciences. Does he agree that the strategy provides industry and business, particularly the life sciences sector, with the opportunity to bring their ideas to the door in order to truly drive their sectors and upskill our workforce? Also, may I invite him to Bury St Edmunds, which sits beautifully next to Cambridge and has both an enterprise zone and West Suffolk College, which would make an excellent institute for technology?
Greg Clark: That is an enticing invitation—it would be very nice to visit Bury St Edmunds—but I am in danger of filling my diary for the year. My hon. Friend’s points resonate with the themes of the Green Paper, which is about ensuring that we have the right institutions and skills to support the businesses of the future. The strategy will be business-led. It is not about the Government directing business; it is an invitation to business, employers and consumers to respond by saying what they need from it, rather than the Government simply saying, “This is how it’s going to be”.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Secretary of State briefly alluded to the importance of migration policy for the industrial strategy, productivity and innovation, so will he consult on taking over responsibility for certain parts of migration policy, seeing as the Home Office is making a mess of it? Even better, given his warm words on the importance of devolution, will he consult on devolving immigration policy so that the nations and regions can use local knowledge to determine the local skills needs?

Greg Clark: My responsibilities are broad enough and keeping me busy without my taking my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary’s job. That said, the hon. Gentleman’s question gives me the opportunity to re-emphasise that the strategy is a whole-Government approach, and of course it is important that the brightest and the best can continue to be employed here and to make the contribution they do to the whole UK economy.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): There is obviously much to be welcomed in the strategy, but may I express my particular support for the importance being placed on science investment and developing skills? To that end, will my right hon. Friend, first, seize the moment and make the case across Government for increasing spending on science and technology to 3% of GDP, which many of our competitor nations have done and which the Science and Technology Committee, which I chair, has called for? Secondly, will he please publish the digital strategy as a matter of urgency?

Greg Clark: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee for pushing us in that direction. He will see in the Green Paper that we are clear sighted about the need to invest in science and research, and this is not just Government investment; we want to create the conditions in which the private sector can invest in research and development. On the digital strategy, that is very much part of the programme that this industrial strategy is leading, and he will have long to wait before he sees it.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I welcome the Green Paper, and the Secretary of State is right to try to position us for the jobs and sectors of the future, but what does he propose to do in the here and now? Many of my constituents working at Doosan Babcock and Chivas Brothers face redundancy. What can he do for them?

Greg Clark: The House of course knows of the situation at Doosan Babcock. Whenever any business makes redundancies, or redundancies are threatened, that is a worrying time for the employees. We are active, through Jobcentre Plus and our other agencies, in making sure that whatever opportunities are available, whether new jobs or training, are offered. In that respect, we generally have a good record, including in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency, and the Green Paper takes up that approach. It acknowledges that businesses will close from time to time, but that the most important thing is that we equip those workers with the right skills to get good jobs in the future.

Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): I welcome the Government’s commitment to skills. Does my right hon. Friend agree that creating a UCAS-style system for apprenticeships could realise the Government’s ambition by giving technical education greater parity of esteem with universities, making it easier for young people to find local vacancies and increasing the number of SMEs offering apprenticeships?

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his words and for his contribution, which, as he will see when he reads it, features prominently in the Green Paper. It is an excellent idea, and I hope he will promote its success in the years ahead.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I welcome the Green Paper, and the Secretary of State say that his approach will be a much broader and more intelligent one. With that in mind and with a view to horizontal reforms, where do tax simplification and deregulation—arguably two of the greatest supply-side reforms that helped to lift the British economy out of the doldrums in the 1980s—fit into his strategy?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Last but certainly not least from the Opposition, I call the voice of Chester, Mr Chris Matheson.

Christian Matheson: I would hope not least, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance has calculated that there is an annual shortfall of 50,000 skilled engineers and that this will aggregate to about 800,000 by 2020. How does the Secretary of State plan to close that gap? While he is at the Dispatch Box, will he take the opportunity to scotch the recent press reports and confirm that all the steel in HS2 will be made at UK plants, including Shotton, where many of my constituents work?

Greg Clark: On the first point, it is clear that our investment in and focus on technical education goes precisely to meet the challenge that the hon. Gentleman identifies—around the gap between the needs of employers and the skills available in the workforce. On procurement for HS2, he will know that we have changed the guidelines to enable the contribution from British steel to be viewed on a fairer basis, but obviously that is part of a process that HS2 will need to go through to procure the product.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Given the failed industrial policies of the post-war period—unforgivable sums of taxpayers’ money were wasted trying to prop up and pick winners—I am reassured to hear the Secretary of State say that his approach will be a much broader and more intelligent one. With that in mind and with a view to horizontal reforms, where do tax simplification and deregulation—arguably two of the greatest supply-side reforms that helped to lift the British economy out of the doldrums in the 1980s—fit into his strategy?
Greg Clark: They are both important. The third of the three challenges I mentioned at the beginning of my statement was to make and keep the UK as one of the best places in the world to found or grow a business, and both of the policies my hon. Friend mentions are crucial to that. This country has succeeded in creating and hosting new businesses in recent years partly because we in the Conservative party have had that very much in mind.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State and his team on the Green Paper and welcome the recognition that the digitisation of our energy system and the inclusion of storage and demand-management technologies will improve productivity as keenly as any other infrastructure improvement. Does he agree that the UK could and should be the world leader in clean tech, and does he share my view that the south-west would be an ideal focal point for the UK’s growth in that sector?

Greg Clark: I certainly agree with the first proposition; we have an opportunity there. On the second, I would say that my hon. Friend is commendably vigorous in his promotion of the south-west, which will have a very big role to play. So, too, will other parts of the country: Cumbria, for example, with its strong nuclear cluster; and the east coast with its expertise in marine engineering and supplying offshore wind. All parts of the UK can benefit from our leadership in clean growth.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome the industrial strategy paper, especially its focus on science and skills, its building on local strengths and its addressing of institutional gaps. As my right hon. Friend knows, Kent has strength in life sciences, but a conspicuous institutional gap in its lack of a medical school—an institution from which life science innovations frequently emerge. I mention to my right hon. Friend that I am hopeful that this industrial strategy might be a vehicle for Kent to seek support for a medical school, and I would be grateful to him for any encouragement he might offer.

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her words. She will know that in life sciences, one proposal is to review what the sector needs to be able to support the small and medium-sized businesses in it, so that proposal might be something to be taken up.

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the statement and on the Green Paper. As he develops the industrial strategy, will he continue to support Britain’s leadership role in the fourth industrial revolution, and the new jobs, innovations and companies that are driving forward our growth? Will he encourage them to contribute to the Green Paper consultation, which I warmly welcome?

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for all the work he has done to make sure that this country does not cede to others the energy and initiative to take advantage of what is termed the fourth industrial revolution. The pamphlet that he recently wrote is full of good ideas, and I hope that my hon. Friend and his colleagues who wrote the pamphlet will respond to the consultation.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State’s statement, and I commend to him the report of the all-party parliamentary group on steel and metal-related industries, which has been published today. I hope that it will be useful as part of the ongoing discussions within government. The Government have made great strides forward in public sector procurement, so will my right hon. Friend make sure as part of this work that we do everything we can to transfer some of those principles into private sector procurement, too?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I will certainly bear in mind what he said and will read closely the APPG report that he mentions.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Any industrial or digital strategy must rely on transformative investment in broadband infrastructure. Can the Secretary of State reassure us that this is a strategy that will address not only the problems of the last 10 years, but those of the next 20 and 30 years, so we can plan for a world web with an internet of things and the fourth industrial revolution, which my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Mak) mentioned a few moments ago?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Our strategy must, of course, be forward looking and must be able to create the conditions in which investors and firms can make commitments now that are going to lead to our prosperity in the future. My hon. Friend’s frame of reference is absolutely right.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I warmly welcome the Green Paper on the modern industrial strategy, but will my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents in Ilkeston and Long Eaton that traditional industries such as lace-making and upholstery, which contribute so much to our local economy, will not get left behind?

Greg Clark: I am interested to hear this observation from my hon. Friend. We are talking about a consultation. It is important to participate in the new industries, so that through our research and development and scientific expertise we can take our place in them, but of course a lot of our existing industries make an important contribution to our economy and to employment, and we want to make sure that they can prosper, too.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): I welcome these proposals and note that in all 10 of the areas of focus, the Yeovil area and its aerospace cluster present outstanding and crucial opportunities to optimise our potential. Will my right hon. Friend visit my constituency and help me to promote a local centre of excellence, an institute of technology, to build local skills and actively to encourage inward investment from the likes of Boeing, so that in partnership with great local companies such as Leonardo, we can deliver the skills and jobs of the future and maintain our strategic abilities in helicopters?

Greg Clark: In my tour of the country—from Orkney to Somerset, it now seems—I will be delighted to look at the aerospace cluster in Yeovil. Companies reinforce each other by their presence, and as we know from experience across the world, when we have several companies all in the same sector, it is a source of resilience to local economies.
Steve Double: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I know you have been saving the best for last.

Many references have been made to mobile technologies and electric vehicles as growth areas for the future. They both rely heavily on batteries. Will the Secretary of State therefore join me in welcoming last week’s news that large deposits of lithium have been found in Cornwall? This creates a great opportunity to build on our mining heritage in Cornwall and develop new industries around the extraction of lithium. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this industrial strategy is designed precisely to support industries such as this one?

Greg Clark: I am interested to hear this—I had not picked up that news—from my hon. Friend. It is certainly true that the technological developments in energy storage, including batteries, provide a big opportunity. If Cornwall has an opportunity to contribute some of the raw materials for that, I am sure that this will be excellent news for the county.

Local Government Finance Bill
Second Reading
6.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Government have made no secret of their ambition to build a growing, international economy that works for everyone. A global Britain, however, needs local foundations. It is not enough to have world-leading, FTSE 100 exporters; we need thriving high streets, strong independent retailers and local economies that match the exceptional growth that UK plc has experienced since 2010.

The people best placed to lead that drive for growth are, of course, our local councillors. They know their communities better than anyone; they know which strengths to build on and which challenges to address; and they hold many of the levers required to deliver change. Yet in my many meetings with councillors and council leaders, I am often told that local authorities lack meaningful incentives to grow their local economies. They tell me that the system is over-centralised, that residents see no connection between the level of local taxation and the level of services they receive and that the proceeds of local growth disappear into national coffers, forcing councils to go cap in hand to Whitehall asking for funding. That is not good enough. Local authorities, local businesses and local communities deserve a better deal, and this Bill will provide it.

The Bill delivers far-sighted, long overdue changes that radically reform the way we fund local government. It ends the main central Government grant altogether, and instead allows local authorities to retain locally raised taxes. It encourages local growth and it supports local businesses.

John Redwood: Does the Minister agree that a council such as mine that actively promotes growth incurs huge bills for new roads, new schools, new surgeries and new other public facilities, which are not adequately reflected in the amount of money we are allowed to retain from the taxes we raise locally or in the support we get from the central Government?

Mr Jones: I absolutely understand that a council such as mine that actively promotes growth incurs huge bills for new roads, new schools, new surgeries and new other public facilities, which are not adequately reflected in the amount of money we are allowed to retain from the taxes we raise locally or in the support we get from the central Government?

This is not a Bill that increases spending and puts a greater strain on local taxpayers. Rather, it offers a focused package of reform that will encourage and support local growth, while we continue to live within our means. I will start with the commitment made in October 2015 that by the end of the current Parliament local government would retain 100% of locally raised taxes. In implementing our reforms, we will move local authorities away from dependency on central Government grant and towards greater self-sufficiency. Let me take this opportunity to record my gratitude for the substantial contributions made by many in local government, and in businesses, to the development of the reforms. The Bill is a major milestone in the process, and establishes
the legislative framework for the reformed system. It reflects the significant input that we have received to date, and our collaborative approach will continue as we determine the detail of the implementation of the new system.

A key part of the new system will be the introduction of stronger incentives for local authorities to increase their business rate income. That will build on the current system of 50% business rate retention. Under the reforms, which we aim to implement in 2019-20, local government will retain about an additional £12.5 billion in revenue. To ensure that the reforms are fiscally neutral, authorities' grant will be replaced by locally raised taxes for existing responsibilities, or they will be given new responsibilities. Those matters will be subject to separate discussions, and will not be dealt with in the Bill. However, the Secretary of State announced last week that the devolution of attendance allowance funding was no longer being considered as part of the business rate reforms, and I am happy to confirm that today.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): In the consultation paper that they published last year, the Government, suggested that attendance allowance might be passed down to local government—I am glad that that is not happening—and that the £3 billion public health grant, and the better care fund that is so crucial to local authorities that face a social care funding crisis, would be axed as part of the fiscal quid pro quo applying to business rates devolution. Is that still the Minister’s intention?

Mr Jones: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Bill does not deal with the principle of what additional matters will or will not be devolved to local government. Social care funding is an extremely important issue. It is this Government who have given local authorities the opportunity to spend up to an additional £900 million on social care in the next two years, on top of the additional package of £3.5 billion to which we have given councils access. In total, we have given them access to an additional £7.6 billion in the spending review period, which is dedicated solely to adult social care.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that the Bill will significantly increase the rates demand on hospitals at a time when the health service is extremely hard pressed? For example, the rates demand on Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham will rise to £7 million. If the Minister is willing to look at discretionary relief on public toilets, is he willing to look again at discretionary relief for hospitals?

Mr Jones: I am sure that, having perused the Bill, the hon. Gentleman will know that NHS hospitals do not feature in the increase to which he referred. I think he was referring to the 2017 business rate revaluation. That exercise has been undertaken by the Valuation Office Agency, which is independent of the Government. The Government have provided a package of transitional relief amounting to £3.6 billion, and NHS hospitals will be subject to the same transitional relief as other ratepayers whose business rate bill will increase as a result of the revaluation. As many Members will know, the revaluation was not designed to raise more or less business rate overall. It is a fiscally neutral exercise, which means that some business rate bills have increased and others have decreased as a result of the independent valuations made by the independent agency.

The Bill does not determine funding levels for individual councils. We continue to work with people throughout local government to deliver the fair funding review, which takes a wholesale look at councils’ relative needs and resources. We remain committed to implementing a new funding formula in time for the implementation of 100% business rates retention in 2019-20.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): Does the Minister agree that, although the devolution of business rates is extremely welcome, the funding gap between predominantly urban and predominantly rural authorities is already too wide? Does he agree that the review must ensure that that gap closes as soon as possible, and certainly does not widen?

Mr Jones: That, indeed, is why a rural services delivery grant was inserted into last year’s local government finance settlement, with its four-year deal. As my hon. Friend knows, this is not part of the Bill, but we are undertaking a fair funding review because local authorities in many parts of the country have apparently pointed out that the last proper needs assessment took place about 10 years ago, and that in many areas the demographic has changed completely in the intervening period. We are considering carefully how resources should be distributed across the system.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): My hon. Friend and I have recently shared many a happy hour debating homelessness reduction, but another issue now concerns me. Most local authorities have warmly welcomed the four-year funding settlement, but it is feared that the adjustments made to, for example, the new homes bonus have adjusted those figures. What consideration is my hon. Friend giving to adjustments to the overall four-year settlement to take account of the changes that the Department has made, which render some of these four-year settlements rather strange in comparison?

Mr Jones: As my hon. Friend says, we have spent many a happy hour debating the Homelessness Reduction Bill, which will return to the House for its Report stage on Friday. As one who is extremely savvy about these matters, as well as being a member of the Communities and Local Government Committee, he will know that the issue to which he has referred does not necessarily feature in this Bill, but does feature in the local government finance settlement, on which we have recently undertaken a consultation. We shall be responding to that consultation, and to points made by Members and local authorities throughout the country about the new homes bonus, one of which my hon. Friend has just managed to put on the record.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I pick up on the point about the rural share? The 50% local share of additional business rates that are to be raised is fine in mainly urban areas, because there are more brownfield sites and areas to encourage businesses, but in seats like mine that are surrounded by every environmental designation from here to God knows where it is going to be far harder to raise this additional money, which of course local authorities desperately need.
Mr Jones: That is a valid point, and, like in the current system, going forward there will be redistribution; it will be one of the core principles within the system, because in setting up the system we must make sure there are not areas that fundamentally lose out just because they do not start from the same position as other areas in the amount of business rates collected. A number of hon. Friends have asked about rural areas and the fact that many of them are very dependent on very small businesses, many of which will be exempted from business rates completely by this Government’s £6.7 billion package on business rate relief. I can reassure my hon. Friend and other Members that the effect of the 2017 revaluation will be mitigated for local authorities, because the system will be reset to make sure areas do not lose out. Indeed, that will also be the case prior to the new 100% business rates retention system getting under way.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): On the issue of redistribution, we currently have the needs assessment, and indeed the Government are going to conduct another review of needs before they start the new 100% business rates retention system. The House has information each year on the needs assessment within the local government financial settlement and, indeed, votes upon it. I understand, however, that in future we are not going to have that system; instead, we are going to have something called the principles of allocation statement, which is made and set for the rest of the period over which the system runs. The principles of allocation statement will not come to this House for approval, however. Why is the House being circumvented in this decision-making process?

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman is Chairman of the Select Committee and has a great deal of knowledge and commands a great deal of respect in the House on local government matters, but I say to him that we are now in a very different world from the one we were in only a few years ago, when local government collected the whole of the business rate incentive and gave it to the Government. In that sense, 80% of the spending of local government was distributed from central Government on the basis of the principles the hon. Gentleman mentions. Now we are moving to a system where by the end of this decade 100% of money within local government will be raised locally, and therefore Government will not year on year be redistributing the funding, which has been the case hitherto. The other point I would make, which has been well-recognised by local authorities in the last year on the basis that 97% of local authorities have signed up to a four-year deal, is that local authorities have asked for certainty of funding, which this system certainly will provide for them.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con) rose—

Mr Betts rose—

Mr Jones: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) first, and then I will come back to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr Wollaston: I thank the Minister for giving way. He will know that the better care fund is an important redistribution mechanism, given the variable amounts that councils will be able to raise through the precept, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates will raise £700 million over the next three years. Can the Minister give any encouragement on whether the better care fund will reflect the serious concerns around the problems with social care?

Mr Jones: I think my hon. Friend is referring to what we term the improved better care fund, which will go directly to local authorities. That funding has been brought forward as part of the spending review 2015. She will probably know that that funding effectively was obtained by changing the way in which the new homes bonus operates, and sharpening the incentive in relation to the way in which that system operates. As such, therefore, that additional money is not freed up quickly enough to do what she says. Although this year £105 million comes into the system, next year it will be £800 million and the year after that—the last year of the Parliament—it will be £1.5 billion. Alongside that, in this financial year we have also put an additional £240 million into the social care system as a dedicated social care grant, which again has been realised from additional savings made through the new homes bonus.

Mr Betts: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. I entirely accept his explanation in relation to the year-on-year arrangements, because there will not be a change every year in needs assessment as there currently is; that will be fixed for the period of a longer settlement. What is essential, however, is that right at the beginning of this new system, when the new needs assessment has been done and an allocation is agreed in the first principles of allocation statement, that comes back to this House so that we can take a view on it.

Mr Jones: As I said earlier, the hon. Gentleman commands a significant amount of respect in this House in regard to these matters, and, while he does not always realise it, there are Government Members who listen to the suggestions and concerns he raises, but I reiterate to him that we are moving into a different world, and that is why we have chosen to implement the system laid out in the Bill.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Given that the Minister is shifting the emphasis in terms of resources on to local government, how much does central Government expect to save as a result of this exercise?

Mr Jones: This situation is fiscally neutral. We expect the current expenditure of local government to be realised from the current local taxes that are raised locally, and there will be an additional £12.5 billion of spending that will also go to local authorities. As I said earlier, this Bill does not look at these items of expenditure—that is a separate principle—but we will certainly be looking to devolve additional responsibilities to local government, in discussion with local government and organisations such as the Local Government Association, which we expect to be fiscally neutral.

Mr Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman, whom I have a lot of respect for, must know that it is not really fiscally neutral, because central Government are saving money as a result of shifting the resources on to local government through the abolition of grants and so forth. Equally, he is asking local government to raise
certain sums of money themselves, and we will surely reach a point where local government cannot sustain that. The important point is that central Government must be saving money—not necessarily his Department, but somewhere in the Treasury.

**Mr Jones:** As I said to the hon. Gentleman, an additional £12.5 billion will be going to local authorities. That will be on a fiscally neutral basis. I also point out that the whole principle on which this system is built is such that it will give local authorities the incentive to widen their business rates base and raise additional funding for providing local services as a result.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Jones:** I will give way to another person who is well versed in local government—and the city of Coventry.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The Minister will remember the time when we shared neighbouring councils. Does he agree that the biggest savings for the Treasury will be created by freeing and incentivising local authorities to create jobs and drive developments forward? This will allow local authorities to get people off benefits, into work and paying taxes. That will be the biggest financial benefit for the Government.

**Mr Jones:** As is often the case, my hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. This is about raising local taxes that can be spent locally, but it is also about driving growth. The biggest win—and one of the most satisfying things for any of us in this House—is to see people moving into employment who were not previously working. What comes from this Bill will be a real driver for local growth.

**Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): Has the Minister looked at the Laffer curve? It is used in economics to indicate the position on the income tax collection spectrum of the optimum place to collect as much revenue as possible. We hear a lot about what this revenue can do for local government, but there is a limit on what businesses can bear, and some of the businesses in my towns are really struggling with business rates. What help can he give to local authorities to incentivise them to optimise business growth in order to optimise the collection of these taxes and the results for business at the same time?

**Mr Jones rose—**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Before I call the Minister again, I must point out that interventions are getting very long. Although we have plenty of time, it would be good if we could keep them a bit tighter. This would allow more people to take part in the debate. I call Marcus Fysh. **(Laughter.)**

**Mr Marcus Jones:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Jones is a very popular name, although Marcus is perhaps less so. It is good to have a fellow Marcus in the House, and I am delighted by the point that he has raised. I do indeed recall the Laffer curve, albeit many years ago during my days of A-level economics. The Bill will set out a framework for local authorities to reduce the multiplier on the business rate and therefore reduce the tax rate. As he implied, that might well lead to businesses being attracted to a particular area, thereby creating additional revenue there.

Local authorities have made it clear that they want more stability and, as I mentioned to the Chairman of the Select Committee, they do not get that from the current system of annual discussions on the future of funding. Councils have told us that they want longer-term arrangements, and 97% of English councils have signed up to our multi-year deal. The Bill will deliver that much-needed stability and certainty, amending the current local government finance settlement process and the related approach to the setting of council tax referendum principles. We will continue to protect local authorities from the impact of sudden reductions in income, and the Bill will provide a framework that will help councils to manage risk and ensure that they have better protection from the impact of successful appeals, so that they can focus on delivering the services that their residents and businesses need.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about protecting local authorities from changes. I welcome his commitment to a fairer funding formula, but is he aware that nine of the 10 authorities with the highest spending power in the country are in London, yet nine of the 10 lowest council tax authorities are also in London? Does he agree that a fairer funding formula needs to take into account the cost drivers behind need in local areas and to be for local people, rather than simply taking into account what has gone before? Rather than being about regression, this needs to be about need and the cost of delivering the services.

**Mr Jones:** My hon. Friend is certainly correct in saying that we need to take a significant look at how funding is provided across the system of local government. As I have pointed out on a recurring basis, the principles for the fair funding formula do not feature in the Bill, but they are an important consideration and we are certainly taking the issues that he has raised into account in the work that we are doing alongside the Bill. We are taking soundings from local government.

The Bill also includes a range of measures to cut business rates for small businesses and local amenities so that local communities can thrive. We will take a power, following the commitment in the Budget last year, for the Treasury to set the inflation rate for the business rate multiplier. This will allow us to change the multiplier from the current rate of RPI to the significantly lower CPI measure. We will change the rural rate relief to ensure that small businesses in rural areas receive the same level of business rate reliefs as those in urban areas. This is not only fair; it will also make a real difference to many employers across the country.

We will provide a new relief for five years for the installation of new optical fibre, fulfilling an announcement made in last year’s autumn statement. To make central Government more responsive to changing business circumstances, the Bill streamlines the administrative process of including premises on the central rating list. We will also be introducing charitable and unoccupied property relief for premises on the central list, bringing them into line with those on local lists. Much to the amusement of hon. Members when the subject came up in Communities and Local Government questions last week, we are also providing a new discretionary relief for public toilets. Councils will be able to maintain these important facilities without having to spend quite so
many pennies. This Government are committed to providing the right conditions for growth. A key function of the Bill is to provide local government with strengthened incentives for growing their business rates income and encouraging local businesses to set up and grow.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I wonder whether the Minister could clarify something for me. On the question of telecommunications infrastructure, the Bill states that the provisions will apply where “the hereditament is wholly or mainly used for the purposes of facilitating the transmission of communications by any means involving the use of electrical or electromagnetic energy”.

My reading of that is that it confirms that the rate relief would be for the actual infrastructure used in telecommunications and that, for example, Virgin Media, which has a property in Kirkby in my constituency, would not be eligible for the rate relief under that provision. I hope I am wrong about that. Can the Minister advise me?

Mr Jones: I think that the right hon. Gentleman might be conflating the central list, and the hereditament or infrastructure, with the business rate relief, which is designed to incentivise providers to lay further networks of fibre-optic cables in the ground so that people can benefit from superfast fibre broadband across the country.

Under the current system, central Government put a levy on local growth. We have listened when councils have told us that this tax on success—this penalty for doing well—is a huge disincentive for local authorities. The Bill scraps the central Government levy for good. This means that local authorities will keep 100% of growth in business rate income between reset periods. That will be a real incentive to grow their local economies, and a great way to keep the proceeds of growth in their communities. We will also allow local authorities that set up pooling arrangements to designate specific areas where they want to boost growth. They will have the potential to keep all the growth and not lose it to the periodic reset and redistribution process.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): To unlock growth through the provision of considerable incentives, we need councillors with direct, relevant business experience. What more can be done to encourage busy businesspeople to put themselves forward for office?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend, who is an entrepreneur, is absolutely right. This Bill and the measures being brought forward will attract entrepreneurial people to the role of councillor. Unlike in the past, when local business rates were collected locally and sent back to Government and then distributed across the country, the change will give local authorities a real incentive to be entrepreneurial and to attract the people that he and many of us want to see in local government.

Going even further, the Bill will provide real flexibility to local authorities. Councils can already provide business rates relief for parts of their area or particular sectors. As a result of the Bill, for the first time since the establishment of the business rate system, councils will be able to reduce the national business rate multiplier for their whole authority, helping them attract business and investment to their area. We are also supporting investment where it is needed to boost growth through infrastructure investment. The Bill will enable mayoral combined authorities and the Greater London Authority to raise a small supplement on business rates in full consultation with businesses to enable them to realise their areas’ growth ambitions. To recognise property owners’ wish to support the regeneration of their areas, the Bill will allow the establishment of new arrangements for property owner business improvement districts. That will enable property owner BIDs to be established across the country whether or not a business rates supplement is in force in that area, allowing a levy to be raised on those with a property interest.

Running a business is more than a full-time job. The working day does not end when the “Closed” sign goes up. There are huge and growing demands on anyone running a business of any size, and such entrepreneurs deserve to have the Government standing firmly behind them, not getting in their way. We will therefore take a power to make the business rate system more convenient, ensuring that every business can access e-billing, and we will provide guidance to ensure that bills look the same everywhere. If a business has premises in Rochdale and in Richmond, it should not have to wrestle with two completely different sets of paperwork. Finally, the Bill includes a paving measure that will help us to meet our commitment of offering joined-up access to tax bills, including business rates, by 2022. The measure will give Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs the ability to carry out early design work and engagement to develop proposals for how that can be delivered.

For too long local government has been too dependent on the whims and largesse of Whitehall and Westminster. Now is the time to change that forever. Now is the time to help local leaders focus on growth. Now is the time to reduce the burden on local businesses. The Bill provides the framework to do all of that and more. It will realise once-in-a-generation reform that will revolutionise local government funding. I am delighted to commend the Bill to the House.

6.43 pm

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): The people of England should have more power to shape their own destiny without having to wait for the say-so of Ministers. However, the Bill is just one part of a mix of new law, funding reviews and detailed regulations, and only when all are publicly available will we know whether Ministers have merely devolved responsibility for more badly funded local services, or if serious opportunities for local initiatives are genuinely being created.

The Conservative party has too often had a hostile attitude in practice to the idea of local people being given the power to govern themselves properly. Opposition Members well remember the attacks of the late Margaret Thatcher on local councils, the introduction of the poll tax, the abolition of London local government and the nationalisation of business rates. Notwithstanding recent deals on extending local powers in some areas, local council services have been one of the hardest hit areas of Government funding in every Budget since 2010.

James Heappey: While we are reminiscing, does the shadow Minister remember that the Labour party made harsh cuts to rural councils during its time in office, which was the cause of many of the problems with the imbalance of funding that we now face?
Local Government Finance Bill

23 JANUARY 2017

Mr Thomas: I do not remember that. Under the previous Labour Government, I remember rural local councils being well funded and able to invest in local services, unlike the position that they face at the moment.

Devolving more financial power to local areas so that public services can be properly funded, with new business activity encouraged and vital infrastructure investment given the go-ahead, is an ambition that we would support, but the detailed implementation of the measures that the Bill paves the way for could make the difficult funding situation facing local government even worse, exacerbate the social care crisis and leave council tax payers having to foot even more of the bill for local services. If the measures are badly introduced, regional inequality could deepen and divisions between areas with a large business community and those with more entrenched barriers to growth might increase. We support the principle of 100% business rate retention, but such a policy needs to be accompanied by a redistribution formula that addresses the divide between those councils that have sizable business rates income and those that do not. It must ensure that no area of England is left behind or worse off than it is now.

John Redwood: Has the shadow Minister given any thought to what incentives might work in some Labour council areas where the business rate level is low and there does not seem to be any industrial or jobs growth?

Mr Thomas: I have given that some thought. If the right hon. Gentleman is successful in getting on to the Bill Committee, I hope that we can debate such questions a bit more.

The Bill does not answer the many questions that local councils have about how business rate retention will work in practice. In particular, there is no clarity about what additional responsibilities councils will be allocated in return for 100% business rates retention.

The Government’s record on local government will give few people confidence that they are capable of addressing such concerns. Over the past seven years, this Government and their predecessor have taken an axe to local government spending. The people of England have been left paying more council tax for worse local public services. Last month’s local government settlement only brought more of the same: Ministers forcing councils to put up council tax and make more cuts to local services.

Mr Marcus Jones: What the hon. Gentleman is saying is interesting because council tax is 9% lower in real terms than it was in 2010. Does he accept that council tax doubled when Labour was in government? That is not a record to be proud of.

Mr Thomas: Figures from the House of Commons Library suggest that there will be a 25% increase in council tax over the lifetime of this Parliament as a result of the Government’s measures. Local authority funding from central Government has been cut by around 40%.

Mr Jones: Even with the adult social care precept, which many councils have welcomed, council tax will still be lower in real terms in 2020 than it was when the Labour party left government in 2010.

Mr Thomas: I admire the Minister’s wishful thinking in coming up with that fact. I gently suggest that he looks at his Department’s spending record on local council services. This year, councils will spend some £10 billion less than they spent in 2010–11. By 2020, according to the Local Government Association, councils will face a £5.8 billion gap just to fund statutory services.

Since 2010, powers have been passed to councils without the necessary funding to go with them, so it is hardly surprising that sceptics wonder whether the Government are really interested in meaningful devolution, or just in devolving responsibility for cuts.

Every local authority has a list of lost services. The doors have shut on libraries, day centres and museums. Leisure centres, swimming pools and playing grounds have closed. Rural bus services, fire safety checks and youth services have been reduced, abandoned or shut. Legal advice services have been axed and women’s refuges have been lost. Investment in parks and street cleaning has been limited. All those services are treasured by local communities and represent vital lifelines for vulnerable residents.

Kevin Foster: It is interesting to hear the shadow Minister’s list. Can he remind me exactly how much extra funding the then shadow Chancellor, Ed Balls, promised as part of Labour’s plans for government in 2015?

Mr Thomas: If the hon. Gentleman looks at our manifesto, he will see that we committed to devolving £30 billion of additional spending from Whitehall to local government.

The Government like to pretend that it is simply ineffective management that stops councils providing key basic services, and that those local councils that are not making cuts to such services are managing their resources effectively. The former Prime Minister David Cameron, perhaps inadvertently, exposed the delusion best when he wrote to the Conservative leader of Oxfordshire County Council in 2015:

“I was disappointed at the long list of suggestions...to make significant cuts to frontline services—from elderly day centres, to libraries, to museums. This is in addition to the unwell and counter-productive proposals to close children’s centres across the county. I would have hoped that Oxfordshire would instead be...making back-office savings and protecting the frontline.”

That lack of understanding of the consequences of his own Government’s actions received the response it rightly deserved from the council leader, who wrote back to explain that some 2,800 council employees had already lost their jobs, that the remainder had experienced pay freezes or below-inflation pay increases for a number of years, and that assets had been sold off to fund revenue costs.

Bob Blackman: Will the shadow Minister help the House by clarifying one Labour party policy? There is currently a cap on the amount by which local authorities can raise their council tax. If councils wish to raise it further, they have to call a local referendum. Does he support that cap, and does he agree that there should be a referendum if local authorities wish to raise their council tax further so that we can get the democratic view of local people?

Mr Thomas: I will address the hon. Gentleman’s interesting question in the context of Surrey County Council’s announcement last week that it will hold a
referendum on a 15% increase in council tax. I wonder how he or Ministers in the Chamber will be advising people who live in Surrey, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to vote in that referendum.

Perhaps one can sympathise with Surrey county councillors after not a single penny of new money was put into local government to help to tackle the social care crisis. Few people in local government think that the Secretary of State’s statement last month on local government finance will stabilise the care market, enable the recruitment of extra frontline care workers, ease the pressure on NHS hospitals, or ensure that all families with loved ones who need help will see them getting the level of care they actually need.

One reason why Surrey’s decision is so striking is because it has been able to increase spending on adult social care by more than 34% since 2010–11. Some councils have had to decrease spending on adult social care by almost the same proportion over the same period. In fact, only two out of the 152 social care-providing local authorities have been able to increase their spending on social care by more than Surrey, so if Surrey says that it cannot cope with the demand for social care, where can?

Although even Oxfordshire and Surrey have been unable to protect frontline services, the impact of local government cuts has been disproportionately felt across the country. The Bill offers no guarantee that the situation will get any better. The poorer an area, the greater its needs and the more it relies on public services, which are often funded by the revenue support grant, yet this Government’s cuts have hit the poorest areas the hardest.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has stated that those councils “among the tenth which are most grant-reliant have had to cut their spending on services by 33% on average, compared to 9% for those...councils among the tenth which are least grant-reliant.” We cannot even call that a postcode lottery. It is true that postcodes matter, but it is not luck or chance that determines the quality or quantity of local services; it is the actions of this Government and their decisions taken in Whitehall. That is the context in which we must consider this paving Bill today.

Before any Government Member again tries to advance the idea that local councils are set to get a significant stream of new funds from keeping 100% of business rates, Ministers have always made it clear that what they give, with great fanfare, with the one hand today, they will take away on another day—probably when fewer people are looking—with the other. The Bill will apparently be fiscally neutral.

Steve McCabe: Birmingham City Council is a perfect example of giving with the one hand and taking with the other. It has been pretty brutally treated by this Government. Birmingham gets £5.6 million from the new adult social care fund, but it is losing £5.6 million as a direct result of the changes to the new homes bonus.

Mr Thomas: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Many local authorities throughout the country have seen services such as housing similarly disadvantaged by the Secretary of State’s decision.

There is no detail of what extra responsibilities will be passed to councils, or which of the additional grants that councils currently receive for their responsibilities will be taken away. Even though councils’ statutory responsibilities are not being properly funded now, Ministers expect councils to take on even more while losing further funding.

As I have indicated, I welcome the Secretary of State’s confirmation that he will not go ahead with his predecessor’s plan to get councils to handle attendance allowance but, as I made clear in my intervention on the Minister, this merely raises the question of what will happen to other specialist funding. The House will have heard the Minister refusing to rule out the end of the better care fund, which I hope the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) clocked, or the end of the £3 billion public health grant. Members representing rural areas would be right to worry about the future of the rural services delivery grant, which is also flagged up for possible axing in the Government’s consultation document.

The Minister has again promised that no local authority will lose out. Does that mean that local authorities will not lose out in year one because there might be some transitional help, or does it mean that every council will be better off and able to meet its statutory responsibilities in full throughout the next Parliament? I welcome Ministers’ intention to pilot their policy approach in five areas, and it is crucial that there is a fair system of top-ups and tariffs for redistributing resources between authorities.

Ministers have indicated that the system will be similar to the one that they introduced under the 50% business rate retention scheme in 2013–14, but that is not wholly reassuring. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has considered what would have happened between 2013–14 and now if 100% of business rates had been retained instead. It found that 16 councils would have seen their funding increase by 20% or more, whereas just one council has seen such a significant increase under the 50% retention scheme. Conversely, 122 councils would have seen their funding fall, with 12 losing more than 2% of their funding. No council has lost that much under the 50% scheme. To have a fair funding system under a 100% business rate retention scheme, the system of top-ups and tariffs must be amended, so why have Ministers introduced the Bill without publishing the responses to their consultation on the detailed implementation of that measure, which closed last July, and without even a date for the publication of their fair funding review?

The Bill raises more questions than it answers. For example, how will Ministers handle the business rates income of a local authority that benefits from a major national Government decision, such as to expand Heathrow or to build a high-speed rail terminus in its authority area? The business rates of Hillingdon Council, which neighbours my council, have always benefited from Heathrow. Westminster City Council similarly benefits considerably from business rates income that arises because of its fortunate proximity to major national assets. In such cases, how will some of the inevitable growth in business rates income, which will have little, if anything, to do with council policy, be redistributed to help authorities that do not benefit from such big advantages? Ironically, although Hillingdon Council has opposed the expansion of Heathrow, it stands to benefit significantly from business rates growth while doing nothing at all to help to generate it.
We also want to explore what would happen if a major business closed or moved away through no fault of the local authority concerned. The sudden loss of a major source of business rates income would have huge implications for the future of local services, but the safety net that Ministers are proposing looks less than generous, especially when we do not know how frequently the needs of each local authority will be reassessed and the top-ups and tariffs system will be reset.

The decision to allow only mayoral combined authorities to introduce an infrastructure supplement appears petty and vindictive. If a community needs infrastructure urgently, local English leaders should not have to jump through extra hoops to put together funding just because they are not a mayor.

Too many big decisions relating to how the business rates regime will work in practice are not yet clear, and too many big decisions will remain with the Secretary of State once the new regime is in place—that much is clear. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the Chair of the Select Committee, made it clear, it therefore seems a little drastic to abolish the need for Ministers to be held accountable annually for their performance on local government finance. It appears that they will still be decisive players in deciding which parts of England benefit more from business rates and which less so. The House should be able to hold the Secretary of State to account specifically for his performance on this matter.

Local government in England and the local services that the people of England rely on have been poorly treated by the Conservative party in the years since 2010, and the Bill could make things even worse. We will give the Bill a fair wind tonight and seek to improve it, but if the significant change is not forthcoming, we will have to consider afresh our approach to the Government’s handling of this issue.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the first Back-Bench speaker, I should say that 16 Members wish to speak in the debate, so if we keep speeches to around 10 minutes or under, there will be no need for a formal time limit.

7.2 pm

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I am sorry that the shadow Minister’s glass is half empty. He said that the Bill had the potential to create a much better situation, as I think it has, but also seemed to be emphasising that he thinks things are going to be far worse. I am glad he is at least not going to be voting against the Bill’s Second Reading.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to a once in a generation reform; I can recall my involvement as a Minister during the passage of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, when I took forward the uniform business rate, among other matters. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has retained the principles of the uniform business rate, among other matters. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has retained the principles of the uniform business rate, among other matters. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has retained the principles of the uniform business rate, among other matters. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has retained the principles of the uniform business rate, among other matters. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has retained the principles of the uniform business rate, among other matters. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has retained the principles of the uniform business rate, among other matters.

I welcome the emphasis on certainty and predictability, in which context I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to set out a bit more clearly how the reforms that he says are going to be brought into effect in 2019, including the new funding formula, are going to interact with the four-year settlement, which, as I understand it, will still be there in 2019-20. For example, we have heard from the Government that councils can increase their adult social care precept by an extra amount in the next financial year and the year after, but in the third of those years, 2019-20, they will not be able to. How are those arrangements going to interact with my hon. Friend’s laudable objective of introducing all these reforms in 2019-20?

Clause 4 is very relevant to matters of local government reorganisation. The nine councils in Dorset are meeting this week and next to decide whether they wish to go down the road of a local government reorganisation. Two of those councils, Poole and Bournemouth, seem to be supporting the idea of creating a new unitary authority with Christchurch, in the belief that were the Secretary of State unwise enough to approve such a proposal and the unitary authority was set up, on day one the residents of Christchurch would be paying £200 more in council tax at band D than the people resident in Poole or Bournemouth.

Last week, my hon. Friend the Minister responded to my written question to confirm that it is not possible for an individual principal authority to levy council tax in one part of its area at a level different from that in another. That is an important principle. I hope that my interpretation of clause 4 is correct when I emphasise that were there to be a unitary authority covering Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch, from day one the people of Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch would all pay exactly the same level of council tax.

The idea of excessive levels of council tax has often been interpreted as being about excessive levels of increase, but, as the explanatory notes on clause 4 make clear, the clause will allow “the Secretary of State to make a statement of principles for determining whether council tax is excessive covering a number of years, rather than just one.”

Am I correct in my assumption that were there to be a new unitary authority for Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch, the Secretary of State could use the powers in clause 4 to say that there should be one set level of council tax for the authority, starting from day one? I ask because later this week, in both Poole and Bournemouth, councillors are going to be invited to support the proposal for a unitary authority in the mistaken belief that they will continue to be subsidised by the residents of Christchurch for 20 years, under an equalisation/harmonisation regime. If they were not, I would say that from day one they would be liable for an increase of up to £200, I think minds would be concentrated and there would not be quite so much enthusiasm on the part of councillors in Poole and Bournemouth for what is being proposed, which is hotly contested by councillors not only in Christchurch but in other parts of rural Dorset.

I hope I can get some clear answers to those questions. The essence of the provision in the Bill is that if councils impose excessive levels of council tax on their citizens, there should be the safeguard of a referendum, but what is proposed in the name of local government...
reform in Christchurch, Poole and Bournemouth is that people in Christchurch should be expected to pay extra council tax but will not have the chance of a local referendum to decide whether or not they wish their council to be abolished and absorbed into a new one. If we can have referendums on the levels of council tax, why can we not have referendums on whether a council is to be abolished? It seems that something is rather out of sync.

In responding to this debate, will my hon. Friend the Minister be a little bit clearer about the pooling arrangements? Why are the Government taking the power to introduce mandatory pooling arrangements, and how will they work? Can all nine local authorities in Dorset be regarded as a pool for the purposes of business rate income and distribution? I do not see any problem with that. In fact, it might be quite desirable, but why must it be imposed by the Government, rather than agreed to locally?

My next point came out in the response of the shadow Minister. I am concerned that, as a result of the powers being given in this Bill, some businesses may find they are in a minority in an area and subject to significant extra supplements on their business rates. How will we ensure that a minority of businesses are not oppressed by the majority? In east Dorset, there is a business improvement district centred on a Ferndown industrial estate. When it was set up, there was concern among some businesses that they might end up paying extra for things that were of no use to them. Can my hon. Friend spell out the safeguards that will be in place to ensure that significant increases in supplements or additional business rates are not imposed on hard-pressed businesses?

I turn now to clause 9 on public conveniences. Christchurch Borough Council has been privileged to win the Loo of the Year award on many occasions, and it has a really good selection of public conveniences, as befits its age profile and its reputation as a very important tourist destination. Meanwhile, much to the consternation of the local people in Poole, Poole Borough Council has decided to close half its public conveniences. Some councils are now thinking outside the box and saying, “Why can’t we enter into joint arrangements so that public buildings can be made available for the provision of public conveniences?” [Interruption.] My hon. Friend the Minister is acknowledging that. On reading clause 9, it seems that there will be no relief from council tax or business rates for a building that partially consists of a public lavatory but that offers other facilities as well. It is difficult to speak to clause 9 without puns, but I hope that the gist of my point has come across. Why would we wish artificially to restrict a relief such as this and say that it will be available only on a free-standing, dedicated public lavatory?

Richard Drax: The matter of public conveniences of course raises some humour, but let me make this point. When I attended an Age UK event some years ago, I was told that there are 2 million people in this country who can be no more than 10 minutes away from a loo. If there is not one available, they cannot leave their house. This is a serious issue, and money is needed to provide this vital service.

Mr Chope: I agree with my hon. Friend. One reason why I am a great supporter of small local district councils is that they are accountable to the local town and the local people. It means that those local people can decide whether more money should be spent on public conveniences or on public parks. It is much better to leave those discretion to the local councils, which is why I am so strongly against the imposition of unitary authorities in Dorset.

Mr Clive Bets (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I rise to support this Bill in principle, although much of the detail, which will determine whether it will be effective in practice, is not in the legislation itself, but will be worked out in due course.

Just in passing, I note that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) gave himself credit for the uniform business rate system. I noticed that he did not give himself credit for the other part of that Act when it came in at the same time.

Mr Chope: I do not resile from my enthusiasm for the community charge as it was introduced, because it delivered a ready reckoner for local people. Our council system would be a lot more accountable if we still had the community charge.

Mr Betts: The hon. Gentleman is the last Member standing who supports that legislation.

Let me refer to the first report this Parliament of the Communities and Local Government Committee, which went into considerable detail about the Government’s proposals on business rates. As we were conducting our inquiry, the Government announced a further consultation, so this was a list of matters for the Government to consider, which I hope they are doing. We had a good deal of evidence about issues that do need consideration and resolution before the system finally comes in. I will not refer to the general issues of local government finance. My concern is that, since 2010, local government has received far more than its fair share of the austerity measures, and that local councils, such as my own northern council in Sheffield, have received more than their fair share of the cuts that local government as a whole has had to endure.

I welcome the devolutionary approach that the coalition Government took and that this Government are now taking, but only as far as it goes. I recognise that devolution cannot simply be about devolving powers and giving councils more control over money that Government give to them, but councils must have more ability to raise that money in the first place. Fiscal devolution is just as important, and the Committee has recognised that. This Bill, in a very small way, goes in that direction, but it still leaves us the most centralised country in western Europe.

I thought the Minister was getting a little bit carried away at the end of his speech when he called the measure “revolutionary”. I cannot really see this as a revolutionary change in local government finance. It leaves us with local authorities having to rely on council tax—I have no problem with that—which raises about 25% of local government finance. It is the only tax in central and
local government that needs a referendum to increase it beyond a given amount, which is determined by the Secretary of State.

I have one little point about this proposed legislation: in future, this House will no longer be able to approve Ministers’ decisions on the threshold at which local authorities have to bring in a referendum to have a council tax increase. That is yet another power taken away from this House. I hope that, at some point, Members will have the chance to express a view on that.

On the business rate retention, it is a 100% retention of the growth in business rates—that is what the system means—with no power to determine multipliers, except to reduce them. On the supplement, in very limited cases—for mayoral combined authorities or the Greater London Authority—the business rate can be increased by a very small amount for specific projects. It would be right and more democratic if councils themselves had the ability to determine business rate multipliers at a local level, even if they did it on a joint basis with other councils. That would take us back to the system that operated before the hon. Member for Christchurch had his say and brought in the new legislation.

I do not know why Ministers are so resistant in this regard, because, in the end, if councils cannot determine multipliers, they have very limited ability to raise income from business rates. I accept that they can do it by approving development—the whole purpose of this is to give more incentives to do that—but that is limited control indeed. It still leaves us with a very centralised system.

There are some important details that we must get right. We had an enormous amount of evidence in our inquiry that showed that the appeals system is a major problem for councils. Rather than falling on the central pot, the cost of appeals potentially falls on individual councils. I understand that, collectively, local authorities are holding back about £1.5 billion in reserves to cushion against appeals. When my own local authority in Sheffield gave evidence, it said that 33% of its business rate base was subjected to appeal, which is a very high figure. We need to deal with that uncertainty for local councils.

By far the biggest challenge in this Bill is how we marry the need to give incentives for development, which I entirely accept, with the need to equalise within the system—to recognise those authorities that cannot grow their base as rapidly as others but still have needs that are high and that might grow in future. My concern is that trying to do that with one tax is a bit like trying to play a round of golf with one club. Can we really do competing things—equalise and incentivise—with the same tax, or are we going to keep some form of grant to do the equalisation, which might make the system an awful lot simpler? Equalisation is never simple, but it could become more complicated because it is now being done on an entirely different basis. That would take us back to the system right at the beginning, the system will still leave us with a very centralised system.

I welcome the fact that Ministers are going to be doing the new needs assessment with the Local Government Association, which I understand will have a working group. The Communities and Local Government Committee will do some research on that as well.

Let me move on to the complications with resetting in the system, which is really important. If we reset too often, we take the incentives away, but if we do not reset often enough struggling authorities will struggle for longer. Will Ministers look at some form of rolling reset—this is an interesting idea that the Committee heard in our inquiry—so that we do not have a cliff edge where we say, “Right, all the extra business development you have had in the past six years will now be stopped in the system and the whole thing will be reset.” What happens if there is a new development only six months before the reset? Why would any authority want to encourage that development when, if it waited another few months, it would fall into the new period and get the benefit of the business rate for longer? Those are some technical issues that we really need to address.

Will we have a new needs assessment every reset period, or will the needs assessment that is done at the beginning of the system last in perpetuity? If it is the latter, how is the needs assessment going to work with the reset periods? Again, I think that it would be much easier if the needs assessment were done in relation to a separate grant kept within the system. I accept that if we had a separate revenue support grant we would need to devolve even more powers to local government to absorb the money from that grant, but it might be easy to do, and it would be in the spirit of devolution then to devolve even more powers. I ask the Minister to look at our Committee’s report in that regard.

I am pleased that tenants allowance has been taken off the agenda. If we are going to devolve powers, can we make them powers that are relevant to business mainly in relation to transport and skills, which were asked for in relation to economic development? Businesses could then understand that, although they could not have an immediate say in linking the money raised from business rates to a particular project, their taxes are, in principle, related to business activities in their area. I also say to Ministers that if we are to have a new system, there are still powers under section 31 for them to give grants.

We cannot consider a whole new system without looking at social care. We have to look at a long-term, revised arrangement for funding social care. One of the real concerns—it came out during our inquiry—is that social care demands are likely to increase faster than income from business rates. If we are relying on income from business rates to fund social care in the long term, there is bound to be a growing disparity. If we build that into the system right at the beginning, the system will never succeed in doing its job. Let us have an independent look at social care, and at whether some other form of funding needs to come in to support it in the long term.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich): The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about social care, because far too often one solution is plucked out of the air as the golden bullet to tackle a real funding crisis, with demand for social care services increasing by at least 5% a year across most local authorities. He is absolutely right that we need a long-term solution. Will he say how that could be incorporated into the Bill?

Mr Betts: I am not sure that we could get that into the Bill, given its long title. The Government have to think about the longer term. If they are going to completely reform the business rate system at the beginning of 2020, and the funding for the responsibilities of local councils, without addressing the fundamental problem
of social care and the demand to which the hon. Gentleman rightly draws attention, with 5% year-on-year growth, they are devising a system that will fail. I do not want it to fail; I want it to succeed. I want us to give more powers and responsibilities to local councils and increase their ability to raise funds, but we need to address this problem and see it in the wider context, even if it cannot be incorporated into the Bill.

I have one final point to make, and it is a very important one. The previous Chancellor announced plans to extend small business rate relief and change the way in which the multiplier for business rates was calculated, from the retail prices index to the consumer prices index. Both those measures reduce the amount of money that local councils get from the business rate. What the Government have said so far, as I understand it, is that they will compensate councils in the current system for those changes, and no doubt they will be reflected in the amount of money taken forward for the new system for which councils will then get new responsibilities. What would happen if a Chancellor were to make some similarly drastic changes to the business rate system? How would local councils be compensated if there were no revenue support grant to do so? I think that Ministers have to address that very important point. Either the Government want to give up their powers to change the business rates system once it is set, or they will bring in changes in future, in which case how will they compensate councils if they remove their grant-making powers altogether? That point is so fundamental that I think Ministers have to address it.

I will end where I began. I support the Bill in principle, because it is a very small step towards more devolution and giving councils more powers and a little more control over the money they raise to spend on the important services they deliver. I cannot agree with the Minister that it is revolutionary, but it is a small step in the right direction. I look forward to seeing more of the detail, but in principle I support the Bill.

7.27 pm

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): It would be remiss of me not to congratulate the Minister for Housing and Planning, who will respond to the debate, because today is his birthday. What a way to send a birthday: having to sit around and listen to this debate. Of course, The Guardian, in its typically cavalier approach to the facts, suggested that he is only 45 years old.

I commend the Government for their more flexible approach to local government financing, which I think is broadly supported by the two local authorities in my constituency.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). I share some of his concerns about the way in which local authorities might, if there is a lag in the system, try to game the system by holding back on new developments either being given permission or being built until such a time as they would qualify. I hope that that concern, along with other possible unintended consequences of this measure, will be addressed by the Minister tonight and later in our consideration of the Bill.

The City of London corporation is grateful for the provisions that will compensate councils for losses arising from valuation appeals. That has been a very significant problem for the City, particularly in the aftermath of the commercial property downturn in the late part of the previous decade, for which the corporation had borne the substantial risk under the rates retention scheme, despite the matter being entirely out of its control. Clause 2 addresses that issue, and I believe that it is very welcome. However, I should note that it comes in the form of a discretionary power to be exercised by the Secretary of State. Further information would be appreciated on how precisely that power will be used, and particularly whether full compensation will be provided for appeal losses.

It is also correct at this stage to put on the record the support that the City of London feels for the wider devolution proposals put forward by London Councils and the Greater London Authority, but it seeks to maintain the special arrangements that recognise that the City ought to retain a greater proportion of the business rate since the amount it can raise from council tax is limited by its small residential population—it has only around 7,000 inhabitants.

I am very aware that many colleagues here who are not London Members will feel, as we all probably do, that if we were starting to look at Government finance, we would not start from the position we are in now, which is an accumulation of various bits of legislation that go back many decades. I am not sure that any of us really wants to go through the rigmarole of looking at this issue entirely from first principles or that we would be brave enough to do so—perhaps only my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) would be happy to. However, the difficulty is that if we do not, there will be what many of my rural colleagues will feel are great advantages to London. The truth about London is that it is an extremely expensive place to live, and what seems like relatively generous treatment in council tax terms reflects that high cost of living in many ways.

If I may, I will turn to the western part of my constituency, which is where we are now. Westminster City Council is seeking Government support for its West End partnership investment programme, which might also incorporate parts of the London borough of Camden. The programme aims to maintain private sector investor confidence at a time when businesses are anxious about the imminent impact of a business rate revaluation. The council would be looking for the programme to work alongside the Bill. The programme would consist of transformative works to improve the public realm, infrastructure and environment in the west end of London, such as in the Oxford Street district. That will, in turn, secure direct private sector co-finance and trigger additional investment by landowners and business occupiers.

I accept that my local authority is very unusual. Westminster contributes 3% of UK tax revenues, making the highest single contribution of any borough. It also has the highest business rates collection in the country, at £1.8 billion a year, and that will rise, it is assumed, to about £2 billion in the next financial year. Ratepayers in Westminster also contribute more business rate supplement than those in all 20 outer London boroughs combined, including £1 billion towards Crossrail, with businesses in the Oxford Street area contributing half of that. I appreciate that the capacity of west end businesses to
contribute business rates and other tax revenues for other projects, such as Crossrail 2, is now highly dependent on their confidence in the west end operating environment.

Major improvements to paving, roads, lighting, traffic lay-outs and infrastructure will be required to bring the west end up to the standard expected by the firms located there and the millions of people—both UK and non-UK residents—who visit. Existing local authority and GLA funding mechanisms are simply unable to address all those problems, and I appreciate, as someone who represents two parts of this central, global city, that a mechanism cannot necessarily apply in this case and that there has to be a sense that this state of affairs is exceptional.

The West End partnership programme is resolutely designed to improve the dwell-time of visitors and, of course, their average expenditure, reversing a recently declining trend, compared with other world cities. That will not only improve onward tourism from London to other parts of the UK—that is an important point to make—but increase the number of international business visitors who trade with several global-facing sectors located in central London. Those include, for example, the Soho media cluster just south of Oxford Street east; the Harley Street medical cluster north of Oxford Street west; the knowledge and creative quarter around the northbank, or the Strand and Aldwych area; and, of course, the very significant financial services sector, which is no longer just in the City, with hedge fund land now very much in the Mayfair and St James's area.

As far as London is concerned, it is important to stress that the supply chains and jobs often reach out to the UK regions. It is often said—I am looking at the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce), whose constituency is in one of the outer London boroughs—that London gets a very good deal and that we get all the infrastructure development, whether that is the Olympics or Crossrail, but it is important to make the vital point that if a lot of that money did not come to our capital city, it would not come to the UK at all, but go to another global city. It is also the case with so much of the money that is invested that jobs are created, with contractor and construction jobs going beyond the capital. Fellow Members who walk to Victoria station or in the west end can see what is happening with Crossrail, but phenomenal numbers of jobs are going to other parts of the UK. The truth of the matter is that great investment has great benefits beyond London, so we should not look too harshly on what seems like special pleading from the capital city for future development.

[Interruption.] I can see there is already another division on the Front Bench of the Labour party, given the knowing look from the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead. However, that is an important point to make, because the iconic and UK-wide opportunities based on central London will hinge on the outcome of the funding decision for the West End partnership programme.

Many overseas retail brands and retail concepts new to the UK will obviously be trialled in central London and then rolled out nationally. These and similar economic flows between London and the UK regions are often two-way, with London dependent on supply chains in the regions, and the regions highly dependent on London's performance. If the capital city succeeds, there are benefits for the rest of the UK—this is not a zero-sum game. We need to make that point, and I appreciate, as a London MP, that I need to make it very robustly. However, it would be foolish to cut away London's success, because the rest of our country would also suffer.

Westminster's local authority believes that the programme it has in mind could create £12.3 billion of additional economic output and generate a further £2.5 billion to £3 billion in tax returns to the Exchequer simply by producing additional floor space, increasing revenues over and above existing Government projections for the business rates to be collected in our area. The private sector is prepared to invest in a very joined-up, strategic approach to the development of the west end. That will consist of cash payments from property firms and business occupiers towards public realm and road works packages.

My local authority submitted its strategic case and programme to Her Majesty's Treasury in March 2016, and discussions are ongoing. The core of the programme would currently cost £814 million. Of that, £409 million would be required that cannot otherwise be funded from existing sources available to Westminster City Council, such as cash contributions from the private sector, GLA funding and the community infrastructure levy. The preferred funding option would result in Westminster City Council increasing local retention from 4% to 6.5%, enabling it to borrow sufficient funds to finance the entire programme over a 15-year period.

Let me say one quick word—this will probably unite Members of the House, albeit in different ways—about business rates, which are a looming nightmare for many small businesses in my constituency, and I think that that applies to much of London, but also beyond the capital. I appreciate that the Government have put together a very welcome £3.4 billion relief scheme nationally, which is designed to benefit the capital city more than other regions. None the less, the most recent consultation did not provide some London authorities with sufficient time to work out the extent to which our local businesses will be affected. I make this appeal to Ministers: Westminster City Council would like to see something more akin to the 2010 relief scheme, and it very much supports the suggestion that we break rateable value into three categories to recognise the varying abilities of small, medium and large businesses to pay business rates.

I take this opportunity to wish the Government great success with the Bill. I hope it is the first of many moves towards devolution. It has been rightly pointed out that this country, for historical reasons, has the most centralised tax base of any western European country. That cannot be a healthy state of affairs if we are to have thriving local democracy. The Bill is an important first step forward—the first, as I say, of many.

7.39 pm

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field). I have known him a long time, and I have listened to him in many debates in the House.

I will go along with the Bill tonight and support my Front Bench, but I have to say I am a bit suspicious. I am sure the Chairman of the Communities and Local Government Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), knows what I mean by that, because, to be perfectly frank, we have been
here before with Conservative Governments. I have been in local government, and we could go right back to Lady Thatcher’s years. When Governments want change, they always use a carrot. One particular carrot that was used in local government way back in the days of Lady Thatcher was local authorities being told that they would be able to keep their capital receipts. They were able to do so initially, but gradually, on a taper, that was faded out. Let us be careful about Conservative Front Benchers enticing us to go down a road that we may regret, because the strategy, as is quite clear now—the Minister as good as said it himself—is to shift the burden of certain services from central Government to local government. As anybody with any experience of local government knows, there will at some time come a point where central Government will want to cut local government spending. Once again, they will say to local government, “You’re spending too much money—you’re overspending.” We have been down this road before. Nevertheless, I will cautiously go along with these proposals—subject, obviously, to our being able to amend them further down the road.

Having said that, it would be remiss of me not to talk about the situation in Coventry. Coventry suffers from the same prospect of potential job losses, library closures and reductions in youth services that we have heard about from those on my Front Bench. We could name a whole catalogue of problems. Since 2010, there has been a 40% cut in Government funding to local councils. Ministers speak of tough decisions but force impossible choices on to local authorities instead. The Government have passed the buck, quite frankly, forcing councils to scale back services as demand has increased. The funding gap currently facing local councils is massive. These pressures are especially acute in Coventry. The funding for Coventry City Council has been cut by a massive 45% since 2010—in other words, a £315 cut per person in Coventry. This reduction is expected to rise to 55% by 2020. There is no way to make up the shortfall without either cutting services or raising local taxation—council tax.

The pressures on social care create a massive gap that remains between the resources available and the funding required. Services are overstretched across the country. The precept offered by the Government cannot make up the shortfall: it is a panic measure that offers too little too late and will cement the idea of a postcode lottery where service quality depends on the affluence of residents. These pressures have been highlighted recently by Surrey County Council, which now plans to hold a referendum to increase council tax by 15%. In the early ’70s, Coventry council did the same thing, holding a referendum on increases in the local rates, as the system was then. Surrey County Council has cited the pressures on social care and children’s services. Both the Chancellor and the Health Secretary have homes in areas covered by this authority. This is a Tory-run council in one of the most affluent areas in the country, so it is an admission of failure in the policies of this Government. If funding is going to be so tight in Surrey, how bad must it be everywhere else? More must be done to integrate health and social care. In their last days, the previous Labour Government wanted to get on board with this Government, then in opposition, to create an amalgamated national care service. That was rejected, and there were various views about that. With health and social care, a failure to deliver on one means a breakdown in the delivery of both.

The 100% retention of business rates by local councils is of course welcome, because it is right that local authorities can shape their services, but this must not come at the expense of further regional inequality. Poorer regions must not suffer at the expense of richer parts of the country. Safeguards are required to prevent a race to the bottom among councils and to ensure that funding is still allocated according to need. Coventry must not lose out once these changes come into effect. I urge the Government to promise that no area will be worse off because of these changes. I also urge them to provide clarity on how this revenue would be distributed so that there is a level playing field for all authorities. I agree with the Chairman of the Select Committee that the Minister should be held accountable every year. As MPs, we are very often in the situation of knowing what our local authority needs, and we need to be able to put its case in this Chamber, not away from the Chamber, so that Ministers can be accountable.

7.45 pm

**David Mackintosh** (Northampton South) (Con): I support this Bill. I am pleased that the Government remain committed to devolution and continue to push for greater powers for local authorities so that decisions are made by local people who understand how best to help their local area. I agree that wherever possible more powers should be taken from Whitehall and given to the town hall.

As a former leader of a large district-level local authority, I understand how important it is for local councils and bodies to be provided with greater powers to manage their own finances more effectively. The ability to allow local authorities to retain 100% of business rates revenue is essential if councils are to fulfil the roles that we continue to devolve to them. It is a power that I wish I had been able to use while I was council leader. With councils expected to carry out greater duties on a day-to-day basis and also to address the key local issues, it is essential that they are able to retain this money and spend it where they think it may be necessary.

As I am sure all hon. Members agree, the business rates system is very complex. In its current form, there are very few, if any, incentives for local authorities to stimulate growth or their local economies. That is because they do not see the benefits of doing so, for only 50% of the money is ever retained locally. This new way of working will be a challenge, as we all need to acknowledge. Local authorities will have to adapt drastically to a new way of thinking and undergo a significant culture change for this implementation to be a success. I hope that this Bill will push local authorities towards greater self-sufficiency and further away from dependency on central Government.

**Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this means that a small business will work more in tune with its local authority because it can talk about the business rates, and both sides—the local authority and the business—can get a better understanding of how each other works? It also gives the local authority last freedom to play around with business rates to encourage more business. We get a better dialogue, which in rural areas such as mine is really important for employment.
David Mackintosh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, and I agree.

With these changes in place, it will be a lot easier to show businesses and residents where and how local revenue is spent, and the direct impact of local decisions. As a council leader, it was always incredibly frustrating to try to explain the complex funding formula to businesses and to residents, and why our great efforts to regenerate Northampton and improve the local economy did not always result in the increased revenue being available to spend locally.

I am pleased that through the Bill the Government will ensure that local authorities that raise less than their competing areas do not necessarily lose out in their local areas, although this should never be an excuse not to fight for investment. As my fellow members of the Communities and Local Government Committee will remember, we recently held an inquiry into business rates where we noted that while we did not underestimate the significance of these reforms, they could lead to significant divergences in authorities’ spending power if not managed correctly. I understand that the Government are still working on the exact mechanism that will be put in place for this, but it is an essential safety net. On the other hand, I hope that councils that do receive a higher income through these proposals are encouraged to reinvest the money further to cultivate business rates revenue growth.

I agree with a point made by the Association of Convenience Stores, which noted that due to the small business rate relief, local authorities will gain little growth in business rates revenue from small businesses, meaning that local authorities are incentivised to focus on encouraging business rate growth from larger companies. Local authorities will naturally be looking to sign off on larger planning developments that will deliver higher business rate yields but which have the potential to undermine local high streets such as my very own award-winning St Giles Street in Northampton. I would be interested to hear how Ministers plan to ensure that 100% business rate retention will incentivise local authorities to encourage the growth of businesses of all sizes, not just larger developments.

This Bill continues the devolution that the Conservative party has been working towards in government. By giving local authorities this power, we are allowing them to focus on their own priorities, and to ensure that they have the facilities available to grow and cultivate their own business environment and that we continue to create a more efficient system of local government that works for everyone.

7.50 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) who, like me, brings experience of local government to the debate.

I do not intend to speak for long, but I want to echo concerns that have been raised about the Bill. Like others, I welcome it in principle. I welcome more flexibility for councils to make spending decisions closer to home. We have certainly argued for that in Manchester for a long time. My fear, however, is that the Bill will do nothing to solve the crisis in local government funding. As such, it is a missed opportunity to support local government properly.

No other part of the public sector has been hit harder by austerity than local government. I was executive member for finance on Manchester City Council during the middle years of the coalition Government, so I experienced at first hand the consequences of unfair cuts to local government spending. They are the result of the Government effectively outsourcing the most difficult decisions to local authorities, thereby putting the blame on local councils rather than taking it themselves. I therefore have a natural suspicion of this Government’s intentions when it comes to local government funding. I will not forget the role of the Liberal Democrats, either. They are not represented in the Chamber at the moment, but without their collaboration with the Tories, local government would not be in such a parlous state.

Every year Manchester faces impossible decisions about which services to close as a result of the huge funding cuts imposed on us. Since 2010, the council has had to take out more than £300 million from Manchester’s budget year on year. Between 2011-12 and 2019-20, there will have been a £600 per household cut in funding. The city council has had to reduce its staff numbers from 10,400 to 6,400. How are councils supposed to continue to deliver services properly with that level of reduction?

I warned when I was making some of these difficult decisions that their full effect would not be seen for some time. I said that it would take time for cuts to feed through the system, and I think that we are seeing that now. For example, in Manchester since 2010, there has been a reduction of £77 million in spending on adult social care, on top of an £11 million reduction in the public health grant. Is it any wonder that we now have a social care and NHS crisis when councils around the country are having to make cuts of that size? I echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee that we need to look at a new way of funding social care with a root-and-branch consideration of how that might be done in future.

The most important thing to remember is that the Bill does not represent any additional funding for councils in the short term. As the Minister said, it is fiscally neutral. While I welcome some of its measures, and although I support in principle the ability of local authorities to retain business rates, there have to be safeguards for those authorities that are less able to raise such revenue. In that regard, the Bill gives rise to more questions than answers. In fact, it raises more questions than answers about local government funding in general.

There is no clarity at all about the most important issue raised by the Bill: how will the Government handle the need for a redistribution mechanism? How will a fairer funding formula operate? What is the basis for any replacement tariff and top-ups? How do we stop the poorest councils losing out? The Government say that councils will not lose out—they are conducting a fair funding review and a needs assessment—but I hope that the House will forgive my scepticism about the Tories’ commitment to fair funding in local government as the poorer cities have consistently lost out over the past six years, particularly compared with the southern shires.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman. Will he acknowledge that rural counties and councils have
been underfunded by central Government for many years and that all we are doing is addressing the imbalance that has been in place for a very long time?

**Jeff Smith:** There is an issue with rural funding that needs to be looked at. We calculate that if Manchester had had a fair and equal share of funding cuts across England—not protection from cuts, but the average cut—we would be £1.5 million a week better off, which would go a long way in local government spending.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) that the Government need to approach the abolition of the revenue support grant with caution. Councils have different dependencies on RSG. For example, Westminster would need to retain only 8% of its business rates to replace the grant that it currently receives, whereas Wirral would require 187% of its business rates to retain the same amount as its current grant, and the figure for south Tyneside is 259%. That illustrates the London problem: how do we address the much stronger ability of the capital, particularly the City of London, to raise business rates revenue? In all likelihood, that issue will be exacerbated by the proposed house price indexing, which as I understand it means that London will be able to raise £700 million more while everywhere else might raise less. Unless the Government make clear how they are going to redistribute funds, we will run the risk of poorer areas being left behind, especially those where business and industry have been in long-term decline and finding solutions is genuinely difficult. Manchester has a very well run Labour council and we are doing pretty well, but plenty of other areas around the country are struggling and will genuinely struggle to drive growth in the future.

Forgive me for wanting to see the detail before I am convinced by the Bill. We will need to see much more detail as it passes through the House as too much is unclear. For example, there is no clarity about the role of specialist grant funding. In my experience of the extremely complex world of local government finance, it is very easy for Government to make cuts under the radar via reductions in specialist grants. I have seen that happen in Manchester. It is not unusual for the Government to use such a mechanism to force difficult decisions on local councils.

I will end with some positive points. Giving local authorities the ability to reduce the national business rates multiplier has potential, but there are obvious concerns about a race to the bottom as a consequence. I am pleased that tax powers are being given to the mayoral combined authorities to fund new infrastructure projects and to stimulate growth—that has to be good news. I also welcome the multi-year settlements, which are a much more sensible way of allowing councils to plan for the future. While we welcome some of the Bill’s measures in principle, I cannot support it without being given a lot more detail and some sense that the Government know how they are going to address inequality between areas and how they are going to make sure that areas such as Manchester will not lose out in the long term.

7.58 pm

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith).

The Bill’s timing is unfortunate. Certainly in South Dorset, this shake-up of local government finance is regarded as part of a perfect storm. Everyone’s minds appear to be concentrated on the ongoing local authority reorganisation, but in addition we now have the question of funding, and how it will be done fairly and devolved properly. However, I entirely endorse the general thrust, as the Government are heading in the right way. Before I forget, on this great day, may I also wish a happy birthday to the Minister for Housing and Planning? I am sure that he would rather be somewhere else instead of listening to me this evening.

I endorse devolution. Local people should have more power to make local decisions—there is no division across the House on that point—but with devolution comes a responsibility, if I can put it like that, for the Government to ensure that there is fair play, whether it be in the difference between urban and rural, or in the difference between the poorer and wealthier parts of our country. As I said in an intervention, moving to the system that the Government propose for business rates raises the question of whether rural areas and the poorer parts of the country will get the funding that they deserve.

Before I move on to talk about five brief points, let me set out my other concern: as pressures on finance grow, the perception from many councillors in my constituency is that the Government are putting more of the tax-raising powers into councillors’ hands, but they are not so keen on that if they do not have the resources to ensure that everything is ditched out properly and fairly. I just raise that as a concern, but overall I welcome the path that the Government are taking.

I asked around, as is my duty as an MP, to find out what officers and councillors thought of the Bill. As an MP, I must act without fear or favour, so it is my duty to mention five brief points that have been raised: the new homes bonus; adult social care; the business rates appeal; second homes; and underfunding in general. I will touch briefly on all five, starting with the new homes bonus. The significant funding change set out in February 2016 has seen the reduction of six years’ funding to five years in ‘17-’18 and four years from ’18-’19 onwards. Worryingly, the inbuilt so-called deadweight of 0.25% set out in the consultation was suddenly changed to 0.4% in December 2016, nine months after the consultation closed. I ask colleagues’ forgiveness for the dryness of my words but, let us face it, this subject is fairly dry and can get rather detailed.

The scheme was designed to reward councils for building new homes, but with the deadweight, there is a risk that the incentive is removed. For example, in Weymouth and Portland, the deadweight is 108 homes, so Weymouth and Portland built 234 homes in 2016-17, but received the new homes bonus for only 126 homes. The incentive has been removed and there are no transitional measures to limit the impact. The calculations are based on band D, which disadvantages councils such Weymouth and Portland where the average property is band B. Even if the authority sees a substantial growth in the number of homes, it will not benefit from the new homes bonus to the extent that the Government might like. It is predicted that Weymouth and Portland will lose just shy of £1 million in new homes bonus between now and 2020.
The Society of District Council Treasurers has made several points about the Government’s plans, saying that they are “severe” and that they “come so late in the budget planning process that many authorities will have little option at this stage apart from reducing reserves.”

The society adds that imposing a baseline of 0.4% is “far more drastic” than the 0.25% mentioned in the consultation. Emerging local plans that include a substantial number of new homes often face fierce opposition—nowhere is that more true than in my seat—but the plans are often made more tempting by the promise of funding from the new homes bonus. However, the reward has now been reduced in cash terms, so resistance to new homes is even greater.

I move on to adult social care, about which I have no doubt that all Members have very serious concerns. I do not like to use the word “crisis” because I think that it describes something considerably more serious than our current situation. In the view of those I have spoken to, business rates retention “does nothing” to address urgent needs. Across the country, the £240 million achieved in savings from the new homes bonus reform is going to social care as a one-off grant. This means that while social care gets one year’s resuscitation, councils of course lose out.

Taking funding from district councils in such a way forces them to review discretionary services, such as low-level support for older people and other vulnerable groups. We have talked about public conveniences and the interesting fact—I had no idea about this until I listened to a debate by Age UK—that there are 2 million people who cannot be more than 10 minutes from a public convenience. If they are further away, obviously there is a disaster, so many elderly people do not leave their homes. In effect, we are forcing them to stay in their homes and that cannot be right.

In addition, unitary authorities get all the money and two-tier councils, such as those in parts of South Dorset, have to split their revenue, so the district council loses and the county council gains. Social care is delivered through a grant that favours the northern metropolitan areas and takes away from councils such as ours. South Dorset has an increasing elderly population, which is only going to get bigger, so the pressure on adult social care is only going to increase.

Business rates appeals are increasing, and they are costly. Under the new 50% retention rate rules, local government must pay 40% of appeals and settlements against business rates. This year, a company called Perenco, which runs the Wytch Farm onshore oil platform, won a £5 million appeal, and the Ministry of Defence won two £2.5 million appeals for its two Army camps. Both organisations had appealed against Purbeck District Council. Forty per cent. of £7.5 million is £3 million, payable by Purbeck District Council directly. It tries to keep £1 million a year as a safety net, so that is three years of safety net wiped out.

On second homes, the view is that they put up house prices and reduce the number of local people living in the area. That is, again, of concern across the House. So long as a second home is available to rent for 140 days a year—if it is registered as a holiday let and liable for business rates—it avoids council tax. The system lowers the cost of home ownership for those who least need it—they live tax-free in a second home—instead of being a tax relief for a small business, as was the intention. Business rates relief on second homes makes very little difference to the district, but a huge difference to the county council and the Chancellor. At least 200 newly registered second homes in Purbeck over the last couple of years will mean a loss of £500,000 a year in revenue. At the moment, Purbeck District Council needs to assess how many homes to build, and it automatically adds 10% simply to counteract the effect of second homes.

Finally, in the view of those I have spoken to, the chronic underfunding of district councils is not addressed by the safety net. It is not addressed by the transition grant payments, which only increase uncertainty for budgets if they are recalculated every two years. It is not addressed by paying £65 million to the upper quartile of “super sparsity” local authorities. Their view is that rural services should be separately funded. Finally, it is not addressed by the top-slicing of the new homes bonus. The new homes bonus should be separately funded as well.

With those points I shall conclude. As I said to the Minister of State—again, a very happy birthday to him—I support the direction of travel, but I am a little bit concerned about much of the detail.

8.8 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), and I am sure his comments will be listened to with great interest by Ministers.

The reform of business rates is, as many others have said, welcome in principle. The Minister made very big claims in his opening speech about the benefits that would follow from it. For example, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) he used the argument that the measure would be fiscally neutral, but we have had no convincing explanation of what the mechanics of making it fiscally neutral will actually be. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) made similar points, yet so far we do not seem to have had any clear answer to those queries. For me, the two tests are: first, will the Bill enable the resources to get to the areas in greatest need, a point that others have already mentioned; and, secondly, will it be fair to council tax payers, businesses and local authorities?

Before I tackle directly some of the issues and how the Bill will work in relation to them, I need to say a few words about the wider context of local government funding and services. In Knowsley, between 2010 and 2020, the local authority’s budget was reduced by a staggering 46%—I repeat, 46%—which equates to £94.7 million in cash terms. In other words, Knowsley has already experienced the biggest cut in Government support, which is largely where those figures come from, of any local authority in the United Kingdom. It is therefore quite right for me to make known our concerns about the problem and try to relate those concerns to the Bill.

Such things do not of course happen without consequences. As the National Audit Office made clear in 2014, all local authorities in England had at that time already experienced a real-terms reduction in funding of 37% since 2010. In itself, that represented a 25% cut in councils’ incomes. We cannot sustain such cuts without their
[Mr George Howarth]

having consequences. In 2016, PricewaterhouseCoopers said in a report commissioned by Lancashire County Council that there was

"a significant risk that the cost of statutory services will exceed the financial resources of the Council."

In other words, it predicted the real possibility that that particular local authority—I suspect this would apply to many others—might not be able to function in a legal and proper manner. Such cuts do have consequences. For example, in Knowsley, between 2015 and 2020, schools on average face a funding cut of £240 per pupil. Despite the Conservative party manifesto commitment to protect such funding, many schools in my constituency will be badly affected.

How does the Bill address those problems? Unfortunately, on the basis of what we have been told, the answer is that we do not know. The Minister talked about focus, but too many of the details are still too fuzzy for us to make a rational assessment of how it will work. We therefore need the measures to be stress-tested.

A briefing note I have received from the Liverpool city region says about the Liverpool city region pilot scheme:

“Despite submitting its formal proposals regarding the scope of Pilot Scheme to the Department for Communities and Local Government in October 2016, the City Region has still had no indication of what the Pilot Scheme will look like, or even when the details of the Pilot Scheme will be provided. This is now severely hampering our ability to plan effectively for the Pilot Scheme’s imminent commencement on 1 April 2017."

The people who are expected to do the testing that will take place do not even know what the terms of the testing will be, and that, frankly, is a matter of great concern.

I want to move on to the question of additional funding for city regions such as the Liverpool city region. Today, I was at the launch of the campaign of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) to be the first ever elected city region Mayor, and he made a very good fist of explaining how he wanted to use the funding. However, there is so much uncertainty about how the powers and the resources can be used, particularly in relation to infrastructure resources, that when he comes in, it will be almost impossible to say what measures and resources will be available to carry out some pretty critical infrastructure changes.

I will not say any more, but it seems to me that the two tests I set at the beginning—whether the Bill will get resources to the communities most in need, and will be fair to local government, business and communities—still have not been met, because we do not have enough detail to know how it will work in practice. I appeal to the Minister for Housing and Planning to give a commitment, when he winds up, to start talking to Liverpool city region, the council leaders who at present run the combined authority, the mayor of Liverpool and the candidates for the city region Mayor about how all this will work. At the moment, the complete lack of clarity has been utterly bewildering, and I am sure the Minister would agree that that is not the position we want local government to be in. I hope that we can have more dialogue. As I said at the beginning, I am not opposed to the principle of the Bill, but we do need more detail, more clarity and more dialogue, and I do hope we will get that.

8.16 pm

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth). I, too, wish the Minister for Housing and Planning a very happy birthday, and I hope he gets some time to enjoy it.

I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak in this evening’s debate. I want to focus my contribution on part 1 of the Bill, which builds on the reforms of business rates undertaken in the last Parliament by extending business rate retention from 50% to 100%. I welcome these changes as a key part of the devolution of powers and budgets, and a move away from local authorities’ reliance on central Government grants. These reforms will give local authorities greater control, responsibility and accountability. I believe that this is a great way to provide councils with something they find very important—financial certainty.

I was a local councillor before entering this place, and I know how councils set their budgets and the challenges they face when doing so. Councils plan their budgets many years ahead, which requires a degree of certainty. Having a way of protecting a certain financial position for years ahead is very much in the interest of local government, allowing councils to plan projects and services for years to come. On the whole, local government is very efficient and has for many years shown all of Government how we can do more with less. Many local authorities that deserve to be congratulated on their budget in these difficult times have protected frontline services by sharing services with other councils, investing wisely, developing their local economy and taking many other actions to rise to their financial challenges.

Various aspects of the Bill will give local authorities more control, including the ability to set and reduce the business rate multiplier, creating incentives for them to grow their business rate income. Rightly, these reforms are fiscally neutral, so with the retention of business rates will come additional responsibilities. As a consequence of devolving these powers, there will inevitably be greater accountability. The powers that local authorities will have, and the decisions they will make, will directly influence outcomes for local residents and businesses. I also know that local government relishes new challenges. There are many services that it wants to get involved in for the betterment of local communities, and so that it can bring its passion, its drive for efficiency and—it offers this above all—its direct connection with voters.

However, business rates do not always offer councils certainty, and councils can face the problem of large ratepayers closing their operations. Therefore, although I wholly agree with the Government’s plans to extend business rates retention, I wish to address the issue of protection for local authorities that are faced with significant business rates losses.

Last June, Rugeley B power station ceased operations. It was incredibly disappointing news for the employees and contractors working at the site, and also for the local community, as the power station had become home to a large number of sports clubs and recreational groups. The closure has also hit the local council, Cannock Chase District Council, hard, as it saw it lose £1 million
a year in business rates. Unfortunately, it is my constituents—my local residents, business and charities—that are paying the price for the failure of the Labour-run local authority to plan for that.

Anyone who has worked in business will be familiar with SWOT—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats—analysis. Given the scale of the business rates losses and the impact on the local council’s financial stability, the threat of the power station closing should have been at the top of the council’s priority list of issues to prepare for. It will have been aware that there was always a risk that a 40-year-old coal-fired power station would close and that it was coming to the end of its life span. It should have had contingency plans in place. The consequence of its not doing that is that the Labour-run council is now having to make cuts to services which will adversely affect my constituents. It should have planned sooner for that eventuality and embarked sooner on further efficiency measures. It would have been in a far better position now, instead of having to default to an argument of blaming the Conservatives for its financial woes, especially given that it is better centrally funded than its three neighbouring Conservative district councils.

That said, the impact of the business rates losses should, hopefully, be a short-term issue. The gap will be filled to some extent with the Mill Green designer outlet village, which is going to be built in Cannock. In conjunction with the redevelopment of the power station site, that should lead to business rate growth for the council in the medium to long term. In fact, I believe that with ambitious, bold and visionary plans, we could create an incredibly bright future for Rugeley based on a new industrial landscape that would serve the local community for decades to come, with highly skilled jobs for future generations. But in the short term we have a shock to manage, and it is my constituents who are now having to deal with the Labour council’s failure to balance its books in the short term.

I urge the Minister to consider transitional funding to see the council through the next couple of years, as I, for one, do not want to see any obstacles put in place to the redevelopment of the power station site and the regeneration of Cannock Chase more broadly. Although I believe that the council should and could have done more to mitigate the business rates impact of the power station’s closure, the situation raises questions about how we support local authorities and protect them from the knock-on effect that is having on the NHS. Government budgets have been felt has been in the care sector, and in the knock-on effect that is having on the NHS. Government cuts to my council’s budget have caused spending on adult social care in my constituency to fall by 20%. I have given examples in previous debates of how this is forcing people to live in unacceptable conditions. It has also become clear this winter that the Government’s

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, may I say that the last two speakers have been very disciplined in taking only eight minutes each? If everybody now restricts themselves to eight minutes each, I will not have to put a time limit on speeches, which will make for a much more pleasant and better flowing debate.

8.25 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling). This is an especially timely debate, because it comes just after the Prime Minister spoke to my local paper, the Grimsby Telegraph, about planned funding for North East Lincolnshire Council. When she was asked how the Government’s cuts to some of the least well-off areas of the country squared with her promise to help people who are “just about managing”, she suggested that North East Lincolnshire was receiving more than enough funding, and that taxpayers in the Yorkshire and Humber region had no reason to complain about their council tax going up.

The fact is that North East Lincolnshire Council has seen its budget cut by some £79 million since 2010—as good as chopped in half. On the ground, that has meant that recycling has been cut to a fortnightly collection, charges for bin collections have had to be introduced and have recently been increased, children’s centres have been closed and merged into new hubs, and public toilets are being closed.

On that point, may I ask the Minister to expand on clause 9, which comes under the convenient heading of “Reliefs”? Will that relief come too late if the public toilets have already been shut? I raise that point because it is a significant concern to people not only in Great Grimsby but in my neighbouring constituency of Cleethorpes, which is a big tourist area. If the relief— I am sorry to keep using that appropriate term—comes too late, those facilities will not be there for people from outside the area to come and use. As has been mentioned, organisations such as Age UK and Crohn’s and Colitis UK are lobbying hard to ensure that public conveniences are not lost. That is particularly important for parents of disabled children and young children, and for older people.

On a visit to Ormiston South Parade Academy last Friday, I was asked by the schoolchildren whether I could make sure that there were more bins near shops, because they have noticed that litter is starting to pile up. Such things might not make the front pages, but they are noticed and they really matter. Another is the increase in fly-tipping, which is a blight on all our communities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) said, the cuts have taken their time to have an impact on local communities, but that impact is really starting to be felt across the piece. It is not about Labour councils versus Conservative councils—it is affecting communities across the country.

Perhaps the worst way in which the cuts to councils’ budgets have been felt has been in the care sector, and in the knock-on effect that is having on the NHS. Government cuts to my council’s budget have caused spending on adult social care in my constituency to fall by 20%. I have given examples in previous debates of how this is forcing people to live in unacceptable conditions. It has also become clear this winter that the Government’s
The downgrading of the social care system is having catastrophic effects on our NHS. So-called “bed blocking”—where patients are fit to return home or move to a care home but no places or in-home support are available—is sapping hospital resources and leading to waiting-times targets being missed by considerable distances. It also resulted in the outrageously circumstance at my local hospital of a 95-year-old woman being discharged from accident and emergency at 4 am because no beds were available.

People in north-east Lincolnshire are facing an almost 10% hike in their council tax bills over the next couple of years because of the Government’s policies, and there is no prospect that that will be enough money to fix these endemic problems. The autumn statement showed an increase in business rates income to the Treasury of £2.4 billion in 2017-18, but that remains unallocated. Why do the Secretary of State and the Minister not protect people from a massive rise in council tax bills by investing the money in social care and ending the precept? To Conservative Members who think that I am making a partisan attack on the Government, I would point out that my Conservative neighbour, the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), has also gone on the record to call for an end to local authority cuts, saying: “Many of the things that make our lives that little bit better... are being cut to the bone”.

In the interview I mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister said that cuts to councils such as North East Lincolnshire were necessary to eliminate the deficit, but that goes no way to explaining why the lowest-income areas, which are generally unable to raise enough funds from local business rates, are facing the harshest cuts, while her local authority is one of the three least-suffering councils.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Lady blames the Government for the funding plight in her local authority area, but the spending power of all of north Lincolnshire is £711 per head, whereas in the top-10 local authority areas in London it is £1,171 per head. Is it not the system that is at fault and the way money is distributed, rather than the Government? It is distributed according not to need but to what has happened previously.

Melanie Onn: I do not agree that it is just about the system following what has always been. I think there needs to be a reassessment of need. It is not just about following the previous system: the £79 million of cuts has nothing to do with what happened before; it is a result of decisions made over the past seven years. As my Labour colleagues have said, we are broadly supportive of the principles in the Bill, but none the less my constituents would want me to ask the Government to make sure that my local authority is no worse off in the future than it is now.

8.32 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) and to contribute to this debate. I also wish the Minister a happy birthday—I am sure there is nowhere else he would rather be. I am delighted that the Government, through the Bill, are continuing their agenda for devolution. The measures in the Bill will revolutionise how finances are raised and bring greater flexibility and accountability to local government. The retention of business rates, for which local councils have been asking over many years, is welcome. The developments in the Bill are particularly welcome in Cornwall, not least because Cornwall is one of the pilot areas for the 100% retention of business rates, which will enable us to be an early adapter and to contribute to fine tuning its roll-out across the country.

That is another sign, following the devolution deal for Cornwall agreed in 2015, that the Government recognise the particular challenges and identity of Cornwall. I am sure that Members across the House will be aware of Cornwall’s dramatic geography: we jut out 90 miles into the Atlantic; our foundations are built on granite; and we are surrounded by fish-bearing seas on three sides, while the River Tamar almost gives us island status. Our geography has contributed to our unique identity and independent attitude, although it also presents many challenges. We have only one neighbouring county—Devon.

Our land is rich in natural resources. Only this week, that was taken further, with the announcement of large lithium deposits, and extraction of this precious metal is now eagerly expected. With the growing global demand for lithium for the production of batteries, this stands to write another chapter in Cornwall’s long history of mining, following on from tin, copper and China clay. We hope to breed a whole new generation of Ross Poldarks—hopefully, a bit more successfully. This change will mean that the local authority will be able to benefit directly from the future growth of this new industry. It will hopefully mean that the local authority will be very supportive of developing this new industry in the near future.

Cornwall’s claim to its own independent identity in culture has been long established, and its desire for greater self-rule has been rekindled in recent times. These days, we Cornish do not march in anger on Westminster as we did in 1497 to protest at the imposition of yet another tax. That attempt did not end too well for the Cornish. No, we have learned, and we now prefer to work more constructively with the Westminster Government, but the desire for greater devolution of powers remains as strong as ever.

I wholeheartedly welcome this Bill as a key move towards devolving more powers. It is an ideal balance between being given the autonomy required to act and being accountable locally without progressing into the unnecessary and expensive bureaucracy of yet another layer of government. I do not believe that we need yet another layer of government in Cornwall, as some would like to see, but I support and I am working towards giving greater powers to the existing bodies in Cornwall. The measures in this Bill will take another step towards making Cornwall Council more responsible and more accountable for Cornwall’s future.

The current review of business rates was long overdue. The delay had led to rates being out of sync with the business community and the constantly changing landscape that businesses face. It left areas that are struggling for whatever reason further disadvantaged, putting additional unwelcome pressures on them. When a high street is blighted with empty shop space, the last thing it needs is
yet more businesses pulling out because of high rates, leaving more shops empty, which can reduce the footfall and further disadvantage those left behind.

With the new measures in the Bill, councils will be able to take a more flexible approach, which has to be welcomed, by being able to adapt the local business rates to suit the needs of their communities and businesses. They can work to attract new businesses where they are needed. This freedom for local authorities to set and vary business rates according to local needs and situations, which will come in 2020, will be a key advantage. It is the local equivalent of Brexit—taking back control for the good of the local community instead of having a one-size-fits-all scenario imposed by a remote authority that all too often does not actually fit in any case.

Alongside that, there are other specific key changes in the Bill, one of which I would like to address in closing. Over recent years, I have campaigned on the importance of public toilets, which are essential in a tourist area such as Cornwall. I have to choose my words carefully here, but a few years ago when I was the cabinet member on Cornwall Council responsible for public toilets, I spent many months touring the 285 public conveniences of Cornwall. I spent far more hours than I would like to admit in some of those toilets.

In recent years, Cornwall Council has been seeking to hand over all its public toilets to town and parish councils and other community organisations. One of the biggest barriers to that is the cost of running the toilets—and a large part of the cost is that they are liable for business rates. Its seems crazy to me that public toilets are liable for rates. They are an essential public service and do not make a profit; they are not a business. Thankfully, the Government have recognised this, and from April 2018, local authorities will be able to use their “discretionary relief powers” —“relief” seems to be the appropriate term here—to remove the business rate liabilities for toilets.

My Cornish colleagues and I raised that with the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, back in 2015 when he visited the county. We have been pressing for this change since, and I am delighted to see that the penny has dropped and that the Government are now addressing this issue. That will enable councils throughout the country to drop the lunacy of charging themselves rates to provide something as basic as a toilet, as well as reducing the costs of running toilets for parish councils and other community organisations that may wish to take on that task.

I am pleased to be able to welcome and support the Bill. The measures that it contains represent another significant step in the Government’s vision of, and commitment to, the devolution of appropriate powers and responsibilities to local government.

8.40 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), but Members may be relieved to know that I shall not be speaking about public toilets.

I support the principle of business rate retention. However, the test of the Bill must lie in the extent to which it delivers fairness across the country, and on the basis of that test, I have some concerns. My first concern is about the context of more than six years of profound unfairness to local government in which the Bill is being introduced. Local government has faced swingeing cuts, imposed initially by the coalition Government and continued and intensified by the current Government. During the period between 2012 and 2020, the average cut in spending power per household for deprived council areas will be more than five times higher than that in more affluent local authority areas. By the end of this Parliament, the average cut in those more affluent areas will be £68 per household, while for deprived areas it will be more than £340 per household.

It is one of the profound injustices of the past six years that many council areas in the greatest need—those with the lowest average incomes and the highest levels of deprivation—have faced the harshest cuts. The Government have been weakening the link between need and funding. It is disappointing that we are debating the Bill in the absence of details of the fair funding review, which would enable us to apply a test of fairness to the Bill and debate it properly, in a fully informed manner. There is no necessary connection between rising levels of need for social care, for example, and the ability to raise additional revenue from business rates through economic growth. In fact, in many areas the reverse will be the case, and it will be precisely the areas with the highest levels of need that also face the greatest challenges in terms of economic growth.

My second concern relates to the challenges currently faced by local authorities as a consequence of the cuts that they have experienced. The most acute of those challenges is in social care. A million people across the country who need care are not currently receiving any. Contracts are being handed back to councils because providers cannot make them work, and our NHS is feeling the pressure of a system that all too often does not give people the support that they need, which results in an acute health crisis.

There are pressures on many other local authority services as well. Libraries and children’s centres are being closed, park services are being cut, and those working in children’s services are struggling to keep our most vulnerable children safe. A system that is already under such pressure requires reform that is guaranteed to deliver additional resources to the areas that need it most. I am concerned about the risk that the Bill poses in the absence of the details of a redistribution mechanism.

My final concern, which I raised when the Select Committee discussed the issue, is about the loss of a democratic link between the source of funding and the services that are predominantly funded. A very high proportion of councils’ funds—up to 75% in some areas—are spent on services that protect our most vulnerable residents, but that concern is not typically uppermost in the minds of most businesses. I fear that councils may find themselves in an uncomfortable tension between voting and taxpaying residents and the businesses that will provide most of their revenue. I would welcome an assurance from the Minister that the Government will monitor the issue, and will ensure that funds for key social and community services are not eroded under pressure from a different taxpayer-stakeholder group.

The Government’s track record on fairness for local government funding is appalling. I call on the Government to publish details of the process for redistributing business rates so that we can ensure that the new arrangements
are fair; to look, in the short term, at the crippling crisis facing social care and other local authority services, and redress the balance; and to ensure, over time, that the services on which our most vulnerable residents rely are not placed at further risk. This reform should be being introduced as part of a package of fiscal devolution reform for local government funding, designed to embed fairness in the system and place control firmly in the hands of local authorities, which know their communities best.

8.45 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). The only observation I would make is that, as in many other speeches from the Opposition Benches, we heard a list of local authority funding and what happened in the last Parliament between 2010 and 2015, but I am drawn back to my earlier intervention on the shadow Minister. After nearly five years of complaints from the official Opposition about local authority funding, the then shadow Chancellor, now a “Strictly Come Dancing” star, was challenged about how much extra he would be putting in, with the plans until 2017 having been published, and the answer was nothing. It has therefore been interesting to hear some of what we have heard again tonight.

I came to this debate with high hopes, because, having read clause 9, I knew this would certainly not be a bog standard Second Reading debate.

Mr Gareth Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kevin Foster: I am happy to give way—certainly on that point.

Mr Thomas: I have a copy of our 2015 election manifesto. It makes clear that we would have transferred £30 billion of funding to the city and county regions, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw his remark.

Kevin Foster: The shadow Minister talks about transferring funding, but his party would have transferred responsibilities. When in January and February 2015 there was a direct challenge to the former Member for Morley and Outwood—it is interesting that he is the former Member—on how much extra Labour was going to put in, the answer was nothing. While there would have been a transfer, there certainly was not going to be anything extra after five long years of complaints. Perhaps that was also one reason why people did not have much confidence in the Labour party having a real programme for government and duly dealt it the electoral blow that surely had to follow, and that I suspect will soon follow again.

I want to go into the details of the Bill and explain why overall it is welcome. When I became the cabinet member for city development in Coventry—I had some quite constructive dealings with the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) at that time—as part of the training scheme we were briefed on what was called the Birmingham dilemma. Previously, councillors in Birmingham had chosen to spend money on regenerating the city, but of course to do that they had had to take money out of the services they were responsible for. While the regeneration had created new jobs and brought new business rates in, they took the blame for the cut in the services that they had had to make to fund it, and they did not get the reward when a significant amount of extra revenue was generated for the national Exchequer. We were briefed on that, and on how we could balance the fact that if we wanted to start regeneration or push forward a project as a local councillor, we did not get any of the reward for doing that financially; we only got the esoteric reward of being able to point to lower unemployment figures in our area or point out that the town centre was looking a bit better following the regeneration scheme. The incentives in terms of day-to-day profit and loss, or, rather, the revenue budget, were just not there. That is why the change to give local authorities more ability to retain the business rates growth they receive and remove that dilemma from local councils is welcome.

It is particularly good that we are now moving to 100% of that growth being retained. Of course in scrutinising this Bill in detail there will need to be some mechanism for when there is a sudden windfall; to be fair, that was touched on by the shadow Minister. Through a stroke of luck, a piece of national infrastructure might be dropped off in a district council area, but that might not necessarily be a sign of taking radical decisions for growth. Likewise, however, if a community is getting a piece of national infrastructure dropped off in its area, it is not unreasonable for it to want to get a direct reward from the business rates concerned.

James Heappey: It is not always the case, of course, when a significant piece of national infrastructure is dropped into a community’s lap that the local authority keeps the business rates. It would be great if a nuclear power station did mean that, but at the moment it does not.

Kevin Foster: I am sure that some of the residents living around Hinkley Point would be very pleased if their district council got those business rates. In some areas where very large developments go ahead, that would probably involve a dividend being declared rather than a council tax being set. However, it is right that our system has balance. Certain circumstances could not possibly be affected by a local authority’s decision—a steel plant closing down, for example—so we would have to look at a situation like that from the other way round. These are the details that we need to go into, but it is absolutely right that local councils should be able to take decisions to innovate and get an actual hard cash reward for doing so, which they can then use to benefit the residents who have been prepared to support them in taking those decisions.

In looking at how we fund local government, I am pleased that we are not considering measures such as a tourist tax, which have been suggested in the past. That would be completely counterproductive in an area such as Torbay. The last thing we need to do is create additional costs for people visiting and staying in the UK, and I am pleased that those kinds of ideas have not come anywhere near the Bill.

There is an issue with social care. We have heard a lot of talk today about this in relation to urban and rural areas, but there is also a real issue in coastal areas. A lot
of coastal authorities in county areas, as well as stand-alone unitaries, can find themselves taking a hit at both ends of the spectrum. For example, my local authority has a ward in which 9% of the people are aged over 85, which presents its own challenges, and at the other end of the spectrum, I have a higher than average number of children in care and one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy. That can present unique challenges for coastal communities, regardless of whether they are unitary authorities or part of a county or two-tier structure. Perhaps we need to have a debate about how we can reflect those different challenges in relation to funding opportunities.

I also welcome the fact that the infrastructure supplements are being brought forward, particularly for combined authorities. There has been some talk about why these powers have been given instantly to directly elected mayors. I expect it is because they are directly accountable and it is they who take the decision to implement these measures. Again, I think it is right that we should look at that question over a wider area. In many cases, a local urban area that might experience business rate growth could be dependent on infrastructure coming through nearby rural areas. For example, one of the biggest boosts for Torbay’s infrastructure—the south Devon link road—is 99% in Teignbridge District Council’s area, but the road clearly has a huge benefit for Torbay.

In the future, could such development projects be dealt with through this kind of arrangement, rather than having to wait decades for a decision at national level?

Overall, the Bill is welcome. This is its Second Reading, so there is clearly time for far more detailed consideration in Committee and when it returns to the House on Report. From my perspective, and from my experience in local government and seeing what is happening in places such as Torbay, I believe that the Bill sets the framework for a debate about how we can deliver a real incentive to local authorities and a clear reward for those communities that innovate and grow, but without penalising any other community.

8.53 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who speaks with much knowledge on this subject. The business rates retention provisions in the Bill clearly have huge potential for our local authorities, which will be able to focus on economic growth in their area, and to grow their rates base and therefore their income. However, this is an incentive around growth rather than the whole redistribution of the current local authority funding system. Most of the revenue going into local authorities will be baked in and redistributed according to a formula whose details we do not yet know, but I am heartened to hear from the Minister that the fair funding review is being taken forward. A technical working group from the Local Government Association has now been charged with that responsibility.

The principle has to be that there is a fair funding formula wherever we live. There cannot be a postcode lottery. The previous and current Secretaries of State have been clear that that is a key part of the proposals. The Communities and Local Government Committee looked into the business rates retention policy, and our report considers the concerns and the opportunities.

Overall, we were supportive of the principle of the Bill, but we recommended that an independent body should look at the funding review. I am sure that the LGA has some good people, but it is important that we have a fresh look at this, so it would be good to have someone truly independent who can sit back from where local government is today.

In addition to the Committee’s initial witness sessions, we had about an hour and a half in the House of Commons Library with some experts from the Scrutiny Unit during which they tried to explain the current system to us, but we left none the wiser. I understand that 159 measures are currently in use, so the current system and the way in which the measures combine is very complex. With so many measures, one would think that the current system would be fair, but it is absolutely not.

I am grateful to Leicestershire County Council for its detailed work—it is available on its website—on authorities’ core spending power. As many will know, core spending power involves all an authority’s revenue, taking into account the revenue support grant, council tax, business rates, the new homes bonus—everything. Opposition Members might say that this is a political argument involving the shires against metropolitan areas, but the council’s evidence did not suggest that at all. Many mets are not getting a fair deal, but many shire counties, such as the one that I represent, are not getting a fair deal either. The fairest deals seem to be those of many London authorities. Nine out of 10 authorities with the highest spending power are in London, yet nine out of 10 authorities with the lowest council tax are also in London. Over the past five years, a typical council tax bill outside London has increased by £100 whereas the average bill in London has decreased. Something about how overall funding is being allocated under the current system is not quite right.

To put those figures in context, the spending per head of the local authority with the highest spending power—obviously a London authority—is £1,170. That figure falls to £770 in North Yorkshire and to £615 in York. There are many other examples, such as Kirklees, Leeds, Wigan, Bury and Wakefield, of authorities getting a raw deal. One might put that down to certain other factors, such as a correlation with deprivation, income or another demographic, but that is not the case. Areas with high income deprivation, such as Leeds or Kirklees, or with a high proportion of elderly people, such as the East Riding of Yorkshire or Dorset, often have a low amount to spend per head. The system just is not working. The 1988 centralisation of the system, under which money was to be redistributed around local authorities, was supposed to make the system fair by ensuring the equal funding of services on the basis of need, but that clearly has not worked and we have been left with a postcode lottery.

I am not picking on London, because some London local authority areas, including that of the Minister for Housing and Planning, whose birthday it is today, are not particularly well funded, but the pattern persists. To put the situation into context again, Hammersmith and Fulham is not increasing its council tax this year. It is not applying the adult social care precept, but it is providing free home care to residents and has cut the price of meals on wheels. Hardly any of those facilities are now available in my area. It is simply not fair that people in different parts of the country with the same needs are getting different levels of service.
Of course there is an impact on the provision of other services in my local area of North Yorkshire. Libraries are closing or are being moved over to community libraries. Bus services will no longer be subsidised, so some services will no longer operate. Obviously there is an effect on children’s services and, crucially, on adult social care—we have a more elderly population in North Yorkshire.

This is not an easy situation to resolve. Moving from one system to another is a zero-sum game. If the system is to be made fair today, somebody will lose out. We have to move away from a system that is clearly unfair. I understand that the system is as it is because of something called regression. Past inaccuracies and unfairness have been built one on top of one another, and it is difficult to reverse those changes.

Of course more money is coming into the system—£12.5 billion, according to the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones). Some extra services will clearly be required for that money, but there is an opportunity to make the system fair. Yes, there will be more services and greater responsibilities, but some areas are getting a better deal today.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a strong point about simplifying the system, which I was about to address. There cannot be 159 different indicators. We know that that does not work. Leicestershire has suggested nine simple indicators, including children’s services, adult social care, highways, fire, area costs, sparsity and density. That is a simple formula that people can understand and penetrate, and it would make sure that the allocations catering for the extra responsibilities we are getting through the system. We should use those nine simple cost drivers instead of this regression, which is a model based on something that clearly does not work. We need a progressive move away from that regression towards a simple, standard, penetrable formula based not on where we live, but on a fair system with fair resources and a fair assessment of the cost drivers wherever we live.

There will be a collective sigh of relief across Somerset and other rural areas about clause 7’s extension of rate relief to rural areas, which will go some way towards putting rural areas on a more equal footing with urban areas, although there is still so much to do in many other regards for us to achieve anything like an equal footing. Small businesses in my constituency have raised that inequality with me, as I am sure others have in constituencies across the country, so it is good that we are addressing it.

Business rates appeals have cost some £2.5 billion over the past five years and, like the Local Government Association, I am pleased that the Bill sets out how the Government will pay local authorities for the cost of appeals, which will clearly make a difference. The proviso to that, however, is that that mechanism must be in place before the 100% retention of business rates, because if it is not, surely the local authority would be liable for 100% of the cost of appeals. I do not fully understand that, but no doubt we will hear more about it—I look forward to hearing what the Minister says. The retention of the redistribution mechanism for topping up a local authority’s funding if it does not raise enough means that the Bill is extremely good news on business rates as a whole, not only for local authorities but for small businesses.

On the wider funding issues, altering the local government finance settlement so that it becomes multi-year instead of yearly will of course provide local authorities with the opportunity to plan ahead. That will give them certainty and clarity so that they can look ahead like any other business or organisation as we transition to the system in which they retain 100% of local business rates. Again, perhaps we will learn more about the details of the proposal.

Kevin Hollinrake: Yes, the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones). Some extra services will clearly be required for that money, but there is an opportunity to make the system fair. Yes, there will be more services and greater responsibilities, but some areas are getting a better deal today.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in order to ensure that the problems that he highlights are not replicated in the new system, we need to find an agreed and sensible way of measuring rural deprivation? That is often incredibly hard to measure compared with deprivation in urban areas because of the scarcity and sparsity of the population.

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David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con): I join other hon. Members in wishing the Minister for Housing and Planning a happy birthday.

The House has been very patient. I will not hold up our proceedings for long as I am sure the Minister wants to enjoy his birthday for a couple of hours. The House has also been very accommodating, as we are yet to hear a lot of the detail regarding the Bill. As Members on both sides of the House have said, particularly the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope), there is an awful lot that we still do not really know, but overall the Bill is immensely welcome.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in order to ensure that the problems that he highlights are not replicated in the new system, we need to find an agreed and sensible way of measuring rural deprivation? That is often incredibly hard to measure compared with deprivation in urban areas because of the scarcity and sparsity of the population.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a strong point about simplifying the system, which I was about to address. There cannot be 159 different indicators. We know that that does not work. Leicestershire has suggested nine simple indicators, including children’s services, adult social care, highways, fire, area costs, sparsity and density. That is a simple formula that people can understand and penetrate, and it would make sure that the allocations catering for the extra responsibilities we are getting through the system. We should use those nine simple cost drivers instead of this regression, which is a model based on something that clearly does not work. We need a progressive move away from that regression towards a simple, standard, penetrable formula based not on where we live, but on a fair system with fair resources and a fair assessment of the cost drivers wherever we live.

Overall, however, the Bill is extremely welcome. It delivers on our commitment to devolve budgets and powers to local government, and it moves local government away from dependency and towards self-sufficiency. As Voltaire and Spider-Man’s uncle both said, “With great power comes great responsibility.” It is clear that the responsibility that the Bill provides will strengthen both the position and the powers of local government.
of business rates will encourage local councils to be more entrepreneurial and rejuvenate economic development departments in city and county halls. In the long term, I am sure that the new focus on local economic development, and the Government’s industrial strategy, with its focus on growth in all parts of the UK, will deliver self-sustaining local authorities that deliver high-quality public services in all parts of the UK. But we are not there yet. In fact, we are nowhere near.

Per capita funding for predominantly rural local authorities is significantly below that for predominantly urban authority areas. Why? Because that is just the way it has always been. There is no rhyme or reason to it; it is simply a legacy of old funding formulae, so rural areas have continued to be at a disadvantage. That is iniquitous, and it needs to be corrected. Instead, under the settlement announced, the gap will widen further. Last year, rural MPs on both sides of the House won a concession for extra money in the rural services delivery grant that effectively ensured that last year’s cuts were shared equally between urban and rural areas, but that was just a sticking plaster that did not change the settlement for this year, or the two that follow. However, I remain ever hopeful that, like last year, some additional money can be found to provide some extra rural services delivery grant to ensure that, again, the cuts fall fairly and that rural residents are not left at a disadvantage. I am clear, though, that that will be just another sticking plaster, and that what local authorities need more than anything is certainty—certainty to borrow, invest and budget in the long term so that local public services are on a more stable footing. That means that the current review of local government funding needs to be accelerated, and accelerated urgently.

Furthermore, we should be bold in our ambition for the scale of that review. A review of local government funding is needed that fully recognises the costs of rurality; the costs of an ageing population; the other costs faced by local authorities around the country in both rural areas and urban areas; the costs of communities in which English is predominantly spoken as a second language; and the costs of pockets of high deprivation both in urban and rural areas. All those costs must be understood. We need to put in place a new funding formula for local government that is entirely transparent and entirely fair for all our constituents, whether we represent rural or urban areas.

In Somerset, we are already paying extra on our council tax to protect ourselves from flooding. We will pay extra on our council tax for adult social care. Our cost of living is rising fast, because fuel costs are going up, which impacts on rural areas more than on urban areas. In return, Somerset residents are getting their bins collected less often, the libraries are open less, youth clubs have lost their funding and bus routes are being lost.

Somerset County Council has done a great job running into this headwind, not least because it does so while carrying the enormous debt left by the Liberal Democrats when they were last in charge at county hall. That £20 million a year interest and debt repayment is a very useful reminder of why Somerset is better off under Conservative control. We should be clear that the alchemy of the Conservative administration at county hall in Taunton—just as in other county halls across the country—cannot go on forever. There must be a review that not only delivers the devolution of business rates, but, in the short and medium terms, ensures that we continue to redistribute money from London and the south-east to the rest of the UK, so that local authorities in rural areas, and in the regions of the United Kingdom, can be given a financial settlement that allows them to continue to deliver high-quality local public services with the certainty that is required so that they can borrow, plan and budget for the long term.

I agree with the principle of this Bill. I absolutely agree with the devolution of business rates to local authorities. It is a great idea to give local authorities the opportunity to be more entrepreneurial, to invest in their economic development departments and to reap that return by growing on their patch the number of businesses paying rates, which allows them to do even more by way of public services. Clearly, it is the long-term future, but we should make no mistake: that system will not work immediately on its introduction. What we need in the interim is a full review of local government funding so that our county councils, district councils and councils everywhere else in the UK can operate with some certainty. We do not have to have this year-by-year cut to local public services that annoys our constituents and that means we have such full mailbags.

9.13 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I apologise for not being here at the start of this debate. I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to say a few words. I will not detain those on the Front Benches for very long.

This Bill provides a framework for a major change in the funding of local government, and it provides for the greater retention of business rate revenue by local authorities, and that principle is the right one. Ideally, money raised in an area should remain there, rather than being circulated and perhaps lost as it goes around the country. People and businesses in an area are entitled to expect their money to be spent on local services, with spending decisions made by local councillors to whom they can talk on a day-to-day basis. It is right that areas are moving away from a system whereby the man in Whitehall knows—or thinks he knows—best. That is an important move by the Government, but, as is often the case in such circumstances, there are potential pitfalls along the way. I wish briefly to outline three of those pitfalls this evening, and I do so in my capacity as an MP for a county and a coastal area, and as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for counties.

My first concern is what I will call an unintended consequence. As part of the devolution process, in order to facilitate the new business rate retention process, at present various responsibilities are being transferred from central to local government to ensure fiscal neutrality. I have no problem with that in principle, but there is a danger that in some circumstances there might be unintended consequences. An example that I have come across is in the field of supported housing. Traditionally, developers of supported housing have been able to rely on the fact that their bankers are prepared to fund much needed new schemes in the relative comfort of knowing that they will be underwritten and underpinned by central Government. It is now proposed that in future that should be a function of local government. I regret to say that the feedback I have received from
many specialist supported housing providers indicates that they are very uneasy about whether the supported housing that we need will actually come forward. Practical steps need to be taken to address this concern—there might be others—if this aspect of the devolution process is to succeed.

My second concern relates to what I will call growth constraints. An underlying premise behind the move to greater business rate retention is that those authorities that promote growth in their area should be rewarded for it. Again, this is right, but the other side of the coin is that authorities that would like to promote economic growth in their area should not be penalised if, for reasons outside their control, they are unable to do so. For example, if much of a local authority area is a national park, it would not be realistic to promote a science park. Moreover, one cannot buck the market, and the success of such business park developments rests on the old adage of location, location, location. If they are not in the right location, there is nothing they can do about it; they cannot move their district, their borough or their county.

My third and principal concern focuses on the requirement for the needs-based review of fair funding to take place at the same time as the move towards full business rate retention. I am aware that that is the Government’s intention and that a consultation is due to start next month. It is absolutely vital that we keep to this. If we do not, county areas, such as the constituency I represent, will be placed at an even greater disadvantage than they are at present. The current formula does not take proper account of the demand pressures that county areas and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) said, coastal areas face. There is the adult social care time bomb that we have heard so much about, the obligation to maintain hundreds, if not thousands, of miles of local roads, and the cost of delivering services in sparsely populated, rural areas. The current formula is opaque and, after years of tinkering, no longer fit for purpose, as it is no longer directly linked to need. The needs-based review must be synchronised with the move towards greater business rate retention—they must be joined at the hip. If it is not, a large section of the population will be very unfairly penalised.

In conclusion, I commend the Government for being bold, for their ambition and for their direction of travel. I thus support the Bill, but I urge the Government to remember that the devil is in the detail and to pursue the needs-based review in a timely and fair way. Time really is of the essence in this issue.

9.19 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): May I join many Members on the Government side in wishing my counterpart a very happy birthday? I am sure this does not quite constitute a birthday bash, and for many it is not quite the icing on the cake either, but we await with bated breath for the Committee stage to really get under the skin of what the Bill means. I hope we will work together then, because I think there is a shared desire to promote devolution, to see more power shift from this place down to our communities, and to really empower local areas to determine what is right for them. But the devil, of course, will be in the detail.

We welcome the move towards devolution, and so will many of our councillors, but genuine devolution means actual power, not just limited decisions being made at a local level within a framework that is tightly defined by a very centralising Government; it means areas having genuine freedoms and genuine power, and working with communities to co-produce the future they want. That is devolution, and power and the ability to effect change are what we all came into politics for. None of us wants things in our areas to be predetermined by a Government—hundreds of miles away in many cases—who do not know the ins and outs of our communities, and who really do not know local circumstances in the way we do.

It is important that we develop a plan that works for the whole country. I think many people in England look at devolution being discussed in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and say, “What about England?” Now, even within England, we are seeing towns, cities and counties being pitched against each other, with large parts of England still completely without any devolution deals. The challenge for the Government is that this is about letting go as much as it is about giving a little away to local areas. It is also about doing that in a meaningful way, and we should have the confidence to give the same powers we are proposing for our mayoral combined authorities to our counties and metropolitan areas. That is real confidence and real letting-go. If the Opposition can help in Committee to table some amendments on that, which will hopefully be received in a positive way, we will, I hope, have a fair settlement for England.

But let us be honest: some of this comes down to cash as well as power. We can have ambition and a desire to make our area the best it can be, but we need funding to make that happen. We need capital to invest in growth. I do not just mean areas doing deals with the Government—providing they have access to the Government, because those that do not will not get that capital funding. I am also talking about having revenue to make sure that the skills providers, the schools system, the health system and the Department for Work and Pensions all work together to make sure we see genuine reform and genuine growth.

A lot of people say, “If you want modernisation, to see where real innovation has taken place and proven itself to be efficient, look to local government.” A lot of people in the Department for Work and Pensions, Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and the Treasury should look at themselves in shame because of the way they have allowed frontline services to be cut to the bone while they themselves have failed to reform from the inside.

I worry that we still see a very narrow base being discussed when we talk about fiscal devolution and local autonomy. Let us be honest: we are still talking about council services being based not on need and on people’s genuine need for support and services but on house values in 1991. We have not had the courage to bite the bullet and take forward revaluations. We have not allowed local freedoms to look at exemptions and discounts in the way that areas have asked for through the devolution deals that have taken place.

On top of that, we are still talking about a very narrow business rate base. Many of the areas that have a low tax base for residential properties have the same
issue with their business rate base: lower values and lower demand have an effect on the tax base and on the amount of tax that can be generated. It is a real shame that when we talk about fiscal devolution and autonomy, we are still taking the easy option. We are using property tax because it is easy: we know how to collect it and we know how to generate it. That then creates the pot of money that local government has to use to sink or swim. Well, that is okay for an area that has a strong tax base, but for an area that does not, the alternative to swimming is to sink, and that is not good enough if we believe in fairness and a decent society.

So we will see amendments being tabled in Committee that really reflect the idea of funding based on need. It is not good enough to set one area against another if there are instances in rural areas that should be taken into account, a fair funding model should accommodate that. Equally, a fair funding formula should take into account areas with high levels of children who need safeguarding support or people who need social care. There should not be the constant imbalance whereby areas fight with each other to get scarce resources to deliver the public services that our communities need.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about looking at this again as a blank canvas. Does he therefore accept that if that new funding formula meant that a local authority was worse off based on such objective need, he would support legislating on that basis?

Jim McMahon: We have heard from Members on both sides of the House the deep concern that any review will mean that some areas are worse off than others. As I said, that is inevitable with such narrow tax bases, when we are looking at council tax income and business rate income and saying, “That’s it.” Given that the additional grants to local authorities are now in question, we are always going to be fighting for a scarce resource.

Devolution deals have included requests for retention of air passenger duty and the tourism tax. Okay, not every area might want that, but if we believe in devolution, local areas should be able to have some of these options. The retention of fuel duty or VAT at a local level has not even been discussed. If we want genuine fiscal devolution, we need to be more open to more taxes being raised locally and spent locally, with local people holding to account the people who make those decisions.

It is not local government that needs to change, or even the DCLG team, but the Treasury—it needs to let go. The reason air passenger duty cannot be devolved at the moment is that the Treasury has no idea how much fuel duty is generated at any of our airports, because it is paid by the airline at its head office. The Treasury has no idea how much is generated from fuel duty, because it is not attributed to every petrol station but paid at the refinery, and that does not account for how much is spent at a local level.

Mr George Howarth: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point that many of us tried to make earlier. Does he agree that on top of the fact that no redistributive mechanism is involved in this measure, there has not been sufficient testing of what the outcomes will be for us to be satisfied that it will work to the benefit of all local authorities?

Jim McMahon: That is an absolutely fair point that has been raised by not just me but very credible think-tanks and by the LGA, whose financial review stated that we need a broad review of the tax base to make sure that local authorities have a broad range of taxes and that they are resilient to future change and future shocks. It is not good enough just to say that councils need to reform.

Mr Jim Cunningham: For very many years now, on and off, we have debated local government. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should have some sort of independent inquiry to have a good look at the needs of local government and how it should properly be funded?

Jim McMahon: I strongly believe, as would many in local government, that local government finance and the powers that are contained within local government should have constitutional protection from the interference of central Government. It cannot be at the whim of the Minister of the day, or even the Prime Minister or the Chancellor, to change the viability and sustainability of public services to such a degree.

We have made some progress with the four-year, multi-year settlement. I am pleased that the majority of local authorities have put in for that, but it was of course based on the projections of doom—on local authorities being told before the efficiency plan was submitted that they had to live within their means, but taking no account of the demand. At one point, the efficiency plans had been submitted, but there was a gap that has not been addressed through the funding settlements that are now being brought in. With the best will in the world, unless central Government bite the bullet and deal with the chronic underfunding of social care, council tax payers will continue to bear the brunt. It is absolutely wrong in a civilised country that people’s ability to receive decent social care is based on the tax base of their local authority, based on house values in 1991, and not on their need for that service.

Mr Cunningham: On social care, I met the chief executive of University hospital Coventry a couple of weeks ago. One of the big dilemmas is that people with mental illnesses are turning up at the hospital and looking for treatment when they should be going elsewhere. There is a real difficulty, certainly in the midlands, in looking after the carers in that situation. Does my hon. Friend agree that something should be done about that?

Jim McMahon: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, but his point goes beyond adult social care and the acute sector. Over this parliamentary Session, we have been discussing the cuts to community pharmacies and the impact that they are going to have. A lot of Greater Manchester’s Healthier Together programme is based on the preventative work of our community pharmacies, and 16 community pharmacies in my own town face closure. That is not part of the health devolution programme to Greater Manchester, but it is being held up as a place that has health devolution. That is because it is very tightly defined and the Government, with the best will in the world, just will not let go, for different reasons.

Members should not just take my word for it. During my years in local government, I had the pleasure of working with some fantastic people. I should be careful
not to overstate this, given that he is one of the mayoral candidates in the race for Greater Manchester, but the Conservative leader of Trafford Council, who is also a vice-chair of the LGA, is very clear that this is not fiscal devolution, but a retention of rates that will be set centrally. If we mean it, we should all learn to let go, trust our local councils and trust local people to hold them to account.

Melanie Onn: I appreciate what my hon. Friend is saying about learning to let go and give power back to local authorities, but what about those that, because of the cuts, are finding it so difficult to operate that they are considering merging? Does he think that that will impact on the future operations of local authorities?

Jim McMahon: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about the burning platform coming down the line towards many local authorities. Local authorities that we support have had to make very short-term decisions and they have a horrible task of trying to meet growing demand, particularly for safeguarding young and vulnerable adults and children and for social care. The principle of devolution has to mean having a national framework with an answer for devolution for every part of England. It should not be about picking areas off one by one and against each other.

James Heappey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jim McMahon: My hon. Friend puts on show his experience with a detailed assessment of the types of variable taxes that local government really needs in order to be sustainable in the long term. We are in the process of looking at local government finance in the longer term, and I make this plea: that we look a bit more broadly than the traditional council tax and business rate base; that we are open-minded about having a more varied range of taxes for local authorities to take; and that, in doing so, we ensure that local authorities are held to account and that they can work together to secure the right distribution method so that funding is genuinely based on need.
Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith). He made it clear that Manchester, which is held up as an example of an excellent authority and which is at the forefront of devolution in leading the Greater Manchester devolution deal, has had to make some terrible decisions just to balance its everyday revenue book. That cannot be right.

Looking down the line, we have a serious problem coming our way: a £2.6 billion black hole in adult social care. If we do not deal with that, it will not mean that we have £2.6 billion more to spend, to save or to give away in tax breaks; it will only push demand elsewhere in the system, as we have seen with delayed discharges and queues for A&E. That can be prevented, but only by providing the money up-front to keep people in their homes for longer, putting far more money into preventive services and making sure that we are not spending money unnecessarily—not because people do not need that service, but because they will get a better service by being well for longer at home. That is really important.

We talk about the people who are already in receipt of social care not getting the support they need, but according to Age Concern 1 million people who would have been entitled to social care in 2010 are no longer in receipt of it. We are talking about somebody’s mum, dad or grandparent. I hope that when I get to the stage of having to think about my father or mother needing that type of care, we will have got a grip on the system. As mindful as I am of that, I am also mindful of the fact that as a Parliament we have a responsibility for the 1 million people who need social care. They have worked and contributed all their lives, and when they really need that care, it is right that the Government stand up for them.

The situation is bad in Oldham and Greater Manchester, but let us just look at Surrey. I know the Conservative leader of Surrey Council, David Hodge; we worked together on the LGA. He is not a grandstander, and he is not trying to make petty points. He is raising a very real issue about the lack of funding in social care. If Surrey had to raise council tax by 15% just to keep its head above water, just look at the authorities that have had their budgets cut even more than Surrey has. Some are in a terrible situation.

I will leave it at that and allow the Minister to come in. I ask him to work with us. Labour Front Benchers believe in devolution and in sending power from this place down to our communities, and we will table positive amendments, as well as probing ones. It is not enough for the Government simply to let go a little; they need to learn to let go full stop.

9.40 pm

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):** As several hon. Members have kindly mentioned during the debate, today is my 45th birthday. It is not a cause for celebration on my part, but what better way to numb the pain than to attend a debate on local government finance? For nearly 24 of my 45 years, I have been interested in housing and local government policy. In all that time, there has been a very strong call for local government to move away from its dependence on central Government grants.

The Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), for whom I have very great respect, asked whether the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nunneaton (Mr Jones), was justified in saying that this is a revolutionary measure. I think it is: it is a big step change in reducing the reliance of local government in this country on central Government. Will it solve all the problems? No, of course it will not. There will still be arguments about the overall level of resourcing and the distribution among local authorities. However, I remind all Members of the House to read the briefing we have received from the Local Government Association, which says that the central measure in the Bill has long been called for by local councils.

The hon. Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas), who spoke on behalf of the Opposition, suffered a bit of amnesia on the Labour Government’s record in office on devolution. None the less, it was very good to hear that the Opposition Front Bench support the measures in the Bill in principle. He was right to say that the Bill is part of a wider package that is very important in terms of what will be devolved to achieve the fiscal neutrality of its measures, on which the Government are consulting at the moment, as well as the distribution of the funding that will ensure a fair settlement for all local authorities and the issue of providing a safety net in case any authority faces a sudden decline in its income.

I will just make a few points in that regard. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith)—he is not in the same place as he was earlier—asked us to forgive him his scepticism. I certainly do forgive him. I think scepticism of all Governments over the years on these matters has probably been justified. However, we cannot legislate for fair funding. The relative needs of various parts of the country are going to change over time—the Chairman of the Select Committee made that point very powerfully—and we cannot legislate for that, but we are absolutely determined to get this right. At the moment, we have two approaches to taking forward the detail and making sure that we address the concerns that Members on both sides of the House have expressed. We will pilot the arrangements, and two hon. Members—my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth)—represent areas that are piloting reforms. We also have a very important steering group with the Local Government Association, and it is working with local government to try to get the details right.

**Mr George Howarth:** Although the pilots are welcome, I made the point earlier that the Liverpool city region—it is one of the pilot areas, as the Minister has said—has had no consultation whatsoever by the Government on how they want to proceed with the pilot. Does he not think that we could do with a bit more detail before we get to the Committee stage so that we can judge what the likely outcomes will be?

**Gavin Barwell:** The Secretary of State has just told me that he has discussed the pilot with leaders in the city region and my officials have told me that there have been some detailed discussions. It is certainly true that not all of the points have been dealt with yet, but I will happily write to the right hon. Gentleman to provide him with some reassurance.

I will deal with some of the points that colleagues have made. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) talked about local government reorganisation in Dorset and what the position might be there. I can
tell him that it would be possible to set one level of council tax from day one, but in previous reorganisations a period has been allowed for council tax rates to equalise. He asked about the pooling arrangements set out in the Bill. We intend to consult local government about those arrangements, but the reason for the change is that the current arrangements have led to some local authorities being left out of what would have been logical arrangements, and we should not allow that to continue. He also made the point that we are looking to implement these reforms in the last year of the four-year settlement. That is true, and we made that clear at the outset when we set out the settlement.

Mr Chope: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Gavin Barwell: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will make a bit of progress, because I have a lot of points to respond to.

The Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East, said that he would like authorities to be given the freedom not just to reduce the multiplier but to increase it. That would certainly be the easy way to raise more income, but Conservative Members believe that the way to raise more income is to grow the local economy, and we are trying to provide incentives for local authorities to do that.

The hon. Gentleman made the crucial point that if resetting were done too often, the incentive for growth would disappear, but if it were not done regularly enough, there would be a danger of authorities falling behind. I can confirm to him that we will look to adjust the needs baseline every time we reset—that is a crucial part of the reforms. We may also need to look at the mix of measures that have been devolved to make the package fiscally neutral, because as he said, demand for services may grow more quickly than the income from the tax base. Those issues will have to be looked at each time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) spoke powerfully about the unique constituency that he represents, for which he is such a powerful advocate in the House. He talked about the huge potential for income there, but also the real challenges that his local authorities face.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) made a good point about ensuring that there is an incentive for local authorities to help small businesses, from which they might not get a business rates income. The Government’s hope, and I am sure that of his local authority, is that small businesses will grow to become medium-sized and larger businesses, so that the incentive will still be there in the longer term.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) made an important point about the appeals system for business rates. At the moment, local government bears a significant part of the risk of appeals. One of the reforms in the Bill that the Local Government Association has welcomed deals with that issue, so that the risk does not sit with individual local authorities. Clearly, with 100% retention that risk would be significantly increased, so we have sought to address the issue that he is concerned about.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) raised the issue of the safety net and referred to an example in her constituency that I believe she has raised with Ministers a number of times. At the moment, in the 50% retention system, there is a safety net at 92.5% of assumed income. As part of developing these reforms, the Government will need to give thought to what the arrangement should be under 100% retention. She is absolutely right to flag up the importance of protecting authorities that face a sudden large loss in their income.

Amanda Milling: Given that the intention is to phase out coal-fired power stations between now and 2025, what will the Government do to work with local authorities that will face closures over the coming years?

Gavin Barwell: There are two issues here—making sure that the arrangements that we have in place cater for circumstances in which there is a significant loss in a local authority’s business rates income from one financial year to the next, and giving advance warning of the timing of closures so that local authorities have time to prepare appropriately. Perhaps my hon. Friend may wish to have discussions with the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton, as the proposals go forward.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The Minister mentioned the fact that the Government want to grow local economies through the measures in the Bill. One problem as a local economy expands is the shortage of housing. If the private sector cannot cope, why do the Government not take the shackles off councils and allow them to borrow to build council houses, so that they can take the pressure off mortgages?

Gavin Barwell: The hon. Gentleman tempts me on to my pet subject. If his argument is that we need to build more homes in this country, I absolutely agree with him, and so does the Secretary of State. There will be a White Paper shortly with a package of measures to encourage all sectors to build more homes, but I point him to the announcement that the Chancellor made in the autumn statement of a further £1.4 billion for the building of affordable housing. The commitment of the Secretary of State and myself on that issue is clear.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) and my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay referred to the measures on rate relief for public toilets. Indeed, there was quite a lot of toilet humour during the debate. Because I am not at home for my birthday, my children are watching, so I will keep it clean. I simply point out one thing to the hon. Lady. She asked whether, if public toilets were closed, the relief would still apply—whether they would still be liable for rates. The answer is quite complicated: they might still be rateable—so there is a potential for a charge—but unoccupied properties with a rateable value below £2,000 do not pay business rates, so they might fall below that threshold. If they are above it, the powers in the Bill would be applicable. I hope that that gives her the detail she was looking for.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) spoke powerfully about the pressures on coastal communities and made a plea that, as we look at the fair funding review, we make sure that those particular
pressures are taken into account. I know that other hon. Members will share his concern, and I thought he made his points very forcefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) spoke incredibly powerfully and showed a real understanding of the detail of local government finance. I have heard it said that when Einstein published his general theory of relativity, for a number of years only two or three people around the world understood it. I think the local government finance system is similar in that regard, but it sounds like my hon. Friend is one of the two or three. He talked about regression—the fact that the formula is not based purely on an assessment of need but takes past spending patterns as a proxy for what is needed—which means that to some degree the political decisions of different authorities have an impact. I think he was arguing that we move away from that, which is absolutely something we can look at as part of the fair funding review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton) spoke powerfully about the importance of the measures on a rural rate relief. He is a great champion for rural communities, and we are pleased to include this measure; it will ensure that rural small businesses get the same treatment as small businesses in other parts of the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heappey) spoke powerfully not just for his own constituents but for rural communities across the country in trying to ensure they get a fair deal from the fair funding review. The House considered this issue last year, and I know that he and the Secretary of State feel strongly about it, but we need to get the detail right and ensure that the formula takes account of the needs of all communities, whether inner-city areas, suburban areas such as the one I represent or rural communities, and ensure that they all get a fair deal out of the system for determining finance.

The final Back-Bench speech was from my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous). He made several points but one in particular bears repeating: about the importance of implementing the fair funding review at the same time as we extend business rates retention to 100%. It is clearly essential in those circumstances to ensure an equitable distribution of the income that local government as a whole raises through other parts of the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), who wound up for the Opposition, made two points that are worth my picking up on (Jim McMahon), who wound up for the Opposition, made two points that are worth my picking up on. First, he made the point that the Government want to address that in several ways. One is the presumption of income, which could become a self-replicating cycle. From growth and might therefore find themselves deprived for whatever reason, cannot raise additional funding that they all get a fair deal out of the system for determining finance. The Government want to address that in several ways. For one, we want to make sure that we get the system for local government funding right, but it will not have escaped the House’s attention that earlier we heard about an industrial strategy from a Government determined that all parts of our country benefit from the economic growth we are delivering. It is again worth looking back at the record of the Labour Government and their failure to do that. We do not intend to repeat that mistake.

The hon. Gentleman made one final point about local government finance. I want to make it absolutely clear to him that nobody on the Government Benches thinks that every single community in the country should have the same level of funding per head. We absolutely recognise that funding should be based on need. Let me give him a statistic: his own local authority has a spending power, per dwelling, of just under £1,900. In the Prime Minister’s community, that figure is just over £1,300, so his constituents are getting a spending power that is nearly 50% more to reflect the fact—quite rightly—that there are extra needs in his community. I want to make it absolutely clear on behalf of the Government that we are committed to a fair system that reflects need.

It is probably worth putting on the record some of the other things that the Bill does that have not received the same attention in the debate. The pooling arrangements and the possibility for groups of local authorities essentially to replicate enterprise zone policy is a really important measure. Some mention has been made of the powers in the legislation for the Greater London Authority and for mayoral combined authorities to levy a 2% supplement on business rates, if local business has been consulted. I must say that I am concerned that the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), who wound up for the Opposition, and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) spoke incredibly powerfully and put their points very forcefully. It is probably worth putting on the record some of the other things that the Bill does that have not received the same attention in the debate. The pooling arrangements and the possibility for groups of local authorities essentially to replicate enterprise zone policy is a really important measure. Some mention has been made of the powers in the legislation for the Greater London Authority and for mayoral combined authorities to levy a 2% supplement on business rates, if local business has been consulted. I must say that I am concerned that the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), who wound up for the Opposition, and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) spoke incredibly powerfully and put their points very forcefully.

Kevin Foster: I appreciate the explanation that the Minister is giving. When people first hear about the idea of infrastructure, they instantly think of roads and railways. Will my hon. Friend confirm that it will be slightly wider than that, including, for example, a good provision of superfast broadband services?

Gavin Barwell: Absolutely. We want the definition of infrastructure to include looking widely at all the different things that can help to drive economic growth. In the industrial strategy Green Paper published today, getting the right digital infrastructure in place is a key part of trying to ensure that we get the broad-based economic growth that the country needs. Again, this tempts me into the role as the Minister for Housing and Planning. There are pressures are taken into account. I know that other hon. Members will share his concern, and I thought he made his points very forcefully.

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focusing on growth deals that aggressively target those areas where the business rate base is smallest might be a good thing to do over the next two years?

Gavin Barwell: I know that the Secretary of State is really keen to work with communities right across the country to get these growth deals in place. We absolutely recognise that if we want to drive economic growth, the role of local communities—local councils, local businesses and local enterprise partnerships—is critical. The Government giving additional freedoms to help make that work possible can play a huge role.

One other measure that has not been touched on is the provision to change the inflation indicator for business rates from RPI to CPI. As the Association of Convenience Stores says in its submission, this will lower annual rate increases for businesses, providing a reduction in the burden of business rates that businesses are going to experience.

In conclusion, local government is a crucial part of our democracy. Many Members, including myself, but going right up to the Prime Minister, have served as councillors before coming to this House to serve as Members of Parliament. All of us know just how important the work of councillors is to the local communities that we have the privilege to represent. For too long, councils have been forced to rely on us here in Westminster and have lacked the levers and incentives required to drive growth and investment in communities, and those communities have suffered as a result. This Bill presents a historic opportunity to change that forever. A global Britain can only be built on a strong local foundation. This Bill will help to provide that, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.
Bill accordingly read a Second time.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Local Government Finance Bill:

Committal
1. The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee. Proceedings in Public Bill Committee
2. Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 21 February 2017.
3. The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

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

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL (MONEY)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Finance Bill, it is expedient to authorise—
(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act; and
(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

Question agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Secretary Sajid Javid relating to the Local Government Finance Bill Carry-over. (Chris Heaton-Harris.)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL (CARRY-OVER)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 80A(1)(a)),

That if, at the conclusion of this Session of Parliament, proceedings on the Local Government Finance Bill have not been completed, they shall be resumed in the next Session.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

That the draft Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice) (Revision of Codes C, D and H) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 22 November 2016, be approved.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

Question agreed to.
Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

Question agreed to.
FINANCIAL SERVICES

That the draft Bank of England and Financial Services (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2017, which were laid before this House on 2 December 2016, be approved.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

Question put.
The Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 25 January (Standing Order No. 41A).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (24 JANUARY)

Ordered,
That at the sitting on Tuesday 24 January, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England (Appointment) not later than one hour after their commencement; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS

Ordered,
That Dr Dan Poulter be discharged from the Scottish Affairs Committee and Craig Williams be added.—(Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Ordered,
That Jo Churchill be discharged from the Women and Equalities Committee and Lucy Allan be added.—(Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)

Sex and Relationship Education

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

10.2 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Four Members have already told me that they wish to intervene, so I hope that others will bear with me. I think that that will probably be as much as we can contain within the time available.

Children have their first mobile phones when they are nine. Many have smartphones, with unlimited and sometimes unfettered access to the worldwide web and everything it has to offer, so we should perhaps not be surprised that by the time they leave primary school, most children will have seen online pornography and one in five will have had to deal with cyber-bullying. By the time that they finish secondary school, six in 10 will have been asked for a digital nude or sexually explicit image of themselves, usually by a friend. As a result, many will have discovered that private digital images of themselves can be passed on to thousands of people at the touch of a button. Removing such images from the worldwide web is all but impossible, which leads to difficult conversations with family, future employers and friends.

When the Women and Equalities Committee was preparing its report on sexual harassment in schools, we took evidence from children themselves, who told us that sexual harassment had become a normal part of everyday life. Women are called bitches, sluts or slags, and one in three 16 to 18-year-old women say that they have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school. Over the past three years, 5,500 sexual offences have been recorded in UK schools, including 600 rapes. Is abusive behaviour from the online world seeping into the offline world? Perhaps; I do not know.

The facts might look pretty stark to the Members who are present tonight. After hearing them, they might be less surprised to learn of the latest Barnardo’s research findings that seven in 10 children believe that they would be safer if they had age-appropriate classes in sex and relationship education at school. More than nine in 10 specifically said that it was important for them to understand the dangers of being online, especially when sharing images.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I understand and share my right hon. Friend’s concern about there being improved relationship education in schools, particularly for younger children, but does she agree that many parents would be concerned—I would be extremely concerned—if teaching sex education to primary school children were compulsory?

Mrs Miller: My hon. Friend is right that parents need to have a voice in all this, and I am sure that any consultation carried out by the Government would take that into account. Research published today by Plan International UK shows that eight in 10 adults in this country want sex and relationship education for children at school, but my hon. Friend is right that it has to be age-appropriate. In primary schools, for the most part, we are talking about making sure that children understand what a good and healthy relationship looks like.
Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on raising this matter. Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), it is crucial, as I have said previously, that parents have control and oversight of what happens to their children, especially when that pertains to outside influences. Does the right hon. Lady agree that parents first, as well as the Government, must consider that when thinking about any changes in sex education?

Mrs Miller: The hon. Gentleman is right that parents have a pivotal role, but so do schools, and I was about to come on to that.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con) rose—

Mrs Miller: I am now, I fear, going to break my rules by allowing my hon. Friend to intervene.

Sir Peter Bottomley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Many of us did not get much from our parents, and many of us did not pass much on to our children, but the truth is that celibacy is the only thing that we cannot inherit from our parents, and many parents are too embarrassed to talk about these things to their children. Does she agree that it would be a good idea if parents and teachers discussed what children ought to know, and considered whether parents or teachers, or both, should talk to them about it?

Mrs Miller: As always, we hear pearls of wisdom from my hon. Friend, who knows that involving parents in decision making, and in determining ultimately what children really need to understand, at whatever age, is exactly the right way to proceed.

I know the Minister well, so I am sure that she will remind us that some of the best schools already teach children about mutual respect and self-respect, and about what makes a truly loving relationship. They go beyond what is currently compulsory—the mechanics of sex and the biology of reproduction—and tackle relationships and the context of a sexualised online world, because we need to help young people to make better and informed choices in those early years. However, it is surely clear to both me and her that many schools do not take that approach. Why should we sit by and allow children in those schools to lose out?

As I said, research published today by Plan International UK shows that eight in 10 adults think that teaching sex and relationship education should be compulsory in all schools, regardless of their status. We need children to be able to make informed choices. We need them to understand that sexting is illegal, and that it could affect their mental health, leave them open to extortion and perhaps limit their future career choices. We need them to understand that pornography does not reflect reality, and that bullying behaviour online is just as unacceptable as bullying behaviour offline. To be honest, it might be more accurate to call it relationship and sex education, because what children need more than ever is to understand what a healthy relationship really looks like. What they see and experience online is, for the most part, not that.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): My right hon. Friend makes excellent points about sexting and unwanted touching, but does she agree that nowadays, given the insidious nature of early emotional abuse, it is vital that every child in school can understand the signs that it is happening?

Mrs Miller: My hon. Friend, who has a great deal of expertise in this area, is absolutely right. It is important that we give children the right information at the right time—that is what I am calling for.

Many of the reputable operators in the internet and mobile communications world understand the real downsides of their products, especially for children, and they are increasingly trying to fit parental controls to sort this out. However, at the moment those controls are only as good as we parents are, and about 40% of parents use them. Parents are conscious of the problems, but children use the internet for an average of more than 20 hours a week. Parents cannot look over their children’s shoulders at every moment and many simply feel out of their depth.

There are reasons for optimism. In a recent debate on the Children and Social Work Bill, Ministers clearly indicated that thinking was under way. The Government have already acted to show that they can work with the online industry. We should all applaud the work that David Cameron did to outlaw child abuse images online. He showed that the internet industry can act when it wants to. We can also welcome the work that the Government are doing to put in place effective age restrictions for online pornography websites.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing this debate and the excellent work that her Committee has done in this area. Does she agree that it is significant that there is now such strong cross-party support for moving in this direction? Five Select Committee Chairs have now said that this is an important issue. Does she also agree that the statutory nature of her proposals is essential, because that will mean that children will get good sex and relationship education and personal, social and health education? We need the teacher training to be done well so that we can get good teaching.

Mrs Miller: The hon. Lady makes an incredibly important point. We need consistency but, as I pointed out earlier, we do not have that at the moment. Placing provisions on a statutory footing would provide such consistency.

The internet has changed everyone’s lives. For some, it has normalised sexualised behaviours, which children can find it difficult to respond to. I see the Barnardo’s research as a cry for help. Parents have to take overall responsibility, but schools have a pivotal role to play in helping more children to understand what a good relationship is and to make better decisions.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend makes a cogent and compelling case. When we are discussing schools in this context, will she clarify that we are talking about not only local authority schools, but the growing academy sector? It is important that academies are included in such provisions.

Mrs Miller: I am sure that one of the many challenges for Ministers will be to ensure that every child can have the right sort of support and teaching. I do not underestimate the challenges that will present, but I agree with the essence of what my hon. Friend says.
We can pretend that what we are talking about today does not affect children, or that parents have all the specialist knowledge that children need. Alternatively, we who are entrusted to shape our communities can do something different and act to clean up the internet, to support parents, and to give children the understanding that they need to make informed choices. Today’s debate is supported by leading charities including Barnardo’s, the Terrence Higgins Trust, the Children’s Society, the National Children’s Bureau and Plan International UK, as well as by the guides, the scouts and Liberty. They all want sex and relationship education to be compulsory. At the moment, schools are relying on guidance that was agreed more than a decade ago when the internet was still out of most children’s reach. They have failed to adapt to what children need, and it is little wonder that Ofsted recently judged 40% of schools to be inadequate in their teaching of SRE.

Who are we to ignore children calling for change? Children have only one chance of a childhood. We know the damage that is being done by cyber-bullying, sexting and the underage viewing of extreme pornography, and we have an obligation to act. I therefore have a question for the Minister, my friend from Hampshire: how will the Government respond to the seven in 10 children who want change? What are the Government doing, and when will that change happen?

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage): I should like to start by congratulating my right hon. Friend—and, indeed, my real friend—the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) on securing this really important debate. I share her view on the importance of children and young people having access to effective, factually accurate, age-appropriate sex and relationship education. This is a subject that the Government take very seriously, and we have welcomed the extremely helpful input of many Members across the House and, not least, of my right hon. Friend’s Women and Equalities Committee. We also welcome the ongoing scrutiny of the Children and Social Work Bill. The Government are committed to exploring all the options to improve delivery of sex and relationship education and personal social and health education and to ensuring that we address both quality of delivery and accessibility in order to support all children in developing positive, healthy relationships and being able to thrive in modern Britain.

The Government welcomed the Women and Equalities Committee’s comprehensive report on “Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools” that was published in September 2016 and contained several recommendations, including proposals relating to SRE and PSHE. I was honoured to take part in an evidence session as part of that inquiry. I emphasise that we are in full agreement that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools—no matter what form they take—are absolutely abhorrent and unacceptable and should not be tolerated.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I am grateful for what the Minister is saying. Does she agree that the debate about SRE is intrinsically linked with PSHE? This is about life skills and enabling young people to deal with the challenges they will face later, by having the capacity to understand what they are facing.

Caroline Dinenage: Yes. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want to enable young people up and down the country to face the challenges of the modern world. We have given a great deal of consideration to the recommendations that arose from the Women and Equalities Committee’s inquiry. In our response, which was published on 9 November 2016, we committed to work with stakeholders, including teachers, parents and pupils, to produce a framework that gives schools sufficient support to produce their own codes of practice, setting out a whole-school approach to inclusion and tolerance while combating bullying, harassment and abuse of any kind.

Despite the usefulness of the Committee’s important evidence sessions, we recognise that the scale and scope of the problem are still not yet fully understood. To improve both our understanding and that of schools, we have also committed to build our evidence base—a work programme that is currently being developed by the Government Equalities Office. That sits alongside a commitment to provide best practice examples of effective ways to work with boys and girls to better promote gender equality and respond to incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Additionally, we have put plans in place to set up an advisory group to look at how the issues and recommendations in the Select Committee’s report can be best reflected within existing DfE guidance for schools, including “Keeping Children Safe in Education” and our behaviour and bullying guidance.

There is more that we need to do. The Secretary of State has made it absolutely clear that we need to prioritise progress on the quality and availability of SRE and PSHE. In making that progress, we must of course look at the excellent work that many schools already do as the basis for any new support and requirements.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): There is general agreement across the House that this is the right thing to do. Likewise, it has been recognised that with Brexit coming down the track our capacity is limited to pass legislation to ensure that every school does this. New clause 1 of the Children and Social Work Bill would require every school, both maintained schools and academies, to provide age-appropriate, inclusive relationship education—the very education that we all want to see happen. Given that and the time constraints—that Bill is almost on Report—will the Minister commit tonight to back new clause 1 or to come back with something exactly like it on Report? There is no time left to ensure that we make good on our promise to those children.

Caroline Dinenage: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been clear that we will set out plans to move forward as part of that Bill.

The existing legislation requires that sex education be compulsory in all maintained secondary schools. Academies and free schools are also required by their funding agreement to teach a “broad and balanced curriculum”, and we encourage them to teach sex and relationship education within that. Many schools choose to cover issues of consent within SRE, and schools are both able and encouraged to draw on guidance and specialist materials from external expert agencies.
Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab): On that point, a Terrence Higgins Trust report found that 75% of young people had not learned about consent and that 95% had not been taught anything about LGBT relationships. Even the UN is calling for SRE in UK schools to be statutory. Does the Minister agree that it is time that the Government respond to that request and make SRE statutory?

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, the Government are looking at it as we speak. We will set out our next plans for inclusion in the Children and Social Work Bill, but we have to get this absolutely right. It needs to be done sensitively, carefully and with cross-party support. This has not been updated for the last 16 years, and my personal opinion is that respect for oneself, respect for others, healthy relationships, consent and all the other things that we really value as part of SRE and PSHE are things that we must also ensure we embody in a whole-school ethos, not just something we teach for half an hour on a Tuesday.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinenage: In a moment. The existing legislation also means that Ofsted publishes case studies on its website that highlight effective practice in schools, including examples of SRE as taught within PSHE.

Luciana Berger rose—

Caroline Dinenage: I will not make the hon. Lady keep standing up and sitting down.

Luciana Berger: I am incredibly grateful to the Minister. I echo the point that the time really is now. We have been discussing the issue in this House since the measure was not included in the Children, Schools and Families Act 2010. Will she confirm on the record this evening that, on Report of the Children and Social Work Bill at the start of February, the Government will either move their own amendment or support new clause 1 to ensure that we have statutory SRE in every single school in our country?

Caroline Dinenage: As I have already said, we are currently considering all the options and are committed to updating the House during the passage of the Children and Social Work Bill. The Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families will definitely be bringing the measure forward as part of the Bill, but the key is getting it right, not rushing it through just to satisfy loud voices on either side of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley: Just to translate, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) is talking about compulsory SRE. I would call it comprehensive SRE. Do the Government have any idea of how many young people miss out on effective sex and relationship education? Will the Government try to ensure that the number of young people who are missing out will be reduced to virtually zero within a few years?

Caroline Dinenage: The biology of sex and relationships is compulsory in schools, but we want to see a much broader look at healthy relationships, respect for oneself, respect for others and issues around consent. Those are all things that we have to look at very carefully as we move forward, which is why we are encouraging schools to use the Ofsted case studies as a resource, while they tailor their own programmes to meet the specific needs of their pupils.

In addition, in 2014 the PSHE Association, Brook and the Sex Education Forum produced a supplementary guidance document on sex and relationship education for the 21st century, which provides valuable advice on what are, sadly, the all-too-modern issues that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke has already mentioned, such as online pornography, sexting and staying safe online. That useful guidance provides teachers with the tools to support pupils on those challenging matters, developing pupils’ resilience and ability to manage risk.

As we have heard today, social media and interactive services are hugely popular with children and young people. They can provide fantastic opportunities for them to express creativity, to learn digital skills and to improve their educational attainment but, like all forms of public communication, they come with a level of risk. The Government expect online industries to ensure that they have relevant safeguards and processes in place, including access restrictions for children and young people who use their services.

We have published a guide for parents and carers of children who use social media, including practical tips about the use of safety and privacy features on apps and platforms, as well as conversation prompts to help families begin talking to their kids about online safety. We have also funded the UK Safer Internet Centre to develop new resources for schools, including cyberbullying guidance that helps them to understand, prevent and respond to this issue, as well as an online safety toolkit to help schools to deliver sessions through PSHE on cyberbullying, peer pressure and sexting.

We are also talking directly to young people about healthy relationships. The Government Equalities Office jointly funded a £3.85 million campaign with the Home Office to launch the second phase of the “This is Abuse” campaign, called “Disrespect NoBody,” from February to May 2016. The campaign encourages young people to rethink their understanding of abuse in relationships, including issues such as sexting. It also addresses all forms of relationship abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, and situations including same-sex relationships. Some of the campaign materials contained gender-neutral messaging, and others depicted male victims of female perpetrators. It was targeted at 12 to 18-year-old boys and girls, with the aim of preventing them from becoming the perpetrators or victims of abuse in relationships.

As I said, we are actively considering calls to update the guidance on SRE, which was issued in 2000. The feedback we have received indicates that the guidance is already clear that young people should be learning what a healthy relationship looks like. However, we do not consider the guidance we produce to be static, and we fully recognise that there will continue to be changes to update it. We are looking at the issue extremely carefully. As I have said, it is essential that we do not rush things. We need to adopt a fresh and responsible approach and listen to a range of views from young people and parents alike.
Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The Minister is rightly setting out the useful advice, guidance, toolkits, resources and campaigns that are available, but does she agree that all those things, valuable as they are, are not an alternative to ensuring that every single school in this country provides high-quality SRE to all our children and young people?

Caroline Dinenage: Absolutely. I agree that we need to equip all our young people to face the challenges of the modern world and everything that it throws at them. We know that SRE is an evolving and vital area of education, so we need to ensure that we have guidance that is fit for children growing up in modern Britain.

Our aim is to secure the very best teaching and learning in our schools on these issues, as a matter of priority, alongside providing the clarity for schools on what should be delivered that I know Members wish to see. We recognise that this is a really important issue, and will continue to explore all effective means to remove sexual harassment and sexual violence from young people’s lives. My hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families has committed to update Parliament further during the passage of the Children and Social Work Bill. I know that he will do his utmost to achieve outcomes that keep young people safe and supported to gain the skills they need to develop healthy and positive relationships.

Question put and agreed to.

10.27 pm

House adjourned.
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): The House will be aware of the tragic death of Jenny Swift at Doncaster prison on 30 December. My sympathies are with her family. As with all deaths in custody, there will be an inquest and an independent investigation by the prisons and probation ombudsman. We are firmly committed to ensuring that transgender offenders are treated fairly, lawfully and decently, with their rights and safety respected.

Carolyn Harris: I cautiously welcome the new guidance regarding the management of transgender prisoners, and I am sure we are all keen to see all transgender people treated with respect and dignity. However, can the Minister assure the House that the new guidance applies to transgender people held in immigration and detention centres, as well as to those housed in the general prison system?

Dr Lee: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. The new guidelines to staff were issued on 9 November, following a review of the management and care of transgender offenders. The review involved independent oversight, including from the Prison Reform Trust. To put the issue into perspective, we have 70 people in this position in the estate at the moment, which broadly reflects the incidence in the population. Specifically on position in the estate, again, to put the issue into perspective, we currently will reply.

The Secretary of State was asked—

Transgender Prisoners

1. Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): What support and resources the Government are providing to transgender prisoners.

Dr Lee: The underlying principle is that people are cared for and managed in the gender with which they identify, rather than that being based solely on their legally recognised gender. As I said earlier, the guidelines came about through interaction with various independent organisations, and staff are being trained in this area. I think some perspective is required here: we have a prison system that is traditionally male-female, and we are dealing with relatively small numbers, but, yes, I am keeping an eye on this issue. In particular, with regard to recent tragic events, I am also looking individually at each case.

2. Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve prisoner rehabilitation.

Dr Lee: The underlying principle is that people are cared for and managed in the gender with which they identify, rather than that being based solely on their legally recognised gender. As I said earlier, the guidelines came about through interaction with various independent organisations, and staff are being trained in this area. I think some perspective is required here: we have a prison system that is traditionally male-female, and we are dealing with relatively small numbers, but, yes, I am keeping an eye on this issue. In particular, with regard to recent tragic events, I am also looking individually at each case.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): The Prison and Courts Reform Bill will for the first time set out in legislation that the reform of offenders, as well as the punishment of offenders, is a key purpose of prison. We need to make sure the whole system is focused on getting prisoners the education they need, and getting them off drugs and into jobs, so that we can reduce the £15 billion cost of reoffending.

Jeremy Quin: I commend my right hon. Friend for the work she is doing in making prison governors more accountable. Will she set out the standards she is laying down so that prison improvements, and indeed offender outcomes, can be properly measured?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need standards so that we can hold prison governors to account on what they are achieving. We are going to start introducing those standards from April 2017. They will include measures such as prison safety, progress made in English and maths, progress on getting offenders into employment and measuring the time out of cell in prisons.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will know that good rehabilitation depends on at least two things: a good probation service providing aftercare when people leave prison, and good partnerships with the business community and employers, who will give people appropriate employment to steer them on their way. We have had some good experience at Reading and other jails. Will the Secretary of State back that kind of partnership?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We know that when somebody gets into work on leaving prison, they are much less likely to reoffend. We are going to launch an employment strategy later this year to encourage more employers like Timpsons, which already does a fantastic job, to participate. We also want to get the third sector involved in that rehabilitation
programme. We will also announce reforms to the probation system, and one key focus will be on how the probation service gets people into employment.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Has there been progress on getting accurate job vacancy data from the Department for Work and Pensions in the areas to which prisoners will be released, to focus work preparation in prisons as effectively as possible?

**Elizabeth Truss**: We are designing the measures on which prison governors and probation services will be held to account on the basis of getting people into sustainable employment. We are training people in prison and getting them into apprenticeships so that they can continue those apprenticeships and that work when they leave prison.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): What steps are the Government taking to ensure that mental health problems are picked up as part of the rehabilitation process, not just to reduce suicide rates in prisons but to ensure that services are streamlined on release?

**Elizabeth Truss**: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that mental health is a major issue. We are giving governors more power over the commissioning of mental health services in prison. I also want to see better diagnosis of mental health issues earlier in the criminal justice system, when people appear in court and when they are on community sentences.

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State set a high standard for employment projects in prisons along the lines of the experience in Padua? I am sure that she is aware of Pasticceria Giotto, an outstanding and exporting bakery business.

**Elizabeth Truss**: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. Catering and bakery is a big area in which we do a lot of training already. We are working with organisations like Costa Coffee to get people into employment. We also have the Bad Boys Bakery at Brixton, which produces some excellent cakes.

**Mr Speaker**: There is no reason to doubt it; the Secretary of State seems remarkably well informed about these important matters.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): Getting ex-prisoners into employment is clearly very important, as the Secretary of State has said. What assessment has her Department made of the number of prisoners who leave prison and get into employment and stay in it for more than six months?

**Elizabeth Truss**: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to talk about the longevity of such employment. We are designing the measures on which prison governors and probation services will be held to account on the basis of getting people into sustainable employment. That is very important.

### Fixed-term Recalls

3. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of fixed-term recalls.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah)**: An offender who is assessed as presenting a high risk of serious harm will receive a standard recall. Thereafter, they will be re-released before the end of their sentence only if the risk they pose is reduced and they can be safely managed in the community. In cases that are not high risk, however, a fixed-term recall is often a more appropriate response.

**Philip Davies**: It is bad enough that prisoners are automatically released halfway through the sentence, whether or not they still pose a risk to the public, but when someone released on licence from prison then reoffends, surely the least the public can expect is that the criminals concerned are sent back to prison to serve the remainder of their prison sentence in full. Instead, a huge number of these people are simply recalled to prison for just 28 days on a fixed-term recall, sometimes on multiple occasions. How does the Minister justify this fraud on the British public?

**Mr Gyimah**: As I said, where a high risk is posed, the prisoner will not be re-released before the end of their sentence. Offenders on licence who are charged with a further offence and assessed as presenting a high risk of serious harm receive a standard recall. If they are convicted of a further offence, they get a fresh sentence.

**Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): In a recent case in Northern Ireland, someone charged with a serious terrorist offence in connection with the murder of prison officer David Black absconded when he was on bail, and the police did not report that to the courts for over five weeks. Is the Minister aware of that, and has he had any discussions with the Minister of Justice in Northern Ireland to take this matter forward?

**Mr Speaker**: That is only tangentially related to the question on the Order Paper, and I think that is a generous statement, but the Minister is a dextrous fellow, so let us hear from him.

**Mr Gyimah**: The straightforward answer is that I am not aware of that particular case and I am willing to take it up with the hon. Gentleman.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Some in the justice system have raised fears that recall is used too readily by community rehabilitation companies because they are disincentivised from investing time in those they consider will not be able to complete their community sentence. What assessment has the Minister made of the use of recall by community rehabilitation companies?

**Mr Gyimah**: The hon. Lady makes a good point about the process whereby community rehabilitation companies have to justify the grounds for recall to officials in the National Offender Management Service before going ahead. Where officials do not find grounds for recall, they will then challenge the community rehabilitation companies. It is important to recognise
that sometimes recalling an offender who is in breach of their licence allows the offender manager to put in place the appropriate mechanisms to manage them in the community.

**Prison Staff**

4. **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to support prison staff in maintaining order.

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice** (Elizabeth Truss): We are recruiting an extra 2,500 prison officers and rolling out new body-worn cameras. We are also empowering governors and providing extra funding to enhance the physical security of the prison estate.

**Sir Edward Leigh**: To be fair to the Government, I appreciate that prison violence has been a problem for decades. I remember being a PPS 28 years ago when the Home Secretary was coping with a prison riot. But was it really wise to cut the number of prison officers by a quarter in the last six years, given these problems?

**Elizabeth Truss**: I should be delighted to have a conversation with my hon. Friend about his experience looking at these issues. He is absolutely right that they have been a problem for a number of years, and it will take time to build up the front line and recruit those 2,500 additional officers. We have recently faced new challenges, with psychoactive substances, drones and mobile phones. We are taking action to deal with those, but it is vital that we have the staff on the front line who can both reform offenders and keep our prisons safe.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Six major incidents in eight weeks is unprecedented in the 25 years I have been in this House. Following on from her reply to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), will the Secretary of State confirm that the figures to September meant a loss in that last year of 417 prison officers? When she says that she has to recruit 2,500 officers, does she not mean that in the next 12 months she will have to recruit 4,000 to make up those 2,500, and does she intend to do that?

**Elizabeth Truss**: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We need to recruit 4,000 officers over the next year. I announced initially that we were recruiting officers for 10 of the most challenging prisons. We have already made job offers to almost all those 400 people, so we are making good progress. We have recently launched a graduate scheme, Unlocked. Within 24 hours of announcing that scheme, we had expressions of interest from more than 1,000 candidates, so there are people interested in joining the Prison Service. It is challenging to recruit that number of officers, but we are absolutely determined to do so. It is what we need to do to turn our prisons around and make them places of safety and reform.

**Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the greatest support that we can give to prison officers is to make sure that they have the correct levels of staffing in their prisons? Is she aware that there have been significant problems, highlighted by recent reports, in Chelmsford prison, which have been attributed to the understaffing of the prison? May I ask her what is being done to get the levels of staff to the correct ones, and would she agree to the prisons Minister having a meeting with me to discuss that?

**Elizabeth Truss**: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to recruit staff at Chelmsford, in addition to other prisons. I know that my hon. Friend the prisons Minister will meet my right hon. Friend. I am keen to visit Chelmsford myself to meet my right hon. Friend and see the situation on the front line.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): As well as issues with understaffing and morale, we still have some old prisons that are not suitable for the kind of rehabilitation that we need, and that cause security issues. Can the Government update us on what is happening to deal with that fundamental infrastructure problem?

**Elizabeth Truss**: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is harder to reform offenders and create the safe environments that we want in old prisons that are not fit for purpose. That is why we are building additional prison places. We have £1.3 billion allocated. We will open HMP Berwyn in Wales shortly, which will have additional places. We are committed to this, and I will announce more about our prison build programme in due course.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What has been the effect of the decisions in 2011, which were confirmed in 2016, to reduce the daily accommodation fabric checks to barely a weekly check? How has that helped to achieve the desired outcome, as stated at the time, of maintaining order and reducing self-harm?

**Elizabeth Truss**: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. We need cells that are fit for purpose and usable. One of the things that my hon. Friend the prisons Minister has been focusing on in his regular meetings is making sure that our contractors get cells back to use and fit for purpose.

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): Some prisons, including Her Majesty’s Prison Birmingham, use prisoner violence reduction representatives—prisoners who are paid to monitor other inmates—to discourage disorder. Stakeholders we have spoken to suggest that some are ensuring compliance by themselves meting out violence to troublesome inmates. What assessment has the Justice Secretary made of their use?

**Elizabeth Truss**: The hon. Lady refers to violence reduction programmes. I have seen them in place in a number of prisons, where they can be very effective. Peer to peer support can often turn prisoners around, but it needs to be carefully managed and monitored. My expectation is that it is the role of the governor of the prison to make sure proper systems are in place.

**Yasmin Qureshi**: In December, during her statement to the House on the riot at Her Majesty’s Prison Birmingham, the Justice Secretary suggested that as many as 13 Tornado teams were deployed to the prison. Such events deprive other prisons of officer numbers.
Is she confident that she has the resources to deal with disturbances of this kind, and when will Sarah Payne’s investigation into what happened be concluded?

Elizabeth Truss: We are increasing the number of Tornado staff to make sure that we can deal with any incidents that arise across our prison estate, particularly while we are building up the strength of our frontline. Those officers do a fantastic job, and they did a fantastic job in resolving the incident at HMP Birmingham. I can tell the hon. Lady that the investigation into the incident at HMP Birmingham, which is being led by Sarah Payne, will report back in February.

Drug Addiction

5. Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to (a) treat drug addiction in prison and (b) provide education and skills training to prisoners formerly addicted to drugs to help them to find work on release.

Dr Lee: The use of legal highs is undeniably changing behaviour patterns among prisoners. Last night’s “Panorama” illustrated the impact of new psychoactive substances. We have developed an innovative testing programme under the current mandatory drug testing regime, and we continue to work with health partners to reduce demand.

Sir David Amess: In the light of the increasing pressures on the prison population, does my hon. Friend see any merit in the Howard League for Penal Reform’s suggestions about increasing the use of community orders—they certainly work well in Southend—and in its approach to helping offenders with drug problems?

Dr Lee: We want community orders to be effective so that further crimes are not committed. This includes better mental health interventions and drugs and alcohol desistance interventions. I am fully aware of the fact that if we can get to grips with the mental health challenges and the substance misuse challenges, crime will go down.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): If the Minister is to address the issue of drug addiction, he will have to address the issue of drugs being smuggled into prison. One method of doing that would be the introduction of new scanning machines similar to those at airports. Has the Minister given any consideration to doing that in prisons, thereby stopping drugs being smuggled by people into prison?

Dr Lee: Yes, consideration has been given to that. There is a particular difficulty with new psychoactive substances, because the way in which they are smuggled in—for example, by the impregnation of letters or paper—means that it is difficult to stop them via scanning. The hon. Gentleman should be assured that we are desperate to get a grip on the smuggling and supply of drugs into prisons because of the adverse impact that they are having.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies) has an identical question, Question 19. It was not grouped with this question, but the position is clear: if he does stand I will call him, and if he doesn’t I won’t. He does. Get in there man!

Dr Lee: My hon. Friend, who has the same profession as me, fully understands the importance of the proper treatment of substance misuse. Having successfully got off the drug, part of that is finding purpose in life, and employment is key to that.

17. Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to recruit more prison staff.

[908355]
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): We are investing significant financial resources totalling about £100 million to recruit 2,500 additional prison officers. We are investing £4 million in our marketing campaign and effort. In addition to our national recruitment campaign, there are local recruitment schemes in 30 jails where it is hardest to recruit.

Simon Hoare: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply. I urge him, as he begins the recruitment process, to give due consideration to recruiting in rural areas, such as north Dorset, where house prices are high, rural public transport is scarce and unemployment levels are very low. That makes the governor’s job at a prison such as Guys Marsh in my constituency even harder.

Mr Gyimah: I am aware that my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in Guys Marsh, his local prison. I assure him that Guys Marsh has been made a priority prison, which means that the governor is getting extra resource, in addition to our national campaign effort, to recruit the staff he needs.

Mary Robinson: Many of my constituents work in the Prison Service and I was contacted recently by one constituent who has worked in it for more than 23 years. He was concerned about the morale among his fellow servants, and we want them to be able to work in safe conditions. That is why we are tackling the scourge of drones, drugs and phones in our prisons, and recruiting more staff so that they can work in a safe environment.

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: prison officers are some of our finest and bravest public servants, and we want them to be able to work in safe conditions. That is why we are tackling the scourge of drones, drugs and phones in our prisons, and recruiting more staff so that they can work in a safe environment.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Given the enormous turnover of staff on the prison estate and the reality that the Government will need to employ about 4,000 extra staff to reach their net figure of 2,500, what is the Minister doing to incentivise existing prison staff to stay and not walk out?

Mr Gyimah: The reality is that, in 75% of our prisons, recruitment is not a challenge. However, there is a challenge in some prisons, particularly in London and the south-east. In those places, we are offering market supplements of about £4,000 to attract new people. For those who are already in the system, we are in discussions about professionalising the Prison Service more to give them a better status and more pride in their jobs.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The chief executive officer of the National Offender Management Service, Michael Spurr, told MPs that there is a need to recruit 8,000 more prison officers to achieve the increase of 2,500, as we have heard again today, yet existing prison officers have rejected the latest NOMS pay offer. When Michael Spurr met the Prison Officers Association this week, did the Secretary of State join him, and did she make the necessary commitments to make increased staffing in the Prison Service a reality?

Mr Gyimah: The Secretary of State and I met the POA last week. We had a very constructive discussion about continuing talks and, more widely, about workforce reform, professionalising prison officers’ jobs and raising their status.

Leaving the EU: Justice

7. Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): What assessment she has made of the implications for the justice system of the UK leaving the EU.

10. Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the implications for her Department’s policies of the UK leaving the EU.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): We are determined to use the opportunities presented by our exit from the EU to build a truly global Britain. Our world-leading legal services contribute £25 billion per annum to the UK economy. My Department is leading the work on future co-operation with the EU on civil, commercial and family law, and, together with the Home Office, on criminal justice.

Scott Mann: I welcome the Prime Minister’s confirmation that we will be ceasing membership of the single market and thus ending the control of the European Court over this country. Does my right hon. Friend look forward to the day when the British courts are no longer undermined by European judges sitting in Luxembourg?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The UK has fantastic, independent and incorruptible judges, and we will be leaving the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, meaning that final decisions will be down to British judges.

Steven Paterson: As with all things Brexit, we are facing a period of uncertainty around the recognition and enforcement of citizens’ rights associated with EU membership. What plans do the Government have to recognise the rights of parties in pending cases before the Court of Justice at the time of our departure from the EU?

Elizabeth Truss: Such issues will be resolved in due course, and there will be a statement later today from my right hon. Friend the Brexit Secretary.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): What can my right hon. Friend do to reassure the legal profession that mutual enforcement of judgments will be a key part of our Brexit negotiations.

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a vital issue for our fantastic legal services profession—four of the top 10 international law firms are headed in the UK. I said this week at a joint meeting with the Lord Chief Justice and members of the legal profession that mutual enforcement of judgments will be a key part of our Brexit negotiations.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Civil and criminal justice are devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Does the Secretary of State for Justice agree with the conclusions of the first report of the Exiting the European Union Committee that the great repeal Bill must be
Elizabeth Truss: I look forward to meeting the hon. and learned Lady to discuss the issues of the devolved Parliament. The Prime Minister has been clear that she wants to strike a bespoke Brexit deal that works for the whole UK.

Joanna Cherry: Because civil and criminal justice are devolved, the triggering of article 50 will have major implications for the rights and freedoms of people in Scotland. Does the Secretary of State accept, therefore, that the Sewel convention will be engaged, and does she agree with the Supreme Court’s judgment this morning that the Sewel convention has an important role in facilitating harmonious relationships between the UK Parliament and the devolved legislature?

Elizabeth Truss: As I said, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU are working closely with the Scottish Government, and the Government have been clear that they will respect the decision of the Court this morning.

Proxation Service

8. Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): What recent assessment has she made of the effect of the volume of probation officer caseloads on the effectiveness of the probation service.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah): We are currently conducting a comprehensive review of the probation system so that it reduces reoffending, cuts crime and prevents future victims. A wide range of factors impacts on the effectiveness of probation services, including not only caseloads but the nature of supervision and rehabilitative support.

Kate Hollern: In October, a joint report by the prisons and probation services inspectors found that “high workloads meant that there was no time to think about cases in prison” and that “workload for resettlement workers meant that they spent very little time working with individual prisoners”.

Is not that evidence that the Government’s mistaken privatisation of the probation service is failing prisoners, failing to prevent reoffending and therefore failing to protect the wider community?

Mr Gyimah: Our ambition for the probation system review, due out at the beginning of April, is clear. We want a simple probation system with clear outcome measures, such as getting offenders into employment and housing. Outcomes, rather than inputs, are the best way to judge our probation service across the board.

Mr Speaker: I call Danny Kinahan.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): That was on a previous question, Mr Speaker.
today that action will be taken on the physical condition of the courts and that an assessment will be made of the rehabilitation company’s work?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** Yes. I had a very useful meeting with my hon. Friend, and I can certainly confirm both the points he makes. I am particularly keen to get that skylight fixed for him. I am working hard on that.

**Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab):** In his reply to the question from the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), the Minister referred to modernising the tribunal system. Does he agree that part of that modernisation should be getting rid of employment tribunal fees, the introduction of which has led to a cut in the number of employment tribunal cases by two thirds and a cut of more than 80% in sex discrimination cases? Can the Minister announce today that those fees will indeed be abolished as part of access to justice and modernising the system?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have been reviewing employment tribunal fees, and I can say that the publication of that review is imminent. Having said that, there is a difference of opinion across the Chamber on this matter. We think it right that individuals should contribute to the costs of the tribunals. It is also worth bearing in mind that ACAS has increased its workload in employment cases from about 23,000 cases a year—the number it used to conciliate—to 92,000 cases now. The result has been a very large increase in the number of cases that do not then proceed to the tribunal.

21. [908360] **Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con):** Does the Minister agree that, if the UK is to remain at the forefront of legal services worldwide and if the sector is to continue as an engine for jobs and growth, it is vital that our courts system is modern, flexible and fit for the 21st century?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I do agree. We have the best legal system in the world, but we also need to have the most modern one. Getting as many things out of court that do not need to be there, applying the full force of judge and courtroom for the most difficult and complex issues, stripping away unnecessary hearings, redundant paper forms and duplication are all important. I can report that, while two hearings ago, there was a saving of a Shard-load of paper as a result of these reports, that has now gone up to three Shard-loads, so we have saved a pile of paper as high as the Burj Khalifa, the largest building in the world.

**Mr Speaker:** What a well-informed fellow the right hon. and learned Gentleman is.

**Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op):** The new chairman of the Bar Council, Andrew Langdon QC, has warned people not to rely too heavily on the delivery of justice online. Yesterday the President of the Family Division, Sir James Munby, complained that facilities in his courts were a disgrace,

“prone to the link”

— the video link —

“failing and with desperately poor sound and picture quality”.

His own court, Court 33, has no such facilities and no video links. Does the Minister understand that some cases are not suitable for video links, and is he prepared to properly resource the ones that are?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** It is important for the courts to have the facilities that they need, which is the reason for our modernisation programme. As for the concern expressed about open justice, everything will work on the basis that people are able to see what is happening in a virtual hearing, so there will not be any secret justice.

**Rehabilitation**

13. **Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to prepare offenders for life outside prison.

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss):** It is vital for us to reduce the £15 billion cost of reoffending, and all the misery that it causes in our society. We must therefore ensure that offenders enter employment when they leave prison, and as a result of our new standards governors will be held to account for that.

**Bob Blackman:** My private Member’s Bill, which is intended to reduce homelessness, will return to the House on Friday. One of its key provisions is a duty for the Prison Service to help people who are leaving prison to find stable homes. What measures can my right hon. Friend take to ensure that prison governors use the four two-hour workshops to prepare prisoners for a life outside prison?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Finding suitable housing, like getting a job, is very important to reducing reoffending. We will therefore measure housing rates as well as employment rates, and prison governors will be held accountable for how well they do in helping offenders to obtain housing.

**Mr Speaker:** Let us hear the voice of Bolton West on this matter. Chris Green.

16. **Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con):** It is commonly understood that once people have been in prison they have paid their debts to society, and contributing to society, especially through work, is a key part of rehabilitation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the declaration of a criminal record at the very beginning of a job application creates an unnecessary barrier to work?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I entirely agree that it is important for us to help people to find work. I support the Ban the Box initiative, and we are exploring options for its promotion. Later this year we will publish our employment strategy. We want to encourage more employers like Halfords, Greggs and DHL, which already work with ex-offenders, to become involved. Once they have jobs, ex-offenders often prove to be loyal and effective employees.

**Human Rights Act 1998**

14. **Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP):** What recent progress she has made on the Government’s plans to replace the Human Rights Act 1998.

[908352]
The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): We are committed to reforming our domestic human rights framework, and we will return to our proposals once we know the arrangements for our exit from the European Union.

Angela Crawley: In September, the Secretary of State said that she was expecting to meet the Scottish Justice Minister to discuss the repeal of the Human Rights Act in Scotland. How does she plan to guarantee that the proposed British Bill of Rights will not compromise the autonomy of the Scottish legal system?

Sir Oliver Heald: The Secretary of State has offered some dates, and I hope it will be possible for the meeting to take place. There will be some time for that now, because, as I have said, we will return to our proposals once we know the arrangements for exit from the EU.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): It is of course right that our manifesto commitment to replace the Human Rights Act remains on the Government’s agenda, but does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that leaving the European Union and freeing the United Kingdom from the bonds of the charter of fundamental rights must be their top priority?

Sir Oliver Heald: I do agree with that. I think it important for us to sort out the EU side of matters, and the exit from the EU, before we return to that subject.

20. [908359] Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): In Scotland there is strong cross-party support for the European convention on human rights and the Human Rights Act, both in Parliament and throughout civil society. Does the Minister agree that any attempt to repeal existing rights will be likely to provoke a constitutional crisis?

Sir Oliver Heald: I do not accept that the sort of changes we are proposing to consider once the situation is known about our exit from the EU would be a crisis-making combination. This country has always had a proud respect for human rights; it long predates the Human Rights Act, and I think we can all agree on that.

Foreign National Offenders

15. Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): How many foreign national offenders are in prison; and what steps she is taking to return those people to prison in their own countries. [908353]

Mr Hollobone: Poland has one of the biggest national groups of foreign national offenders in our prisons. Poland’s derogation from the compulsory EU prisoner transfer directive was due to expire in December 2016. Are we now in a position to send these Polish prisoners back to prison in their own country?

Mr Gyimah: All eligible Polish nationals have been identified and deportation orders sought. We have referred cases to the Polish courts, and transfers will take place once Polish legal procedures have been completed.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Does the Minister think the number of prisoner transfers will go up or down after we leave the EU?

Mr Gyimah: We have already been in touch with the Department for Exiting the European Union on prisoner transfer agreements, but, as I said in my opening answer, that is one way of removing prisoners from this country. The early removal scheme is another way, and we have been successful at removing a lot of prisoners through that scheme.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Has the Ministry of Justice made an assessment of how many British offenders are held in foreign prisons?

Mr Gyimah: There is a number available, but I do not have it to hand. I am willing to provide it, if the hon. Lady wants to follow up.

Mr Speaker: Put the details in the Library; it will be helpful to us all.

Employment Tribunals

22. Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): When she plans to publish her Department’s review of the introduction of employment tribunal fees. [908361]

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): Imminently.

Paul Blomfield: The Prime Minister claims she wants to protect workers’ rights. Is not the Government’s fear in publishing this report that it is going to demonstrate that the introduction of fees has negated that process? The Minister earlier said that publication is “imminent”; his predecessor said last July it was “soon”. Can he define the terms and give us a date?

Sir Oliver Heald: The hon. Gentleman will not have long to wait; it is genuinely imminent—but it has taken longer than we had hoped.

Topical Questions

T1. [908328] Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.
The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): Today the Supreme Court issued its judgment on article 50. The 11 justices of the Supreme Court heard evidence over four days in December before handing down their judgment. Our independent judiciary is the cornerstone of the rule of law and is vital to our constitution and freedoms. The reputation of our judiciary is unrivalled the world over, and our Supreme Court justices are people of integrity and impartiality. While we might not always agree with judgments, it is a fundamental part of any thriving democracy that legal process is followed. The Government have been clear that they will respect the decision of the court.

Deidre Brock: The Secretary of State has been gallivanting with City of London law firms of late, most recently on Thursday in Fleet Street, promising to put English law at the forefront of the attempts to create global Britain. Does she think that English law is superior to Scots law? What efforts is she making to promote the international interests of law firms from across the UK, and will firms not in the City of London get the same consideration as the firms in that one square mile?

Elizabeth Truss: I want to promote both English and Scots law internationally; I think they are both huge assets to our country, and a very important part of commerce and business and the trust people have in our system. When I meet the Scottish Justice Minister, I will be delighted to meet some law firms up in Scotland.

T2. [908329] Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I welcome the Government’s commitment to creating the status of guardian for the property and affairs of a missing person. This is much wanted and much needed by the affected families. Will the Minister tell us when this legislation will be brought before the House?

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald): We welcome the Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on this subject, because we are determined to provide help to the families left behind when a person goes missing. It is our policy to introduce legislation, but we also now look forward to responding to my hon. Friend’s Bill on Second Reading.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): There are two things that are dangerous for our democracy: attempting to ignore the outcome of the referendum, and standing by while the independence of Britain’s judiciary comes under attack. In the light of that, I welcome the progress that the Secretary of State has made today, under pressure, in speaking up for the independence of our judiciary, but that has not deterred the continuation of the attacks. Will she now, once and for all, condemn the attacks on our judiciary?

Elizabeth Truss: I am delighted to hear that the Charity Commission for England and Wales has suspended the registration of f{ft=“1”}or BBC in their deliberations on the matter. However, the Government are concerned that women—and, indeed, men—should not fall foul of the TV tax so disproportionately.

T4. [908331] Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Figures released last month show that women are twice as likely as men to be prosecuted and seven times more likely than men to face the maximum £1,000 fine for non-payment of the TV licence fee. Additionally, figures show that in 2015 the number of women jailed for offences relating to this matter doubled. Will my hon. Friend explain to the House why women seem to fall foul of the TV tax so disproportionately?

Dr Lee: Of course, sentencing in individual cases is a matter for the courts. However, the Government are concerned that women—and, indeed, men—should not be sent to custody if they do not need to be there. Revised guidance on sentencing for non-payment of the TV licence fee was issued today by the Sentencing Council. The guidelines set out possible factors that could reduce the seriousness of TV licence evasion, including circumstances in which the culprit is experiencing significant financial hardship.

T6. [908333] Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The proposed closure of Camberwell magistrates court would require my constituents—whether victims, witnesses or defendants—to make unacceptably long bus journeys to Croydon and Wimbledon to attend court. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the implications of the proposed closure for access to justice for my constituents?

Sir Oliver Heald: My hon. Friend and I have discussed this matter informally. The welfare of the child is always paramount in court decisions, but he will remember that parental involvement provisions were inserted into the Children and Families Act 2014. The courts are now required to presume that a parent’s involvement in the child’s life will further that child’s welfare unless the contrary can be shown.

T5. [908332] Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): All Members will have been appalled by the recent findings of the inquest into the tragic death of Dean Saunders in Chelmsford prison. This was a man in a mental health crisis who should never have been sent to prison, and he was failed by everyone who should have been there to protect him. According to the charity Inquest, he is one of the 113 prisoners who took their life last year. When will the Secretary of State provide a full and frank response to the question of why Dean died?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): My condolences go to Dean Saunders’ family. This is a dreadful case. I have seen the details of it, and I am seeking the details of all those cases to see whether there is a pattern in why they are happening. I hope to come forward later in the year with suggestions for policy change relating to mental health assessments in prisons.

Sir Oliver Heald: I thank the hon. Lady for her response to the consultation, which has now closed. We will, of course, announce our decision in due course. As was made clear in the consultation, there is excess capacity in London magistrates courts. Camberwell Green has significant outstanding maintenance, totalling more than £1 million. The consultation is about ensuring modern and efficient courts and improved court arrangements for everyone.
Mr Sam Gyimah: Again, I am happy to provide that information and put it in the Library.

Elizabeth Truss: Once we leave the European Union, British judges will once again be the final decision makers in our courts. I am sure that our world-renowned judiciary will rise to the challenge, and I am working very closely with them on arrangements.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Government have signalled their intention to remain a member of Europol after we leave the European Union. Is there a similar resolve to continue membership of Eurojust?

Elizabeth Truss: I am working with the Home Secretary on arrangements for criminal justice after leaving the European Union, as well as with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): The Justice Secretary has already said that four of the 10 biggest legal firms are based in the United Kingdom. What steps is she now taking, given the similarity between English law and the law in New York state, Australia and New Zealand, to promote opportunities for British law firms after we leave the European Union?

Elizabeth Truss: Last week, I hosted a meeting with the Lord Chief Justice and leading legal firms to talk about mutual recognition and enforcement of contracts. In the spring, we will hold a global Britain legal services summit to promote the fantastic capabilities we have in the law.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): When people leave prison, we need to ensure that those addicted to drugs or alcohol have the best start away from their dependency so that their loved ones can be protected from that harm. Does the Minister agree that former prisoners with a substance addiction, who might come back coercively to control their families to get to that substance, can be managed better?

Dr Lee: I think it extremely important that ex-offenders receive appropriate substance misuse treatment in the community, and I am looking at that extremely closely.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah, a Crabb or a Berry? I think we will have the Crabb.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Ministers will be aware of the disturbing incident that took place recently at Haverfordwest magistrates court, where a defendant, while in the dock, was able to use a sharp object to carry out a serious act of violence against themselves. Will the Secretary of State please commit to looking into what went wrong with the security...
arrangements at the court? No one should be in a position to do harm to themselves or others in any courtroom in England and Wales.

Sir Oliver Heald: My right hon. Friend makes an important point about an extremely concerning incident. I have been briefed already, but I have asked for a further report from Her Majesty's Courts Service on exactly what happened and what measures are necessary to ensure that such an incident does not happen again.

Mr Speaker: Let’s have a Berry.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): When I met Lancashire police federation representatives last Friday, they said that they believe the sentencing guidelines dealing with an assault on a police officer to be adequate, but that in some cases they are not properly enforced by the courts. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that an attack on a police officer is always considered an aggravating factor, because an attack on the law enforcers is an attack on society itself?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for his comment, and he is absolutely right about attacks on police officers—and also on prison officers. We have strengthened the law in those areas and I have regular discussions with the Sentencing Council.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): The use of psychoactive substances, especially Spice, was highlighted in a Home Affairs Committee report last year. Will the Secretary of State tell me what links can be highlighted between the rise in psychoactive substances and levels of violence in prisons?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that psychoactive substances have had a serious effect in our prisons: the prisons and probation ombudsman described them as a “game changer”, which is why we have now rolled out testing to deal with those substances. We have extra sniffer dogs to deal with them as well, and we are making progress.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Recognising the consequences of crimes for victims must be at the forefront of offenders’ minds as they leave prison, so what steps are Ministers and the probation service taking to ensure that that is the case?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: victims have to be at the centre of the justice system. That is what our court reforms will help to deliver. Restorative justice programmes, led by our police and crime commissioners, can help to bring a sense of justice to victims.
Article 50

12.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will now make a statement on the Government’s response to today’s judgment by the Supreme Court.

This Government are determined to deliver on the decision taken by the people of the UK in the referendum granted to them by this House to leave the EU, so we will move swiftly to do just that. I can announce today that we will shortly introduce legislation allowing the Government to move ahead with invoking article 50, which starts the formal process of withdrawing from the EU.

We received the lengthy 96-page judgment just a few hours ago, and Government lawyers are assessing it carefully, but this will be a straightforward Bill. It is not about whether or not the UK should leave the EU. That decision has already been made by the people of the UK. We will work with colleagues in both Houses to ensure that this Bill is passed in good time for us to invoke article 50 by the end of March this year, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out. That timetable has already been supported by this House.

Let me go through the issues step by step. The Government’s priority following the European Union referendum has been to respect the outcome and to ensure it is delivered in the interests of the whole country. This House voted by six to one to put the decision in the hands of voters, and that Bill passed in the other place unopposed. So there can be no going back: the point of no return was passed on 23 June last year. The Government have always been clear that we must leave by following the process set out in article 50 of the treaty on European Union. People want and must leave by following the process set out in article 50 and that legislation is required to make our own decisions.

Let me now turn specifically to the process for invoking article 50 and the issues that arise from today’s Supreme Court judgment. The Government’s view, which we argued in both the High Court and subsequently the Supreme Court, was that it was constitutionally proper and lawful for the Government to begin to give effect to the decision of the people by the use of prerogative powers to invoke article 50. Today, the Supreme Court has agreed with the High Court’s judgment that the prerogative power alone is insufficient to give notice under article 50, and that legislation is required to provide the necessary authorisation for this step.

In addition, the Supreme Court considered the roles of the devolved legislatures in the process of triggering article 50. On this, the Supreme Court ruled—and I quote from the summary:

“Relations with the EU and other foreign affairs matters are reserved to UK Government and parliament, not to the devolved institutions.”

The summary goes on to say:

“The devolved legislatures do not have a veto on the UK’s decision to withdraw from the EU.”

I will come back to our collaboration with the devolved Administrations later in this statement.

The Government have been giving careful thought to the steps that we would need to take in the event of the Supreme Court upholding the High Court’s view. First, let me be clear that we believe in and value the independence of our judiciary, the foundation on which the rule of law is built. So, of course, it goes without saying that we will respect the judgment. Secondly, as I have already made clear, the judgment does not change the fact that the UK will be leaving the European Union, and it is our job to deliver on the instruction that the people of the UK have given us.

Thirdly, we will within days introduce legislation to give the Government the legal power to trigger article 50 and begin the formal process of withdrawal. It will be separate from the great repeal Bill that will be introduced later this year to repeal the European Communities Act 1972. It will be the most straightforward Bill possible to give effect to the decision of the people and respect the Supreme Court’s judgment. The purpose of the Bill is simply to give the Government the power to invoke article 50 and begin the process of leaving the European Union. That is what the British people voted for, and it is what they would expect. Parliament will rightly scrutinise and debate this Bill, but I trust that no one will seek to make it a vehicle for attempts to thwart the will of the people or to frustrate or delay the process of our exit from the European Union.

Fourthly, our timetable for invoking article 50 by the end of March still stands. That timetable has given valuable certainty to citizens and businesses in the UK and across Europe. It is understood by our European partners, and provides a framework for planning the negotiation ahead. This House itself backed the timetable by a majority of 373 in December, so we look forward to working closely with colleagues in Parliament to ensure that the legislation on article 50 is passed in good time to allow us to invoke it by the end of March, as planned.

The Government’s fifth and final principle for responding to this judgment is to continue to ensure that we deliver an exit that is in the best interests of the whole of the United Kingdom. The Supreme Court has ruled clearly in the Government’s favour on the roles of the devolved legislatures in invoking article 50. But while that provides welcome clarity, it in no way diminishes our commitment to work closely with the people and Administrations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as we move forward with our withdrawal from the European Union.

Let me conclude with a word on what today’s judgment means for the UK and the nature of our democracy. I know that this case, on an issue of such importance that arouses strong views on all sides, has not been without controversy, but the Court was asked a question, a proper, thorough and independent process was gone through, and it has given its answer in law. We are a law-abiding nation; indeed, the UK is known the world over for the strength and independence of its judicial system. We will build on this and our many other strengths as we leave the European Union. We will once again be a fully independent, sovereign country, free to make our own decisions.

The Prime Minister has already set out a comprehensive plan, including our core negotiating objectives. She has been clear that we want a new, positive and constructive partnership for the UK and the EU—a partnership that will be good for the UK and for the rest of Europe.

Today, we are taking the necessary step to respect the Supreme Court’s decision by announcing a Bill. It will be up to this Parliament to respect the decision that it
entrusted to the people of the United Kingdom—a decision that the people took on 23 June. I commend this statement to the House.

12.39 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement. This is a good day for parliamentary sovereignty, as the Supreme Court has ruled that we shall have a say in this House on article 50. Given the issues that are involved, that is quite right and the Prime Minister was wrong to have attempted to sideline Parliament in this process. This Bill is to be introduced only because the Prime Minister has been ordered to do so. I hope that, in the aftermath, there will not be the attacks on our judges that there were when the High Court gave its ruling. It is the duty of all of us to defend them if there are such attacks, and to do so quickly. I hope that the Secretary of State will join me in that endeavour.

The question now moves on to the proper role of Parliament. The Supreme Court said nothing about the particular form of legislation. On issues as important as this, it would be wrong for the Government to try to minimise the role of Parliament, or to seek to avoid amendments. I ask the Secretary of State to confirm that he will not take that approach.

This is a question of substance, not of process. Last week, the Prime Minister committed herself to swapping the known benefits of single market membership and the customs union for the hoped-for benefits of a free trade agreement, with a fall-back position of breaking our economic model. That is high risk, and there are big gaps, inconsistencies and unanswered questions in her approach.

If the Prime Minister fails in her endeavour, the cost will be borne by families and working people and communities throughout the UK. The stakes are high, and the role of this House in holding the Prime Minister and the Government to account throughout the process is crucial.

Labour accepts and respects the referendum result, and will not frustrate the process, but we will be seeking to lay amendments to ensure proper scrutiny and accountability throughout the process. That starts with a White Paper or plan—a speech is not a White Paper or plan. We need something on which to hold the Government to account throughout the process. We cannot have a speech as the only basis for accountability for two years or more. That is the first step. There needs to be a reporting-back procedure and a meaningful vote at the end of the exercise. The Government should welcome such scrutiny, and not try to resist it, because the end result will be better if scrutinised than it would otherwise be. I hope that the Secretary of State will confirm that he will not seek to minimise scrutiny and accountability.

I will leave it to others to talk about the devolved Administrations, but whatever the Court ruled it is important that those interests are taken properly into account.

I end with this: what a waste of time and money. The High Court decision was 82 days ago. The Prime Minister could have accepted then the need to introduce a Bill, and we could have debated the issues. I would like the Secretary of State to lay out what the cost to the taxpayer has been of this appeal.

Mr Davis: Let me say this to the hon. and learned Gentleman: the Prime Minister was not aiming to sideline democracy.—[ Interruption. ]

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman should resume his seat. The House is in an understandably excited and excitable state. What I want to say to colleagues is that they do not need to look into the crystal ball when they can read the book. Members should know by now that I always want to facilitate the fullest possible questioning and scrutiny, and it is right that that should happen, but it is also right that, when the Secretary of State is responding to questions, he is given a fair and courteous hearing.

Mr Davis: The Prime Minister was aiming to carry out the will of the people—all 17.4 million of them—in the national interest. That was what she was doing. Let me pick up on the point that the hon. and learned Gentleman quite properly raised: the issue of our judges. I think that I mentioned at length three times in my statement that this is a nation of the rule of law, a nation to which the independence of the judiciary is important, and a nation that is watched by other countries as an example for themselves. Of all the people he could criticise, I do not think that I am at the front on this issue.

Similarly, on the parliamentary process, there has been an interesting litany through this whole process over the past six or seven months. Every time I get up, I say that I will give the House as much information as possible subject to not undermining the national interest or our negotiating position. That is what we have done and that is what we will continue to do—not just through this Bill, but through the great repeal Bill, subsequent primary and secondary legislation, and the final vote at the end, which we have promised.

The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned membership of the single market, putting to one side of course that membership means giving up control of borders, laws and rules, on all of which the Labour party is singularly incapable of even making a decision let alone coming up with a policy. He also talked about a plan. Last week, the Prime Minister gave a 6,500-word, closely argued speech that has been recognised across the country and around Europe as the epitome of clarity with clear objectives, aims and ambitions for this country, so I do not take that point at all.

On scrutiny more generally, we have now had, I think, five statements, 10 debates, and some 30 different Select Committee inquiries. I hardly think that all that in six months represents an absence of scrutiny of a central Government policy. The hon. and learned Gentleman does not often surprise me, but for the ex-Director of Public Prosecutions to say that taking a matter to the Supreme Court is a waste of time strikes me as quite extraordinary. I have made this point several times over the past few months: once the process has started, a reason for taking it the full distance is to get the most authoritative and clearest possible guidance on a major part of our constitution. Yet again, the hon. and learned Gentleman has not advanced the knowledge of the House very much, but I look forward to the contributions of other Members.
Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to note that my recently published memoirs are cited with approval in paragraph 195 of the judgment? Does he share my surprise that that is a minority dissenting judgment?

More seriously, does my right hon. Friend accept that parliamentary sovereignty has always meant that Governments of the day pursue broad policy objectives in the national interest and quite willingly submit them to the judgment of the House, through both debates and votes, and that they proceed with broad policy objectives only when they have the support of a majority in the House of Commons? Will he give me the Government’s assurance that the Bill will be drafted on the basis that it improves opportunities for Parliament to give or withhold its consent to major policy objectives and that the Government will pursue that approach in future years? Having one vote right at the end of the process, when the House will be told that it either takes the deal that the Government have or goes into the alternative chaos of having no agreements with the EU or anybody else, is not a good substitute for the normal tradition of Parliament consenting to the policy aims of the Government of the day.

Mr Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have been skirmishing over this issue for, I think, some 30 years, always with good humour, and I hope to respond to him in the same vein today. He repeated on television earlier today that characterisation of what the Government are proposing, so let us look at it. As I said, we have already had 10 debates and vast numbers of other arguments, but this is what is going to happen: first, we will have a Bill to authorise the triggering of article 50; then we will have a great repeal Bill whereby we go through the entire corpus of European law as it applies to the United Kingdom, which I should think will go on for a considerable amount of time; and then we will have primary legislation on major policy changes and secondary legislation all put before both Houses. There will not be just one vote. At the end of the process, we will have the vote that eventually decides whether or not the House supports the policy we propose. Let me make it plain: that policy will be aimed solely at advancing the interest of the United Kingdom—getting the best possible negotiated outcome that we can achieve, having taken on board the informing debate of this House of Commons throughout the entire two years running up to it.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): First, I welcome the judgment and anything that strengthens parliamentary scrutiny of this process. There was a time, back in the dim and distant past, when the Secretary of State was a great champion of parliamentary scrutiny, so I am sure that, deep down inside, he welcomes the judgment as well.

I wonder why the Government fear parliamentary scrutiny. Is it because they might be found out? Is it because we will find out that the emperor in these circumstances has no clothes? They talk of democracy, but I gently remind the Secretary of State that in Scotland at the general election, the Conservatives got their worst result since 1865. They have one MP.

We are told today that this is a political decision, and as a political decision on the role of the devolved Administrations I hope that this Parliament and this Government will continue not to legislate on areas that are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament without its consent. Today’s judgment said that this process should enhance devolution. If that is the case, will the Secretary of State tell us today that no powers will be returned from the Scottish Parliament to Westminster during the course of this process, and will he seek consent from the Scottish Parliament before legislating in areas over which it has responsibility?

Mr Davis: Again, I am surprised. I would have thought that, of all people, the Scottish National party attached great importance to the results of elections to the Scottish Parliament, in which last time the Scottish Conservative party came second under the estimable Ruth Davidson.

To the main point of the hon. Gentleman’s question, I want to make two responses. First, the process we have gone through with all the devolved Administrations—the joint ministerial process—has been going on for some months now, and at the very last monthly meeting we had a presentation from Mike Russell, the Scottish Government Minister, on the Scottish Government’s proposals. We disagreed with some and agreed with some absolutely—for example on the protection of employment law—and some we will debate in the coming weeks and months, most particularly on the point the hon. Gentleman raised: the question of devolution and devolved powers.

The hon. Gentleman knows that I am a devolutionist. I can say to him firmly that no powers existing in the devolved Administrations will come back, but there will be powers coming from the European Union and we will have to decide where they most properly land, whether that is Westminster, Holyrood or wherever. The real issue there is the practical interests of all the nations of the United Kingdom—for example, preserving the single market of the United Kingdom and the United Kingdom’s ability to do international deals. There is a series of matters that are just as important to the ordinary Scot as they are to the ordinary English, Welsh or Northern Irish citizen, and that is what we will protect.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): The very fact that this was a split judgment shows that our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was absolutely right to take the case all the way to get a full decision. I ask the Secretary of State to resist our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and not to overcomplicate this matter. After all, the question is: should the Government trigger article 50? I urge the Secretary of State, when he brings the Bill to Parliament, to keep it short, to keep it simple and, most of all, to keep it swift?

Mr Davis: Well, we will certainly keep it straightforward. My right hon. Friend is right: this was—is—a unique circumstance in many ways. It is unique in terms of the importance to the United Kingdom, but also unique in the fact that it is carrying out the will of 17.5 million people who voted directly—something that has never happened before in our history—so it was important to take the matter to the Supreme Court to get the full judgment. I give him this undertaking: I will do everything in my power to make sure that the measure goes through
swiftly, and that while it is properly scrutinised, it is a simple and straightforward Bill that delivers the triggering of article 50 by 31 March.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Having argued in court that Parliament should not decide on the triggering of article 50 and lost, will the Secretary of State accept the unanimous recommendation of the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union—and in the process agree with himself before he got his present job—and now publish a White Paper on the Government’s objectives so that they can be considered alongside the legislation that he has just announced? If the Government do not do so, they will be showing a lack of respect for this House of Commons.

**Mr Davis:** I do not often disagree with myself, but let me say this to the right hon. Gentleman: the speech given last week by the Prime Minister was the clearest exposition of a negotiating strategy that I have heard in modern times. It laid out clearly what we judge the national interest to be and how we intend to protect it, what we want to do, and what we hope does not happen and how we will avoid that. I do not see that this Government have avoided answering any question, whether from his Committee or from Opposition Front Benchers. The only questions that we have been unable to answer are those that it would be to the disadvantage of the country to answer, because that would undermine our negotiating strategy.

Let me give the right hon. Gentleman one example. A couple of weeks ago, my opponent, as it were, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), said on Channel 4, “What we want to know is whether the Government will pay for access to the single market and how much they’ll pay.” If anything would undermine the negotiating position, that would. It is precisely that sort of thing that we are going to avoid. We will continue to give information to the House. I gave the Brexit Committee an undertaking that we will give at least as much information as will go to the European Parliament—indeed more, I think. We will continue to keep the House informed throughout the entire process, which is not going to be over in a few weeks—it will last two years—and the House will be as well informed as it has been on any matter of such importance.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): The Supreme Court this morning ruled that the form of the Bill is “entirely a matter for Parliament.”

The judgment also indicated that the issues before the Supreme Court have nothing to do with the “political...merits of the decision to withdraw, the timetable and terms of so doing, or...any future relationship between the UK and the EU.”

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in relation to any potential amendments, the Bill itself will be short and tightly drawn to give effect exclusively to the Supreme Court decision?

**Mr Davis:** The short answer is yes. My hon. Friend cites paragraph 122 of the decision and the Court’s commentary. The purpose of the Bill is to meet the requirements of the Supreme Court to deliver the instruction from the nation at large and to do so in the national interest. That entails a straightforward, easily comprehensible Bill so that the country at large can see what Parliament is doing and what decision it is visiting on the Government.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I agree with the Secretary of State that Parliament must respect the result of the referendum, but I hope that he agrees that the Government do not have a blank cheque from either Parliament or the public on what kind of Brexit they now pursue. He says that there will be votes in the process. Given that the Government have said they are ruling out being in the customs union, the common external tariff and the common commercial policy, and that, as he knows, there are strongly held views on different sides about the impact that that will have on our manufacturing industry, which will be crucial to our future, can the right hon. Gentleman say when he will give Parliament a vote on that decision?

**Mr Davis:** I would say a couple of things to the right hon. Lady. First, we are asked on the one hand to tell the House what our plan is, and then we are told, “Oh, but we don’t like that, so we want a debate or a White Paper”—[Interruption.] No, it is fine; I perfectly understand the argument. The simple truth is that there will be any number of votes—too many to count—in the next two years across a whole range of issues. For example, I can see the sort of issue she is raising coming up in the great repeal Bill, in subsequent primary legislation, and perhaps even in subsequent major secondary legislation as well. I am quite sure there will be a number of votes on that subject in the next two years.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): If someone votes against sending the article 50 letter, are they not voting against restoring the very parliamentary sovereignty that they call in aid? Do not the British people want a proper Parliament, rather than a puppet Parliament answering to Brussels, and does that not require sending the letter soon?

**Mr Davis:** What it requires is leaving the European Union, and that is what we are going to do.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept my view that the public want us to get on with this and actually carry out what they voted for? Does he also accept that while they will not look lightly on amendments that are tabled, particularly by parties that actually want another referendum, to delay things unnecessarily, they do perhaps want amendments that clarify the situation and make us all more aware of the Government’s intentions?

**Mr Davis:** The hon. Lady, as ever, goes right to the heart of the matter. The public will not view well attempts to thwart, delay or confuse this process. They will view well attempts to elucidate what is going on, to promote the national interest, to help the negotiating position and so on, and that is entirely what the Government are going to do.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): There is a genuine desire, I believe, for people to come together, to support the Government, to build a consensus and to get the
best deal possible. The reality is that we have abandoned the single market and the free movement of people without any debate in this place, never mind a vote.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): We had a referendum.

Anna Soubry: Well, there was one question on the paper: leave or remain. We are leaving the European Union—that is accepted.

I take my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State as a man of his word. When I voted for the two-part motion in December, I did not agree with triggering article 50 at the end of March, but I voted for the motion in the spirit that we would have a plan—I would like a White Paper—that we could debate. That would bring us together. What does my right hon. Friend have to lose by having a debate on a White Paper?

Mr Davis: Let me say this to my right hon. Friend. Friend, who passionately holds a well-formed view on these matters. First, in terms of bringing people together, a large part of the Prime Minister’s speech was aimed at creating a sense of this country that everybody can get behind, ranging from the protection of employment rights through to our role in the world, all of which is very important. Secondly, the Prime Minister laid out an incredibly clear future and a future approach for us, so I think that she did everything one could ask of a Prime Minister to deliver on our undertakings.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) talks about things that were not on the ballot paper. What was on the ballot paper was leaving the European Union—that is accepted.

Mr Pat Mcfadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Last week in her speech, the Prime Minister said: “the Government will put the final deal that is agreed between the UK and the EU to a vote in both Houses of Parliament, before it comes into force.”

The article 50 negotiation is not the final deal—the final deal is the future trading agreement between the UK and the EU—so can the Secretary of State confirm that Parliament will get a vote on both the article 50 agreement and, as the Prime Minister said, the final deal? What will happen if Parliament says no to the terms of either of those agreements?

Mr Davis: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman’s overall question is yes—we are standing by both those votes and we will continue to do so. But I reiterate again that the point is that they will not be the only votes; there will be a large number of other votes in between.

Labour Members can ignore it till the cows come home, but the simple truth is that they are going to have many, many, many votes on many different policy areas after extensive debate on primary legislation. So the answer is that Parliament will have a great influence on this process, and it will have the final say. That is democracy in action.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): Further to that last reply, my right hon. Friend has given us admirable clarity on article 50 and the timetable. Could he give us a little more information on his current thoughts about the timetable for the great repeal Bill?

Mr Davis: That Bill will be in the Queen’s Speech, it will be presented to the House very soon thereafter and I expect it to be debated extensively. I think that it will be the centrepiece and the start of a major debate about the nature of this country and the future, so it is important to get it in front of the House very early.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The final vote offered by the Government on the negotiated package will not be meaningful unless they also guarantee that, if there is a vote against the withdrawal treaty, we will have an option to continue talks with the EU for a better deal, rather than simply falling out with no deal at all. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that we will have that vote in time for such further discussion to happen?

Mr Davis: That is of a piece with those arguments that say that we want to have a second referendum so that we can revisit this. What it does is to give a prize to somebody who is trying to put up the worst possible negotiation for us. There are plenty of members of the European Union that want to force us into changing our mind and going back inside, and we do not want to do anything that allows or encourages that to happen. The hon. Lady is not right to say that the vote is meaningless; for a start, the Select Committee and the Opposition both asked for it. In addition, it will be—I repeat this again—the last of many, many, many votes and debates on major legislation.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Hard Brexit means saying that one is going to leave the European Union and actually doing it. Soft Brexit means saying that one is going to leave the European Union and remaining in all but name. Which course do the Government intend to follow?

Mr Davis: In his younger days, my right hon. Friend was an expert in Soviet propaganda. I am afraid that I view “hard Brexit” and “soft Brexit” as terms of propaganda.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State guarantee that this House will have the ability to scrutinise and vote on the agreement between the UK and the EU27 at the same time as that agreement is put before the European Parliament?

Mr Davis: I repeat again that the House will have that opportunity over and over and over again, on a whole series of primary legislation and secondary legislation and, finally, with the vote itself. I have not given a great
deal of thought to how the timing of that will coincide with the European Parliament, but I will do so and write to the hon. Lady.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that in the course of the court case the Government laid great stress on the irrevocability, in their opinion, of article 50. In those circumstances, I am sure he can understand that the problem facing the House is that in triggering article 50, that irrevocability has to be matched against the excellent words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in setting out a plan that envisages a future relationship with the European Union from outside of it. Will he therefore keep in mind that the debate on article 50 is likely to be greatly facilitated if the ideas expressed by the Prime Minister are put into a White Paper, similar document, to which reference can be made in the triggering of article 50, without fettering the Government’s discretion in their negotiations thereafter, because ultimately, as he may agree, this comes down to an issue of trust? If the Government can build that trust, they will greatly facilitate their task, and, if I may say so, those such as myself who wish to help them in what they are trying to achieve.

Mr Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend—my old friend—tempts me down a certain route, but I will answer him in these terms. In the case, the argument put by the Government did not depend on the irrevocability or otherwise of the legal issue in front of us; it depended on the fact that we view the irrevocable moment as being 23 June last year, and that it is not in the gift of the Government to change their mind, so we have already passed the point of no return. In terms of information, I have said over and over again that I will provide what information I can, and as much information as I can, without undermining our negotiating position, and I will continue to do so throughout the article 50 process and beyond.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): We all know that negotiations are two-way processes, and we accept that our European partners may not be able to agree on anything until the German and French elections are out of the way. In the meantime, however, there is a logic to why article 50 should be triggered by the end of March. It has to do with a two-year process, so that by the time of the next European elections we will have completed the process. It is important to remind not just colleagues in this House but probably colleagues in the other House that there is a logic to an end of March date.

Mr Davis: The right hon. Lady, as ever, gets to the point of the matter. There are many reasons for triggering by the end of March. There are the rather obvious ones: the public want us to get on with it, and that includes remainers as well as leavers in terms of the original vote. There are practical reasons of business uncertainty: the longer we spin this out, the more difficult it is for businesses and workers in terms of their own futures. She is also right that it fits very neatly, as a sort of sweet spot, into delivering an outcome that is in our interests within the European timetable. The House should understand that there are roughly 15 elections between now and the end of the process, and then there is the European parliamentary election, which, if we get too close to it, could compromise the vote at the end. There is a whole series of reasons why the end of March is incredibly important. It is not an arbitrary date—it is designed to uphold the strength of the negotiations, so she is right on the nail.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): As one who campaigned to remain in the European Union, I welcome the decision of the Court today, which gives me the opportunity to say that I accept the result of the referendum and I will vote for the Bill triggering article 50. Let me also say, at the risk of repetition, that it would help still further the authority of the House, and the authority with which the Prime Minister goes into the negotiations, if the Secretary of State took on board the unanimous view of the Select Committee, and the view expressed by its Chairman and others, that the way in which the Prime Minister set out the plan, with her clarity of expression, is only enhanced, and that the work of the House, which is endorsed by the Supreme Court judgment, is equally enhanced by the publication of a White Paper, with the opportunity to debate and cover a number of things that the Bill cannot itself cover.

Mr Davis: I thank my right hon. Friend for the tone of his very good question. The issue here is not information. I have said over and over again that I will provide as much information as is consistent with the House’s previous motions on this, while not undermining our negotiating position, and that is what we will do. We will provide as much information as possible, but people should bear in mind that the article 50 Bill is going to be presented quite quickly to the House, so do not have a great deal of time either.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Today’s Supreme Court ruling is a victory for transparency and openness, but a half-hour speech by the Prime Minister outside this House, with a couple of questions for the media, is no substitute for parliamentary scrutiny. Will the Secretary of State please take on board the views of Members in all parts of this House and bring forward a White Paper, which will unite this House in order to forge a way forward?

Mr Davis: I have been at this Dispatch Box, on statements alone, five times in the past five months, and I am at great risk of boring the House. I will just repeat to the hon. Lady what I have said already: we will deliver the maximum possible information and the maximum possible debate.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): This House should be grateful to both the Supreme Court and the High Court for asserting parliamentary sovereignty and allowing us to have a say on the article 50 process. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who has said that he will vote in favour of article 50—I will too. In the spirit of the question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who called for a swift passage of the Bill—I agree with him—does the Secretary of State agree that when the House voted for the motion in December, it was not just
in relation to the 31 March deadline but in relation to the publication of a plan? I suggest to him that the passage of the Bill will be swifter if a White Paper is published and debates happen on that, too, and the article 50 process is separate.

Mr Davis: I hear what my right hon. Friend says. I am becoming very boring in reiterating the same point—that we will provide as much information as we possibly can, subject to not undermining our position.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): In 2014 in Scotland, we were told we were a powerhouse Parliament and an equal Parliament in the UK. We know from this morning that we are not the equal of Wallonia and Belgium, and we will not be consulted on Brexit. With the turbo-charged cowardice of the leader of the Labour party, it is clear that Scotland will now be taken out against our will. As the UK Government pursue Brexit, Scotland must take the opportunity of an independence referendum. Meantime, as the Scottish Parliament is not being consulted, will at least the views of Scottish Members of Parliament in this House be taken into account and respected?

Mr Davis: My answer to the hon. Gentleman—another old friend—is, “Of course.” I have spent a very great deal of time speaking directly to the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Government and the Northern Irish Executive too. I consider it incredibly important that in this process we protect the interests of the people he represents—the people of Scotland—in this negotiation.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s commitment to giving as much information as he can to the House and its Committees. Given that, could he explain why the Government are not providing any evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee’s inquiry into the practical consequences of leaving the European Union after two years with no agreement in place—an outcome that is a distinct possibility, and one over which the Government cannot command the outcome? Surely it would be best for the country and for every single company in the land that will be affected by this to understand the consequences as clearly as possible, so that they can plan for it.

Mr Davis: As I said, we will provide as much information as we can. However, this is a question of a negotiation, and we do not know where the end game will be. Even the rather stark example that my hon. Friend cites might have different aspects. He is presumably talking about the trade aspect, but there is also, for example, justice and home affairs. There are so many different things to assess that it would be, frankly, nothing more than an exercise in guesswork at this stage.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Today the Government have been humiliated in the Supreme Court. They have been taught a lesson about the real meaning of parliamentary sovereignty and taking back control. Will the Secretary of State now accept this verdict in the spirit, as well as the letter, of the ruling and finally concede that this House needs votes along the way, not simply debates without votes, and proper parliamentary scrutiny so that together, working across this House, we can bring the country to the best possible deal in the interests of all our areas up and down this country?

Mr Davis: I will say two things. First, I really recommend that the hon. Lady reads the judgment, rather than trying to interpret it or put her own blush on it: read the detail of it. It is a very good judgment and a very sound judgment, as I said in my opening statement. As for giving continual votes and continuous information, I have been saying that all day today.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The Bill should be brief and the outcome simple; that is a point of principle. Is the Secretary of State aware that if the Opposition parties combine to constrain the Government’s negotiating hand—for instance by insisting on staying in the single market, which would mean effectively remaining in the EU—many of us believe that we should have an immediate general election and put the matter to the people? That might concentrate the minds of those in the Labour party.

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is asking me a question that is way above my pay grade, to say the least, and the person whose pay grade it is has left. The point I would make to my hon. Friend is this. I would hope that every Member of this House saw it as their duty to their constituents to deliver the best outcome. That is precisely what the Government’s strategy is—to deliver the best outcome for Britain in this negotiation.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I am pleased that the case that was presented to hand a veto to the Northern Ireland Assembly—a blatant attempt to overturn the result of the referendum—has failed. Could the Secretary of State tell us, now that the Northern Ireland Assembly has been collapsed by Sinn Féin, what arrangements there will be to have the issues that concern Northern Ireland raised prior to negotiations and during negotiations?

Mr Davis: With respect to the hon. Gentleman’s first point, it is notable that while there was an 8:3 judgment on the rest of the issue, the Court was unanimous on not allowing the Northern Ireland Executive a veto. In terms of maintaining, not so much a relationship but an understanding of the issues that relate to Northern Ireland, last week when we had a Joint Ministerial Committee I wrote to the Northern Ireland Executive to ask them to continue to send Ministers to represent the interests of Northern Ireland. Although the First Minister and Deputy First Minister disappear, as it were, in the interim, Ministers stay in post, just as in any other Administration. Last week, they did turn up, and I will continue to extend an invitation to that end. If that does not work, we will find some other bilateral way to proceed. The hon. Gentleman must take it as read: I view it as near the top of my priorities, if not actually my top priority, to preserve the situation in Northern Ireland, to preserve the border in its current state without hardening it, and to preserve the interests of the Northern Irish people.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): No Bill that goes through parliamentary scrutiny does not become, as a result, a better Act of Parliament. Could the
Secretary of State announce when we will get a business statement, so that we know the timetable for the proposed Bill? I hope that we will have a day for Second Reading. I urge him to say that ample time will be given to the Committee stage, so that the House can properly scrutinise the Bill before it goes to the Lords.

Mr Davis: On my hon. Friend’s last point, that would certainly be my intention. On the first point, there will be a business statement on Thursday anyway. Bear in mind that we are talking about a 96-page judgment. The point, as I have said before, of going right to the Supreme Court was to ensure that we got an authoritative, detailed final judgment on what we need to do and how we need to do it, and we need to study it carefully. That will take a little bit of time, but not very much, and we will come back to the House as soon as possible thereafter. It is entirely possible that Thursday’s business statement may cover that.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Secretary of State keeps talking about certainty, but given the Prime Minister’s statement specifically on the customs union, my constituents working in the manufacturing supply chain have nothing but uncertainty about their jobs. So what exactly is wrong with the suggestion made by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) that the Government bring forward their policy on Brexit for a vote in this House?

Mr Davis: The hon. Lady talks about certainty. A two-year negotiation is going to take place, and there is nothing we can or should do to collapse that. That means that there is a limit to the extent to which we can introduce certainty. By the way, I had not mentioned it until then in this discussion. There will be debate after debate. On article 50, there will be debate on the policy. On the great repeal Bill, there will be debate on the policy. In several subsequent pieces of primary legislation, there will be debate on the policy. There will be no shortage of debate or votes.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Any obligation placed on the Government’s negotiating position during the passage of the Bill may subsequently be subject to judicial review, with consequent delay. I hope that my right hon. Friend will judge the intentions that have been announced to amend the Bill in that light.

Mr Davis: As my right hon. Friend knows, I view everybody with great charity and generosity, and I will continue to do so.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Further to the question asked by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), when the Labour Government legislated for the Lisbon treaty, Parliament had 25 days, including 11 days in Committee of the whole House, to debate it. There are 66 days before 31 March. How many days is the Secretary of State planning to give us?

Mr Davis: I will say two things. First, was it not the Lisbon treaty—nothing more than the triggering process. There will be vast quantities of legislation—much more than on the Lisbon treaty—between now and the conclusion.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that those who now wail parliamentary sovereignty mean the yoke of Brussels; when they say scrutiny, they mean delay; and when they say respect, they mean condescension? Does he agree with me that the British people have voted and we must legislate?

Mr Davis: As ever, my hon. Friend speaks for England.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): We are all trying to get the best deal for our constituents. That is why the Liberal Democrats will seek to amend the article 50 Bill to give people their first say on the terms of the UK’s future relationship with the European Union, and on Government plans to crash out of the single market and the customs union, inflicting huge damage on families and businesses up and down the country. Why do the Government not take this opportunity to boost their democratic credentials and simply agree to such a popular vote?

Mr Davis: I would ask the right hon. Gentleman to exercise his brain on this matter. The consequence of putting a second referendum at the end of the negotiation is to invite every single member of the European Union who does not want us to leave to propose the worst possible deal, in the hope that we will change our mind. We are not going to do that.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Today we uphold the rule of law by respecting the Supreme Court judgment. Does my right hon. Friend agree that both Houses of Parliament must now respect the result of the referendum by swiftly passing into law this necessary Act?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is as right as ever.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State can see the phenomenal interest in the House in this issue, and he should not be afraid of scrutiny. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) asked how many days he would commit to proper scrutiny on the Floor of the House of all the issues surrounding article 50. Can he accept that this Bill is more important than the Bills on the Lisbon treaty and the Maastricht treaty, and that any attempt to curtail the opportunities for this House to scrutinise the issues would betray the Government’s fear of proper debate?

Mr Davis: Let me say two things to the hon. Gentleman. I do not think that I have ever run away from scrutiny. I have spent more time at the Dispatch Box than any other Secretary of State in the last five months. In terms of what he says about the importance of the Bill, of course it is important, and indeed I want as much time as we can possibly get for it to be discussed; but that is a matter, as I said, for the usual channels to discuss.

Many people who see the Bill as incredibly important—perhaps more than it really is—are seeing it as some sort of point of no return. The point of no return was passed on 23 June last year. This is simply carrying out
the instructions of the British people. We will do so under the full scrutiny of Parliament and under the authorisation of Parliament, and we will give time for that; but do not conflate that with the whole process of the negotiation. It will take much, much more time than was given to Lisbon, because that number of pieces of primary legislation will take more time.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) talked about our democracy—in fact, he is the only representative of his political party in the Chamber—but would it be very undemocratic, in my right hon. Friend’s opinion, for him to go down to the House of Lords and encourage 120 unelected Members of the House of Lords to play ping-pong and mess about with the Bill? We must deliver what the British people have asked for.

Mr Davis: I think the British public will be looking at both Houses and expecting them to do their democratic duty properly, which means not to thwart the Bill or delay it unnecessarily, but to undertake a proper process of scrutiny and then to deliver on the will of the people.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Supreme Court has ruled very clearly today that the devolved legislatures do not have legislative competence and capacity in relation to the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. Therefore, it must follow logically that the procedure called EVEL, but known by its long title as English votes for English laws, should not be applicable when we come to the great repeal Bill. EVEL as a procedure is deeply divisive in this House, and it is demeaning to Members who represent Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Given that the Secretary of State has said—and I believe him—that every effort will be made by this Government to hold together the United Kingdom, it would be helpful if the Brexit Secretary clearly ruled out the use of EVEL on the great repeal Bill?

Mr Davis: I cannot off the top of my head think of a circumstance in which EVEL would apply, but it might do so. The point I would make to the hon. Lady is that that rests on a ruling by the Speaker, not by a Secretary of State.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Will triggering article 50 be adequate to release us from other related treaty obligations under the 1972 Act, such as our membership of the European economic area?

Mr Davis: That is a debatable matter of law. I think that is the accurate answer. Subsequent matters may arise after the triggering of article 50, but if so we will come back to the House.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): There is no reason why the Government should not get their Bill through all the proper stages in this House and in the other House by the end of March. When the business managers come knocking and say, “We should condense the processes and have several different stages on the same day”, may I urge the “old” Member who flourished for 20 years on the Back Benches to return and fight hard for this House, saying, “We will do the process properly”?

Mr Davis: I will thank the hon. Gentleman not to refer to me as the “old Member”. I will of course ensure that there is proper scrutiny.

Mr Speaker: I do not think the right hon. Gentleman has another birthday until December—I think his birthday is 23 December—so he has a long time to wait: nothing to worry about.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Today, British judges in the highest court in the land decided a point of historic constitutional importance that is unprecedented in law. It was right to seek the judgment of the Supreme Court to enable it to “discover” the law, as we lawyers euphemistically call it. Crucially, the Supreme Court recognised the limits of its constitutional powers when it left the form of that legislation to this Parliament. Is this not our constitution thriving in action, and does it not bode well for the future?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Her question goes to the point that I have made previously at the Dispatch Box which is that that is why we took the case all the way to the Supreme Court. By the way, it was not just about the role of the House of Commons on article 50; it was also, of course, about the role of the devolved Administrations, which had in any event to go to the Supreme Court.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that many of us warmly congratulate the judges in the Supreme Court and the High Court on upholding parliamentary sovereignty, which the Government to a large extent tried to bypass in triggering article 50? The judges are not the enemies of the people but the defenders of parliamentary democracy.

Mr Davis: If the hon. Gentleman goes back through this old Member’s extensive experience, I do not think he will find that I have ever referred to the judges as the enemies of the people—just the converse. It is occasionally embarrassing to me that I sometimes use them.

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): I welcome the statement by the Secretary of State. I also welcome paragraph 122 of the Supreme Court ruling, which narrows the scope of the rather opaque High Court ruling and allows us to pass a short, sharp Bill to trigger article 50. Does he agree that it is the responsibility of every democrat in both Houses to give effect to the will of the British people by passing the Bill without delay?

Mr Davis: I agree with my hon. Friend. For my part, I will endeavour to make the Bill as straightforward and as comprehensible as possible. I say that not just for speed, but because the public will be watching us. The public will want to know what we are voting on and to be able to understand it, so nothing will be opaque. We will aim to present a straightforward, simple Bill that we will take through as fast as is consistent with proper scrutiny.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Paragraph 151 of the Supreme Court ruling says:

“The Sewel Convention has an important role in facilitating harmonious relationships between the UK Parliament and the devolved legislatures.”
What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that there is a harmonious relationship? Does he agree with the ruling, and will he produce a White Paper, as the SNP has proposed, and actually write something down, which he did not do ahead of the EU referendum?

Mr Davis: If I remember correctly, that section ends with the phrase, “nobody has a veto”—no devolved Administration has a veto. In terms of involving and looking after or trying to help assist the interests of the devolved Administrations and the people they represent, we have a whole process in place with the Joint Ministerial Committee, which does nothing but consider these matters. It considers the interests of the nations of the United Kingdom to ensure that none of their special interests, none of their special political situations and none of their special economic situations is harmed in any way.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): There have been a couple of references to paragraph 122 of the Supreme Court judgment. It says:

“There is no equivalence between the constitutional importance of a statute...and its length or complexity.”

It adds:

“A notice under article 50...could...be very short”.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a very important message for Opposition Members?

Mr Davis: I take my hon. Friend’s point, and I will seek incisive brevity.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): The Prime Minister said that

“no deal...is better than a bad deal”,

but ending up on World Trade Organisation rules could be the worst possible deal, hitting businesses and families hard. May I press the Secretary of State: will there be a vote in this House at the end of the trade negotiations—not just the article 50 process, but the trade negotiations—so that Parliament can decide what is in Britain’s national economic interest?

Mr Davis: I will correct the hon. Lady slightly: there will not be a simple trade negotiation. The European Union pretty much always insists that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, so justice and home affairs, security matters and a whole series of other issues will be tied into it. But, yes, there will be a vote at the end of it. We have already agreed to that.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): There has been a lot of talk by some Opposition Members of second referendums on article 50. Will my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents, the majority of whom voted to leave, that he will categorically rule out any second referendum?

Mr Davis: Yes is the answer. I am afraid I take the view that to suggest that somehow the British people did not know what they were doing the first time so must have a chance to get the answer right is, bluntly, patronising, undemocratic and improper. Rightly, that view is held by one of the smallest parties in this House. The answer is that I will not under any circumstances support a second referendum.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The Welsh Labour Government and Plaid Cymru, as the official Opposition, have come together in good faith to establish our Brexit aims, which were published yesterday as a White Paper. Why will the Secretary of State not do likewise?

Mr Davis: I spoke to Carwyn Jones about that yesterday. I have not had a chance to read it in detail, but I know the headlines. He took me through them, and it struck me as a very constructive submission to the process. We will debate it at the next Joint Ministerial Committee.

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Mr Speaker, “joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth”. Does my right hon. Friend share my delight that those who were previously happy for sovereignty to be dispatched to Brussels now believe in the sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament?

Mr Davis: I warn my hon. Friend to be wary of biblical quotations. The last one I used was,

“Get thee behind me, Satan”,

and it rode with me for several weeks thereafter. However, he is right that this is a massive exercise in democracy, and we will make it so.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The Supreme Court’s judgment is welcome in that it establishes that the will of this House is sovereign and superior to the royal prerogative, but it is unwelcome in that it seeks to take back from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland powers that had been devolved to them. Will the Secretary of State promise that the special needs of Wales, which will be hit more severely by withdrawal from the single market than England, will be considered and that we will have not just a red, white and blue Brexit, but a red, white and green Brexit that meets the will and the needs of Wales?

Mr Davis: I will say two things. First, I think that the hon. Gentleman misreads the judgment. It does not talk about taking back powers back from the devolved Administrations at all, as far as I can see. As I said to the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams), the interests of the people of Wales, as far as the Welsh Government view them, have been put into a paper that has been submitted to the Joint Ministerial Committee and will be debated at the next meeting of its European negotiating arm.

Mr Shaiiles Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): The Supreme Court judgment was decisive in its position on the devolved Assemblies. Given that, does my right hon. Friend agree that now is the time for the stateswomen and statesmen of the devolved Assemblies to respect the decision of the Supreme Court and work constructively with the Government for the greater good of the United Kingdom, of which they are very much a part?

Mr Davis: I could not have put it better myself.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): I will vote to trigger article 50, but I also have a duty to scrutinise the Government’s deal to ensure that it does not make my constituents poorer. As taxpayers, my constituents have a right to know how much the appeal to the Supreme Court cost them. Will the Secretary of State tell us?
**Mr Davis:** On the latter point, I do not have that number in my mind, but I can—[HON. MEMBERS: “Oh!”] Well, I don’t. I have been studying the judgment today. I will provide the hon. Lady with that number as soon as I can. That will happen quickly. I am quite sure that the Supreme Court judgment will have been expensive on one level, because lawyers are expensive, as the Labour spokesman would tell us. I am sure that he is a much more expensive lawyer—that is the greatest compliment I can pay him.

To make a more fundamental point, when we are dealing with something as important as this—I do not think anybody in the House questions the importance of the constitutional decision that has been made today—it is incredibly important that it is done on solid ground, with proper authority and in a way that the Government can interpret properly to deliver the right outcome. I have made that point across this Dispatch Box more than once. Frankly, it will therefore be worth whatever we have paid for it.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for being the right man in the right place at the right time. Sixty-one per cent of the people of Kettering voted to leave the European Union. They will take comfort that there is nothing in today’s judgment that will delay the process, and they will like the fact that their Member of Parliament will obey their instructions and vote to trigger article 50. I commend it to all other Members to do the same.

**Mr Davis:** I thank my hon. Friend for that. All I can say is that I am surprised it was only 61% in his constituency.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): The judgment’s terms tell us that we should not rely on mere political convention for legal adherence or political confirmation on key matters. That being so, Sewel will be meaningless in the context of the great repeal Bill. Does the Secretary of State recognise that the key constitutional precept of the Good Friday agreement—the principle of consent and the democratic potential for a united Ireland—will have to be explicitly included in any new UK-EU treaty in order to fully reflect the principle that those issues are a matter for the people of Ireland, without external impediment, and to properly reflect the terms of today’s Supreme Court judgment?

**Mr Davis:** I will not reiterate the facts of the Supreme Court judgment on the Northern Irish aspect. The hon. Gentleman can read those much more authoritatively in the judgment. I have said to him before in this House and reiterate to him again that there is more than one guarantee in this matter. The British Government are determined to preserve the peace settlement and all that underpins it; the Irish Government are determined to underpin it; and so is the Commission. I will say something nice about the Commission in this regard. When I spoke to Michel Barnier, my opposite number, he reminded me that he was involved in the original peace process. All the parties to this matter therefore have a vested interest in delivering what the hon. Gentleman wants.

**Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): You will recall last week, Mr Speaker, my right hon. Friend extolling the fact that he liked to please his boss. He also said earlier what a wonderful speech she made last week. I say to him that he could unify the whole of this side of the House by publishing a White Paper based on that excellent speech. I am sure that that would make him even more popular with our boss.

**Mr Davis:** I thought I was really rather restrained, given that the Prime Minister was sitting here today. I could have been thoroughly oleginous, but I was not prompted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) this time, who gave me the line about Her Majesty.

**Anna Soubry:** I nearly said that.

**Mr Davis:** Yes, absolutely. I will not rehearse all the arguments again, but I will provide whatever information I can and as much information as I can, as promptly as I can, bearing in mind that the process is likely to start next week.

**Owen Smith** (Pontypridd) (Lab): I agree with the Secretary of State that the Prime Minister was very clear in her speech last week that we are leaving the single market and likely the customs union. Before the referendum, his Government said that that would cost the British people £66 billion or roughly half the cost of the NHS per year. Do the Government stand by that estimate or is there a different estimate today? If so, will he tell us what it is?

**Mr Davis:** I will say two things. First, Andy Haldane, the deputy governor of the Bank of England, has talked about a Michael Fish moment for economic forecasters. The hon. Gentleman might deliberate on that the next time he wants to ask a question like this. Secondly, economic models and forecasts are only as good as the assumptions that go into them. The point that the Prime Minister made last week was not just that we would not be a member of the single market, but that we would seek the freest and most barrier-free access in the interests of the people of Wales and others. That is what we will seek, but the negotiation is not complete yet. That is our aim and if we succeed, it will be hugely valuable for the people of Wales.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): The EU referendum saw a 72% turnout and a clear vote to leave the European Union, showing the strongly held will of the British people. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Liberal Democrats’ call for a second referendum—one Liberal Democrat Member was here today, but he is not here now—shows that they do not care about the public’s view unless they get their way?

**Mr Davis:** Looking across the Chamber, I am tempted to ask, “What Liberal Democrats?” As my hon. Friend said, there was only one of them here, which shows just how seriously they take this incredibly important issue. I think the public at large will take the view that the Liberal Democrats are trying to use this matter for their own political purposes, not for the national interest.

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): There have understandably been a lot of questions today about process, but there is an emerging Brexit reality in the
Mr Davis: I could stand here for 10 minutes naming companies, such as Apple, Google, Microsoft and McDonald's, that have decided to be here. We have pretty much the highest employment and lowest unemployment rates for some considerable time, completely contrary to the pessimistic predictions of many people after the Brexit result. If we want a demonstration of how wrong the establishment of Britain got this, we need only look at those numbers.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): Exiting the EU is uncharted territory, and there will naturally be uncertainties and challenges along the way, so what steps are the Government taking to communicate with British businesses in order to build confidence and foster economic growth in the months ahead?

Mr Davis: I can send my hon. Friend the details, but the number of meetings is beyond counting; we have had meetings with manufacturing, aviation, tourism, finance and banking, insurance and so on. Not just my Ministers but Ministers across Government are talking to their own client industries, as it were, to ensure they know what their concerns are, what the opportunities are and what policy measures we have to take to maximise the opportunities and mitigate any concerns. It took a few months, but people are beginning to see the opportunities and mitigate any concerns. It took a few months, but people are beginning to see the opportunities and mitigate any concerns.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has twice said that the point of no return was on 23 June, and he has ruled out a White Paper and a vote on the plan. Does he agree that neither the words “customs union” nor “single market” were on the ballot paper? If the House decides, at some point after article 50 has been triggered, that it does not wish to proceed with the process, would we leave automatically or is it reversible?

Mr Davis: First, I have listened to people talking about what was not on the ballot paper. It is rather like saying, “You said you were going to sell the car, but you didn’t say you were going to sell me the engine and tyres as well.” These elements—the common external tariff barrier, the common commercial policy, the role of the European Court of Justice, and so on—are components of the EU, which the public voted to leave. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman misquotes me. I have said that there will be any number of votes and debates in the coming two years, many of them about the issues he talks about.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I fully support the words from all quarters in support of our judges, who are the best, most inestimable and highest-quality I have seen anywhere in the world, but does my right hon. Friend agree that those warm words need to be matched by action from all Members? In particular, just as the Government accept the verdict, should not Members accept the words of the Supreme Court that a small Bill can have the same power as a larger one, and should not those from some of the devolved parts of the UK accept the verdict, too? On the cost, does he agree that, if he is publishing the cost of the Government’s action, we should ask the devolved Assemblies, particularly that in Scotland, to publish how much taxpayers’ money they spent joining the action?

Mr Davis: As I said on the costs, I will provide the numbers; there is no problem with doing that. I would make the point, however, that we did not bring the case, of which the cost is a direct outcome. I am not one of those—[Interruption.] Animal noises from the Opposition notwithstanding. I am not one of those who criticise the people who brought the case; I think they brought a very important constitutional case, which is why I said, whatever it cost, it was worth doing. Let no one say to the Government, however, “Why did you appeal the case?” We did so because a massively important constitutional issue was at stake, and my hon. Friend is right that we should all take it very seriously, take it as the status of our law today and obey it accordingly.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Scotland is supposed to have the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world, and the Scotland Acts tell us now that it is permanent and that the Sewel convention is embedded in law, but we now know, of course, that the Scotland Acts are barely worth the vellum they are written on. The Secretary of State says he is listening to Scotland—that is great, he has said it several times today—but when will he act? If he does not accept the very reasonable proposals we put to him, the Scottish people will quickly ask what the point is of our being here at all.

Mr Davis: If I remember correctly, the Supreme Court said of the Sewel convention that it was not for the judges to decide. I listened last week as the Scottish Government Minister presented at great length the arguments in their paper. As I said earlier to one of the hon. Gentleman’s colleagues, there are bits we disagree with and bits we absolutely agree with—for me, the most obvious one is the protection of employment law, which I take very seriously, and on which we are absolutely in the same place. I and others on the Joint Ministerial Committee discussed with the Minister the issue of devolution, and the clear point was that no existing devolved powers were to be retracted. Of course, that is not going to happen, but we also have to think, in rational terms and in the interests of the Scottish people and citizens of the UK more widely, about where the best place is to make decisions. In most cases, I would prefer to devolve powers, but in some circumstances that is not practical. We have to do what is right for the people, not what suits our political interest.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I am confident that every Member will vote to trigger article 50—for which of us would dare thwart the will of the people? Does my right hon. Friend share my concern, though, about the implications of the case for a Government’s decision to go to war, for example? Could that now be challenged by a member of the public?
Mr Davis: No, I do not think my hon. Friend is right. It is a 96-page judgment, so we have to go through the detail, but the major part of the case was confined to two aspects—the implications specifically for the European Communities Act and for those treaties that have an effect on the domestic legal rights of citizens—and I do not think that the decision to go to war falls within either. He raises more broadly, however, an important point. We are in an era when the exact reach of the royal prerogative has to be established and understood. Once we are in complete command of our own future, we will have to know what the Government can and cannot do, what we have to do in conjunction with Parliament and where we have to go back for authorisation. That is one reason we are taking our time to read the judgment.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Secretary of State has mentioned a few times that this is a massive exercise in democracy. I put it to him that a useful tool in a participatory democracy is issuing White Papers. I do not understand why he has set his face against doing that, given that we are about to make the most important decision for many generations and trigger article 50.

Mr Davis: The Chairman of the Select Committee, who is not here, said his Committee wanted a plan as quickly as possible—before the middle of February; I said it would be difficult to turn out a full White Paper before then. One of the virtues of delivering the plan via a prime ministerial speech of some length was that we could do it quickly, we could make it very clear and everybody could understand it. It also got coverage around the world in a way that no other medium could have. People remind me—and sometimes tease me, of course—of my history as an activist for parliamentary rights. The important point is that we are here only because we represent our constituents’ interests.

I have tried—I keep reiterating this phrase—to provide as much information as possible. Let us take the plan with respect to what was asked for by Labour Front-Bench Members and the Select Committee. They asked, “What are we going to do about the single market?” and hopefully that is now plain. They asked, “What are we going to do about the customs union?”, and hopefully that is now plain. They asked, “What role is seen for Britain in the world?”, and hopefully that is now plain, too. Of course, what we cannot do is say what the outcome of the negotiation will be. We cannot give that level of certainty, but we can certainly give a level of certainty, as we have and as we will, as to what the aims and strategic objectives are. We have done that.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I, too, welcome today’s judgment by the Supreme Court, and I would like to lend my support to the Supreme Court judges. I hope that we do not see any repeat in tomorrow’s newspapers of the bile that was directed towards the High Court judges last year. Although I welcome the Prime Minister’s speech last week, which focused on a comprehensive free trade agreement, I have received thousands of emails and correspondence from my constituents all wanting to have their say on this issue. After all, 70% of them voted to remain inside the European Union. Does my right hon. Friend therefore agree—as other colleagues have said, and without wishing to make him repeat himself—that the best way to do this and to ensure that my constituents’ views are heard is via the use of a White Paper?

Mr Davis: I am afraid that my hon. Friend has failed in not making me repeat myself. Plainly, the House has determined that I would fail miserably in “Just a Minute”, or whatever the quiz is called where people are not allowed to repeat themselves. I reiterate that it is the facts that matter and the plan that matters and answering Parliament’s questions that matters. We have done all those things. We will continue. I will continue to provide whatever information I can without compromising our negotiating position—I will do that.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his answer to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), when he said that he had written to the Northern Ireland Executive. Does he recognise that the Northern Ireland Executive have collapsed after just eight months and may not have the confidence of the people of Northern Ireland? They had no joint plan. Will the Secretary of State ensure that he writes to all parties and includes everyone, so that we get something that will tell all of us where we are going? We accept the result. We need a quick resolution, but we must all be included. Will he do that?

Mr Davis: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. Before I answer directly, let me say that I have, of course, sought to get the parties in the Executive to continue to send a Minister to the Joint Ministerial Committee, but that is only one mechanism; there are others. I think that the Prime Minister will be speaking to the Taoiseach next week, so the Irish Government interest will be represented. I will, of course, talk to others more directly. I went to Northern Ireland early on in my time in this job. I am inclined to say yes to the hon. Gentleman—I will write to him—but let me consider the issue carefully, so that I do not land myself in some problem. The reason I say that and the reason I am being cautious is that an election is now under way, and I have to be wary of the British Government appearing to meddle in any aspect of the election. Let me, therefore, pause and think about that. I will do what I judge to be in the best interests of Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman must take that as my promise.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. After faster progress for a while, the pace has slowed terribly in the last few minutes. What is required is a pithy question of the kind in which a Queen’s Counsel should specialise. Let us hear about the contents of the textbook pithily. I call Lucy Frazer.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The Supreme Court, at the beginning of its judgment, on its very first page, said in terms that it wanted to emphasise that the case had absolutely nothing to do with the terms of withdrawal, the arrangements for withdrawal or the details as to any future relationship with Europe. In those circumstances, does the Secretary of State agree that all that the Supreme Court decided was that, before pulling the trigger, there needs to be authorisation...
by Act of Parliament? Under the terms of the judgment at least, there is no obligation to set out the details of any deal.

Mr Davis: I agree.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Today’s judgment states that, notwithstanding new legislative constraints, “withdrawal from the EU will enhance the devolved competence”. I asked the Secretary of State this same question just last week and was dismayed to find that he was able to provide only his presumptions. Can he now provide concrete examples of which types of powers will be devolved to the devolved Administrations, following our exit from the European Union?

Mr Davis: I rather suspect that the hon. Lady misquotes me from last week. What I said, or what I should have said, was that some elements of the powers coming back from the European Union will go to the devolved Administrations, that some will stay in the centre, but for a number we are going to have to debate the matter and decide. That will happen in the first instance in the Joint Ministerial Committee and then at Cabinet.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Single sentence questions, please, with the abandonment of any preamble that colleagues might have in mind.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Although the Secretary of State should take seriously amendments proposed to the forthcoming Bill in good faith, I invite him to give short shrift to those who seek to use amendments to derail or delay a vital process.

Mr Davis: I will.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has already attempted to sideline Parliament by appealing this case and by refusing to publish a White Paper, so can he be very clear: will the Bill be drafted in such terms as to allow not just amendments, but substantive amendments? Yes or no?

Mr Davis: I have been here for 30 years. If the hon. Gentleman knows how to draft a Bill that withstands any amendments, I would like to hear about it.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): In any negotiation, it is worth thinking about the other side. Lord Hill, who knows a thing or two about Europe, came to give evidence to our Select Committee on the best strategy for negotiation. He said that it is now to come together because the decision has been made; otherwise, we would be sending mixed messages to our interlocutors. Does the Secretary of State agree?

Mr Davis: Yes, and I would hope that, once we get through the article 50 process, we will see a rather more collegiate attitude from all parts of the political spectrum. It is, after all, our national interest that is engaged.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): A moment ago, the Secretary of State reminded us that our job is to do what is in the best interest of our constituents. The city I represent has 8.5 million visitors each year, has two universities and has an economy that includes the head offices of EDF and Amex. If I do not believe that, between now and March, the guarantees offered by this Government will protect everything that is great about my city, surely the right hon. Gentleman would agree with me that I cannot support this timescale.

Mr Davis: I am not about to protect the hon. Gentleman from his constituents. I am afraid. My comment to him is this: we are in a negotiation. If he can point out to me a negotiation that had guarantees before it started, I would be interested to hear about it.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that it is strange that many seem to be unaware that legislative changes will be needed on a range of issues as we leave and not just on the point about article 50. Does he agree distinctly that, if people try to use tricks of procedure in this House or anywhere else to try to frustrate article 50, they will fuel the scepticism that pushed people to vote leave?

Mr Davis: That is true, and I think Members’ constituents would notice, too.

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

Mr Speaker: Somebody who has been waiting a long time must have been able to work out how to put the question in a short sentence. I call Neil Gray. Let us hear it.

Neil Gray: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given that a legislative consent motion is now apparently a political decision and there is no impediment to the Government bringing one forward, will the Secretary of State advise us whether the Government had a legislative consent contingency in place before the Supreme Court ruling and why on earth he would rule out bringing one forward now?

Mr Davis: Because I have said that no component part of the United Kingdom has a veto. If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would know that I have said that dozens of times in this House.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend reassure my Bury North constituents, a majority of whom voted to leave, that he will allow nothing to get in the way of ensuring that the Bill that he has announced will be passed as quickly as possible?

Mr Davis: Yes.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The Secretary of State said in his statement that the Government are determined to deliver on a decision taken by the people of the United Kingdom but Scotland, of course, the country that we on the SNP Benches represent, voted to remain within the United Kingdom and the Scottish Government have been empowered by the Parliament to make sure that we remain within the single market. Why is the Secretary of State acting
against the best interests of the Scottish people? Will he not understand that, if he refuses to accept our will, our only option—

Mr Speaker: Order. Too long. Too loud. We do not want to hear it. Enough.

Mr Davis: First, I do not necessarily think that the interests of the Scottish National party are the same as those of the Scottish people. Secondly, as I remember, the Scottish nation voted to stay inside the United Kingdom—the United Kingdom that voted to leave the European Union.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): The World Trade Organisation has done a fantastic amount of work to reduce trade barriers around the world, and it is the basis of our trading relationship with the United States of America, where we have a trade surplus. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that this provides a great foundation for a trade deal with the EU, and that it is now for the EU to do something better than that?

Mr Davis: I agree.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken a great deal about listening to the devolved nations, but will he listen to what they have to say about the importance of unfettered access to the single market?

Mr Davis: We already have. That was the point that the Prime Minister was making when she said that we wanted barrier-free, most facilitated trade with the EU.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend assure the 70% of my constituents who voted for Brexit that he has a contingency plan to ensure that, if the upper House were to attempt to thwart or delay the Bill, we would meet the March deadline?

Mr Davis: From what I remember of my hon. Friend's constituency, there are enough Members of the upper House in it for him to be able to tell them himself.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Secretary of State talks about not thwarting the will of the people. Will he finally recognise that 62% of people in Scotland voted to stay? The Scottish Government are not asking for a veto; they are asking for a compromise that would allow Scotland to maintain membership of the single market. When will the Secretary of State work with them to achieve that?

Mr Davis: As I have said to several of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, we work in the Joint Ministerial Committee, we work bilaterally, and we seek to protect the interests of the whole United Kingdom, not least Scotland.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I do not want to frustrate the process, but is the Secretary of State saying that the referendum result is the only factor that should govern the article 50 vote? Is that not tantamount to signing a blank cheque and setting aside the views of our constituents?

Mr Davis: When a question begins “I do not want to frustrate the process, but”, it tells us something in its own right.

The Government are seeking authorisation to trigger the start of the negotiation, which is what the British people voted for last year. End of story. That is not the only issue, but it is the most important issue.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): This judgment rode roughshod through the Sewel convention. Can the Secretary of State assure me that he will seek meaningful discussions with the Scottish Government which will respect and reflect the desire of the Scottish electorate to remain in the EU?

Mr Davis: I think that the Scottish Government's case was represented in the Supreme Court. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not pick and choose which bits I like or do not like; I go along with the Supreme Court, because it is the highest court in our land and we have to obey it.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The country voted to leave the EU, but my constituents did not vote for a cut in their living standards. There are genuine and serious concerns about the impact on our economy, manufacturing, higher education and research if the UK leaves the EU without a deal and falls back under World Trade Organisation rules. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the risks of leaving with no deal in place, and will he publish that assessment so that it can be subjected to proper scrutiny?

Mr Davis: There were a great many forecasts of how terrible things would be if the people voted for Brexit. They were all undilutedly wrong: every single one was wrong. Our strategic aim is to secure a comprehensive free trade agreement, not to fail to do so, and that is what will protect the hon. Lady's constituents if she is willing to pay attention to it.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): The Secretary of State has said that he wants to preserve the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, and that he understands the peace settlement. We are currently engaged in an election process, which will be quickly followed by negotiations of which Brexit will form an important part. In discussions with the Taoiseach and with the Irish Government, will the Secretary of State ensure that special status for Northern Ireland is considered thoroughly in those negotiations?

Mr Davis: A whole series of special circumstances apply. When I first visited Northern Ireland after taking up my present post, what came up were matters such as the importance of the border and the single energy market, and we will continue to pay attention to those matters. If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I am going to be very careful about answering questions because of the ongoing election process, but I think she should take it as read that we take this issue very seriously indeed.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Secretary of State for Scotland, who is no longer in the Chamber, told the House on at least five occasions that the Sewel convention had been placed on a statutory footing by
the Scotland Act. Today the Supreme Court said that that was not the case. Which of those contradictory judgments currently holds the confidence of Her Majesty's Government?

Mr Davis: It was not a contradictory judgment. This is a reserved matter.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Surely the ruling confirms that “Brexit means Brexit” has been totally inadequate as any sort of explanation to Parliament or its people. The devil is often in the detail, particularly the Tory detail, and surely that detail ought to be provided in the form of a White Paper.

Mr Davis: Obviously the hon. Lady is not the first person to ask for a White Paper, but hers was perhaps one of the more partisan requests. The strategic aims are very clear: they are designed to protect the interests of the people whom she represents.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I noted that the judgment was issued during the Court's Hilary term. I hope that someone will explain to the Trump Administration exactly what that means.

Can the Secretary of State tell us why it is right for unelected peers to have a greater say in the article 50 process than elected Members of the devolved institutions?

Mr Davis: I am trying to think what the significance of Hilary term is, except in the context of the Chairman of the Exiting the European Union Committee. I am afraid that I did not hear half the hon. Gentleman's question, so I shall have to write to him. [HON. MEMBERS: “It was about the Lords.”] I could not hear that either. I will answer later.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): There are rules in place which ensure that Parliament can scrutinise legislation as it passes through the House. Will the Secretary of State commit himself to ensuring that those rules remain in place, and that there will be two clear weekends between the Bill's First and Second Readings?

Mr Davis: That is a matter for the usual channels, not for me.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): The Scottish Government have published the details of their proposals for maximising an ongoing relationship with the European Union. Does the Secretary of State recognise that refusing to publish a White Paper is tantamount to political cowardice?

Mr Davis: I really do not think so. I have never been accused of cowardice before, so I am not quite sure how to respond to the question, but the answer is no.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I am becoming increasingly concerned about the way in which supporters of the Government's view are trying to delegitimise the opinions of others by suggesting that their intention is to thwart the decision to leave the European Union. May I ask the Secretary of State to confirm, having read the statement of the Scottish Government's position, that no part of that document suggests that Scotland, or indeed any other part of the United Kingdom, should do anything other than leave the European Union?

Mr Davis: After receiving that document I was very careful not to criticise it publicly, because I wanted to have that debate. I was chairing the Joint Ministerial Committee, so I did not want to, as it were, colour my chairing of it.

As I have said before, the document falls into three categories. There are bits which I did not think would work, there are bits that are subject to debate—especially those relating to devolution issues—and there are bits where we are absolutely on the same page, on matters such as employment law. However, elements of this paper will run into problems not just with the United Kingdom Government, but with other members of the European Union. It was criticised by the Spanish Europe Minister, and it was criticised implicitly by senior Norwegians on the European Free Trade Association front. I do not think that it can be held up as the ideal model for a perfect outcome.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the Secretary of State, to the Opposition spokespersons, and to all 84 Back Benchers who took part in this important series of exchanges.
Point of Order

2.18 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday I told the House in good faith:

“Sir Craig Oliver vehemently denies that he or any other member of David Cameron’s media team ever knew about the aborted Trident test”.—[Official Report, 23 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 25.]

Sir Craig had said that to my parliamentary office staff, in terms bordering on rudeness. However, when invited to appear before the Defence Committee today, he told the Clerk that he did not wish to attend, saying that he had left No. 10 to work for the remain campaign before the test firing took place. Is there some way in which I can correct the record and assure the House that we held a most interesting session today on the subject of the Trident test firing in June, in the regrettable absence of the Secretary of State for Defence and, indeed, Sir Craig Oliver himself?

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman has borne stoically and with fortitude the absence of the named individual. It would certainly have been a gruelling experience to appear in front of the Committee chaired by the right hon. Gentleman. I think the answer to his question as to whether there is some orderly way in which he can put the record straight is: there is, he’s found it, job done.

Industrial Action (Protection of Critical National Services)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

2.20 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I beg to move, that leave be given to bring in a bill to regulate industrial action by those providing certain critical national services; to define critical national services to include railways, operators providing buses, trams and underground railways, the National Health Service and fire and ambulance services; to require those taking industrial action in relation to critical national services to demonstrate that the matter in dispute is such that the adverse effects on the provision of service to the public caused by the action is proportionate and reasonable; to provide for the High Court in England and Wales and the Court of Session in Scotland to adjudicate on proportionality and reasonableness of action and to determine a minimal required level of service to the public to be provided in the case of such action taking place; and for connected purposes.

Trade unions have a long history of campaigning for workers’ rights, stretching back to the 19th century. Trade unions ushered in an era of regulated working hours, holiday pay, sick pay, maternity pay, health and safety at work and decent wages. I applaud those achievements, fought for by trade unions and made law by past Parliaments. I respect what trade unions have achieved in the past 150 years, and I understand that the right to strike is inseparable from the struggles that led to these victories that have helped to civilise our country. But we must also recognise that strikes have a profound effect on the wider public, especially where those strikes occur on critical national services. It is time to consider again the impact that strikes have on the wider public, and to protect the public as well as uphold the right to strike.

A few weeks ago, I received a heart-rending message from a constituent, Jenny Lehane. She said that tears were streaming down her face as she wrote about the effect of the recent Southern railway strikes on her family. She wrote that she had to get her six-year-old son to walk to a bus stop at 5.30 in the morning when the trains were not running so that she could get to work and her son could get to school. She said those responsible should “hang their heads in shame”, and she attached a photo of her son trudging disconsolately down a cold, dark street wrapped in his blanket.

That is the human impact of nearly 40 days of strike action that the RMT and ASLEF have taken in the past few months, most recently only yesterday, to say nothing of the unofficial strike action and work-to-rule that have been taking place on non-strike days. The operator, Southern rail, must shoulder a great deal of blame. I am not here to defend it; in fact, I think it should lose the franchise. But there is no question that the strike action has made a bad service unusable in the last six months.

In this case, I do not believe that the unions have a substantial complaint. No one is losing their job. No one is getting a pay cut. Every single train currently scheduled to run with two members of staff will continue to be scheduled to run with two members of staff. The dispute centres simply on who opens and closes the doors, and whether the train can still run if the conductor does not turn up for work. The rail regulator says that...
there is no safety issue, contrary to the union position. In fact, millions of trains have run perfectly safely since 1984, including 1.5 million trains in the last five years, without a single fatality. All of London underground runs with driver-operated doors perfectly safely, as does most of continental Europe. The RMT is disputing these issues simply to retain its ability to shut down the rail network in the course of future strike action by its conductors.

It is on this flimsy pretext that 400 conductors are preventing 300,000 people from getting to work or getting home to see their loved ones. Sue Gait Eskil had to quit her job as a sales manager. My constituent Lee Fenton was fired from his job working for a local council. Emma Green had to quit her job as a commercial lawyer. Many people are having to consider moving home. It is just not acceptable that the rights of these people are not being adequately protected.

I am afraid to say that there are signs that this kind of industrial action—hugely disruptive to the public, but based on a flimsy pretext—is spreading. Merseyrail and Great Northern are apparently next in the union’s sights, and two weeks ago London ground to a halt due to an RMT strike on the underground over changes that were in fact introduced some time ago.

I am pleased that the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, to his great credit condemned the RMT underground strike without reservation, but it is very disappointing that the Leader of the Opposition did not follow the Mayor’s example. Far from following the Mayor of London’s fine example, he said that, instead of siding with the public, he would in fact join the picket line. [HON. MEMBERS: “Shame.”] Indeed.

The president of the RMT, a man called Sean Hoyle, did not even bother to disguise his motives. He was recently filmed speaking to a group of trade unionists, saying that the strikes had the objective of “bringing down the Government”: those are his words, not mine. Mr Hoyle is entitled to his political views, but he is not entitled to use the power he has as the president of a major trade union to inflict misery on hundreds of thousands of people simply in furtherance of his nakedly political objectives.

We now need further legislation to recognise the public’s right to get to work, to see loved ones or to receive medical treatment, as well as respecting the unions’ right to strike, which I fully accept. We in Parliament should not stand by and allow strike action to cause people to lose their own jobs.

This Bill goes further than previous legislation and proposes that strikes on critical national services, such as the railways, tubes, buses and NHS, should be “proportionate and reasonable” in the view of a High Court judge in order to be lawful. The judge would weigh up the complaint of the striking workers against the impact on the wider public in deciding what is “proportionate and reasonable”, and where strikes were allowed the judge would specify a level of basic service that would be available during any strike. The law in Canada, Spain and Italy already works in a similar way, guaranteeing a basic level of service.

A poll published in yesterday’s Evening Standard found that 55% of Londoners support these proposals, and public support for them is growing daily. Many other Members support these proposals, too. In a similar vein, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), who is in his place, is introducing his own ten-minute rule Bill on 4 February to stipulate that strikes based on the pretext of safety concerns cannot proceed unless the relevant regulator agrees that there is a safety issue.

I do not for one moment dispute the right to strike, but the public also have a right to get to work and not be forced out of their own jobs by union action. A fair balance is needed between the two, and I am afraid to say that current legislation does not provide it.

If there is a Division, in order to support this motion today Members do not need to agree with the precise details of the Bill. For example, Members may think that there are better methods of arbitrating between the rights of the unions and the rights of the public than through a High Court judge; some have suggested to me in the last few days that Parliament itself might be an alternative. But if the House supports this motion, we are sending a simple message that the public have rights as well as trade unions, and that it is Parliament’s duty to protect the public as well.

This Bill is about balance and fairness, and I commend it to the House.

2.29 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I rise to oppose the motion moved by the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp). I do so because the proposed Bill is disproportionate and unnecessary, and an attack on a fundamental British liberty—the right to withdraw labour in a legal trade dispute with an employer.

It is not as though we have not already experienced a full-frontal attack on the rights of workers who are in dispute with their employer under this Government. I draw the attention of the House to yesterday’s Order Paper, which I am sure hon. Members have read. Page 34 gives details of “Remaining Orders and Notices”, and states:

“Business in this section has not yet been scheduled for a specific date. It has therefore been set down formally to be taken in the Chamber today but is not expected to be taken today.”

What could this business be? Point No. 3 on the Order Paper is a motion on trade unions in the name of “Secretary Greg Clark”, dealing with political funds. Point No. 4 is also a motion on trade unions from the Secretary of State, dealing with the draft Important Public Services (Transport) Regulations 2017. Point No. 5 is a motion on trade unions dealing with the draft Important Public Services (Fire) Regulations 2017. Point No. 6 is—you’ve got it—a motion on trade unions dealing with the draft Important Public Services (Border Security) Regulations 2017. Point No. 7 is a motion on trade unions dealing with the draft Important Public Services (Education) Regulations 2017, and point No. 8 is a motion on trade unions dealing with the draft Important Public Services (Health) Regulations 2017.

The Bill proposed by the hon. Member for Croydon South would restrict the rights of people in the workplace further, even before the Government have brought into force their latest full-frontal attack on workers. We all know that if the Bill were allowed to proceed, it would simply be the thin end of the wedge of even more anti-trade union legislation from the Conservatives, because this is what they do when they are in power—dogs bark, birds fly and Tories attack workers’ rights.
In the press, as he did in his speech, the hon. Gentleman framed his Bill specifically as a response to the Southern rail dispute, but of course it goes much further, as it covers transport in general, the national health service, and fire and ambulance services. This is not just about one industrial dispute, whatever its rights and wrongs. The Bill is about further restricting the long-fought-for right of workers in a free society to withhold their labour.

The hon. Gentleman talks about disproportionate industrial action, but it is important to bear in mind what the proportions really are. There were 106 strikes in 2015—the last year for which we have figures—which is an eighth of the number of strikes that took place in 1985. That equates to a loss of 0.003% of all working days in 2015, when 81,000 workers went on strike. That is the lowest level since records began in 1893.

Let us look at the type of so-called disproportionate action that occurs in the industries that the hon. Gentleman highlighted. One of the most widely covered strikes this year was that of British Airways workers, who have taken a total of five days’ action to protest against their poverty-level pay. For those workers, that action was a real hardship and sacrifice. On average, mixed fleet cabin crew—the category was introduced deliberately to create a second-class group of workers at the company—earn £16,000 a year including allowances. Willie Walsh, the boss of the parent company, pocketed £6.5 million. That is the very definition of “disproportionate”.

Industrial action is already highly regulated, especially in the light of the execrable Trade Union Act 2016, the regulations under which I mentioned earlier and are yet to be brought into force. Through that Act, the Government created specific strike thresholds for important public services—50% of the union membership must vote, and 40% of those entitled to vote must be in favour of industrial action for a strike to be legal—but even that is not good enough for the hon. Gentleman. His Bill would put the decision about whether workers can withdraw their labour into the hands of High Court judges. Ironically, that is one group of workers whose pensions the Government are unable to touch. In the light of today’s events, I would have thought that Conservative Members might be more wary about handing over decisions to judges, but that is another matter.

The proposal is also insidious because it comes from the same party that is picking the pension pockets of nuclear workers in places such as Sellafield. The Government’s latest raid on the pensions of nuclear workers will adversely affect communities such as Copeland, where a large number of nuclear workers live. At the time of privatisation, promises were made to ensure the protection of their pensions. During the Committee stage of the Bill that became the Enterprise Act 2016, I tabled amendments that would have ensured that workers in that sector were exempt from the public sector redundancy cap. The Government refused to support those amendments, and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority has now announced its intention to save the Treasury a reported £660 million from those workers, despite the promises that were made when the industry was privatised. It will not escape the attention of the workers of Sellafield—and, indeed, the voters of Copeland—that the Conservatives are not only seeking to make it more difficult for people to take action in specified industries, but robbing those people of their promised pensions.

Where was the hon. Gentleman’s concern for ending industrial disputes when the Government promised to bankroll Southern in this dispute using taxpayers’ money? The Government have inserted clauses into franchise agreements setting out that any losses accrued by the rail company in the event of industrial action can be compensated by the Government using taxpayers’ funds, which removes any incentive for the company to come to the table.

Where was the hon. Gentleman’s concern for consumer access to our critical national services when the Prime Minister dismissed the humanitarian crisis in our hospitals as “overblown”? The real problem facing our national health service is not a handful of days of doctors’ strikes, but this Government’s policy of systemic and constant underfunding, understaffing and overworking. Where was his concern for consumer access to our critical national services when we saw train fares rise again in the new year? Labour protested against the price hikes, but there was no ten-minute rule Bill from the hon. Gentleman about people’s right to a reasonable fare when traveling to work.

There is another way to deal with industrial relations. The Labour Government in Wales recently introduced their own trade union Bill. They are a Government who understand that workers are not an “enemy within” to be isolated and vilified, and that workers themselves are consumers who contribute to the economy and are members of the community. That is the approach that the hon. Gentleman should be advocating. This Bill is an attack on working people by a party that is bankrolling employer intransigence with public money in the very industry that he has been talking about, and I hope that the House will reject it.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23).

The House divided: Ayes 127, Noes 206.

Division No. 128 [2.37 pm]

AYES

Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Ansell, Caroline
Baron, Mr John
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Sir Julian
Bridge, Andrew
Bruce, Fiona
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Philip
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Dowden, Oliver
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Elliott, Tom
Elphicke, Charlie
Foster, Kevin
Freeman, George
Fuller, Richard
Fyshe, Marcus
Ghani, Nusrat
Graham, Richard
Tellers for the Ayes:
How Merriman and
Mr Steve Baker

Industrial Action (Protection of Critical National Services)

Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Green, Chris
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Heappey, James
Herbert, rh Nick
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kinahan, Dr Rosena
Allin-Khan, Dr heroine
Ali, Rushanara
Alexander, Heidi
Abrahams, Debbie
Abbott, Ms Diane
Ashworth, Jonathan
Arkless, Richard
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Boswell, Philip
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn

Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Fernier, Margaret
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiellro, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Fint, rh Caroline
Fynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Glass, Pat
Glinond, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Haynes, Lynne
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, rh Mr Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, David
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
MacNeil, rh Mr Angus
MacTaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCaig, Callum
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McGarry, Natalie
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
Meams, Ian
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Morden, Jessica
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O’Hara, Brendan
Oney, Sarah
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Patoners, Steven
Pennycook, Matthew
Philips, Jess
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stamer, Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Michelle
Timms, rh Stephen
Turley, Anna
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunnna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Weir, Miles
West, Catherine
Whiteford, Dr Elidith
Whitehead, Dr Alan

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Arkless, Richard
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Boswell, Philip
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn

Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judy
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
David, Wayne
Day, Martyn
De Piero, Gloria
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Dougherty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Durkan, Mark

Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Fernier, Margaret
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiellro, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Fint, rh Caroline
Fynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Glass, Pat
Glinond, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Haynes, Lynne
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, rh Mr Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, David
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Law, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
MacNeil, rh Mr Angus
MacTaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCaig, Callum
McDonagh, Siobhain

Mr Steve Baker
Wales Bill
Consideration of Lords amendments

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): The National Assembly for Wales passed a legislative consent motion on 17 January, copies of which are available with the Bill documents online and in the Vote Office. I must draw the House’s attention to the fact that financial privilege is engaged by Lords amendment 9. If it is agreed to, Mr Speaker will cause the customary entry waiving Commons financial privilege to be entered in the Journal.

After Clause 17

Lending for capital expenditure

2.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 9.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment 44.

Alun Cairns: I am pleased to open the debate on the amendments made to the Wales Bill in the other place. Given the number of Members who wish to speak in this relatively short debate, I shall aim to keep my comments relatively brief.

First, I place on record my gratitude to the peers who contributed to the scrutiny of the Bill during its passage through the House of Lords. It would be dangerous to try to name them all for fear of forgetting some, but a number who regularly attended briefing sessions and gave feedback throughout the process helped to get this important Bill through the other place without any Government defeats. I thank in particular Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth for steering the Bill so ably through the other House on behalf of the Government, supported by Baroness Mobarik as Whip for the Bill.

I also take the opportunity to place on record my thanks to a number of right hon. and hon. Members of this House. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) started the process when she established the Silk commission in 2011. My right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) expertly guided through Parliament the Wales Act 2014, which implemented the Silk commission’s fiscal recommendations. I pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb). In his time as Secretary of State he took a number of bold decisions, most notably the establishment of the cross-party St David’s day process, which put in place the framework of the Bill. That was a bold move, as I have suggested—one that sought to bring all parties together to make a constitutional agreement that would bring both Houses together, understanding the politics of both sides of this House and of the other place.

My right hon. Friend was unstinting in his belief in the importance of the Bill and subjected himself to immense scrutiny with respect to its contents. I pay tribute to his work in setting the framework that has allowed my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales and I to take it through the Chamber.
It is also appropriate to pay tribute to Members on the other side of the House who played an important part in the scrutiny of the Bill, especially the former shadow Welsh Secretary, the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), and his predecessor, the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), who was involved in the work, negotiations and discussions throughout the process, as well as the current Opposition Front-Bench team.

I wanted amendments 9 and 44 to be spoken to separately, to give right hon. and hon. Members the opportunity to consider the fiscal framework agreed between the UK Government and the Welsh Government. The amendments are directly linked to that agreement.

The agreement reached between the UK Government and the Welsh Government is an historic agreement that is fair for Wales and fair to the rest of the UK. During scrutiny of the Bill last summer, this House approved the removal of the requirement for there to be a referendum before Welsh rates of income tax were implemented, and the fiscal framework paves the way for the devolution of those historic tax powers from April 2019.

The block grant adjustment mechanisms that will take account of the devolution of stamp duty land tax and landfill tax are also part of that agreement, ensuring that the replacements for those taxes in Wales, which the Welsh Government are already legislating for, come on stream in April 2018.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): While the Secretary of State is talking about the fiscal framework, may I welcome the lifting of the cap on borrowing for capital expenditure to £1 billion? That is not quite the £2 billion that Front-Bench colleagues in the other place asked for, but I welcome it as a step forward. Does the Secretary of State agree that that measure will give the opportunity to continue investment in infrastructure in Wales, both digital and physical, and can also contribute to increased productivity?

Alun Cairns: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the scrutiny he provided at previous stages, and for his comments just now. I will come to the numbers later, but I hope he recognises that there was a mature discussion between two institutions, and he is absolutely right that this measure paves the way for the Welsh Government to use their new borrowing powers to legislate for and finance things that really matter to the Welsh people.

The agreement ensures that, when tax powers are devolved, the Welsh Government will have fair funding for the long term, taking into account Welsh tax capacity and treating population change consistently across tax and spending. In doing so, we are delivering on the independent Holtham commission’s ambition of a long-term fair funding settlement and agreement for Wales.

Indeed, I spoke to Professor Holtham only last week, and he is clear that this is a “very fair settlement” and that there is now no case to argue that Wales is underfunded. The Government previously stated that Wales receives a fair settlement. This cements that in place and enhances the settlement.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Does not the Secretary of State agree that the fiscal framework is already out of date because it is pre-Brexit and we now know that Wales will suffer severely if we come out of the single market? Is it not true that the Bill is just another stepping-stone on the way to a new Bill, which we will get when the terms of Brexit are declared?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that we have a positive dialogue with the Welsh Government on the nature and framework of the process and the ultimate outcomes of exiting the EU. I was happy to receive yesterday from the Welsh Government a paper outlining their proposals, and we will of course give it close consideration. It will be subject to a future Joint Ministerial Committee for the European negotiations.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): No doubt, then, the Secretary of State would disagree with the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies), who said yesterday in an interview with me on ITV Wales that Wales should simply get in line with the Brexit process and just kowtow to the Prime Minister’s agenda?

Alun Cairns: I did not hear my hon. Friend’s comments, but should there be any attempt to frustrate the process of exiting the EU by the Welsh Government, the Welsh population would not expect or want it. After all, Wales voted to leave the EU, and it is only right and proper that we act on that instruction and direction, which came from the public in Wales. I would hope that the Welsh Government continue to engage positively in the way that they have.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): Given the respect that the Secretary of State says there is between the institution of the National Assembly and the Government here at Westminster, should he not be disappointed that the Supreme Court has not ruled today that there should be a formal consultation with Wales via the National Assembly?

Alun Cairns: We have maintained that the views of the Welsh Government are important, but the views of other stakeholders in Wales are also relevant to the discussion. The Welsh Government will rightly form their view, and the UK Government will come to a conclusion that serves all parts of the United Kingdom, including other stakeholders in Wales, as part of the process. The legal action that the Welsh Government took was a matter for them. We have had the judgment, and we need to respect and act on it.

I shall return to the fiscal framework and the funding settlement for Wales. I have already mentioned Professor Gerry Holtham, but it is appropriate that we pay particular tribute to him for the work that he did. We should also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary for the part he played in the negotiations, and to the way the Welsh Government and Mark Drakeford, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, went about the negotiations with my right hon. Friend, whereby two mature institutions discussed serious matters that will have long-term positive consequences for Wales.

3 pm

Building on the existing funding floor, the Welsh Government will continue to have a fair level of funding for the long term, taking into account Welsh tax capacity and treating population change consistently. For the
first time, we have agreed to add a need-based factor of 115% into the Barnett formula, as Holtham recommended. We are embedding the funding floor that we announced in December 2015 into the mechanisms that decide how Wales is funded. The significance of this measure should not be understated: the Labour party called for it from Cardiff Bay for many years while it was in power in this place, but it has taken a Conservative Government to introduce that needs-based factor and deliver on Wales’s needs. I hope that the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), will recognise the significance of bringing the needs-based factor into the Barnett formula.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Does not the Secretary of State share my concern that the needs-based factor will be based on sums ascertained in 2009-10, which will be effectively 10 years old when it comes into effect? There should be a review before it starts.

**Alun Cairns**: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention, and for the scrutiny and interest she has rightly given the Bill, but I hope she recognises the significance of the fiscal framework. The needs-based factor to which she refers is 115%, and the current level is well above that. It will fall to 115% over time, recognising the fair settlement that Wales gets because of its needs. It is significant that that needs-based factor is being introduced into the Wales settlement for the first time. It is something for which the hon. Lady and her party have been calling for some time, but it took a Conservative Government to deliver it.

**Jo Stevens**: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to go down a route for which no decisions have been taken. We are keen to engage and discuss those matters and, as we have already said, we are keen to engage with the Welsh Government and the other devolved Administrations on future funding arrangements. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise the fairness of the way we have approached the Barnett settlement and the fiscal framework, and that that will give him confidence that, as we hope, we will achieve a fair settlement for Wales and all parts of the United Kingdom as we exit the European Union.

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Alun Cairns**: I would like to make a little progress, but I will happily give way later if time permits.

We have agreed a fair way for the block grant to be adjusted to take account of tax devolution and the devolution of a portion of income tax, and a transitional multiplier of 105% in the Barnett formula that will give the Welsh Government additional money, over and above current levels, whenever we increase spending in a devolved area. That 105% demonstrates the even longer-term transition to getting down to the floor of 115%. We are doubling the Welsh Government’s capital borrowing limit, so that they will be able to borrow up to £1 billion—as the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) pointed out a moment ago—to invest in infrastructure throughout Wales.

Lords amendment 9 puts the new capital borrowing limit in place now, so that it will be available as soon as the Welsh Government start to raise revenues through the taxes we are devolving. Lords amendment 44 ensures that Lords amendment 9 comes into force two months after Royal Assent, thereby putting the new borrowing limit into place well in advance of the devolution of tax powers. As the hon. Member for Torfaen rightly highlighted, that will allow the Welsh Government to get on with things that matter, and to legislate and use the new financial capacity that the Bill will grant. Taken with the Wales Bill, the agreement paves the way to making the Welsh Assembly a more powerful, accountable and mature institution, with greater powers and responsibilities to grow and support the Welsh economy.

The fiscal framework agreement resolves once and for all the perceived issues of underfunding that have overshadowed political debate in Wales for so long. It provides the Welsh Government with a powerful new borrowing limit to deliver much-needed infrastructure investment, and it ensures that the devolved Government in Wales can become truly accountable to the electorate by raising around a quarter of the money that they spend. Gone are the days when poor levels of public service in Wales could be blamed on perceived underfunding. For too long, funding was used as an excuse for poor outcomes, but not any longer. If they want big government, the Welsh Government could even raise taxes to pay for it. Or, if they want to reduce income tax levels, they could look to drive out inefficiencies and allow Wales to be seen in a new entrepreneurial light. I urge the House to agree to the Lords amendments.

**Jo Stevens**: (Cardiff Central) (Lab): In the spirit in which the Bill has so far developed, we will this afternoon see something of a rarity in my life: I will, on occasions, agree with the Government and some of the measures they are taking. Before the Secretary of State gets too
excited about that, though, it has to be put on record that the Bill has had a chequered history. It started out very badly—so badly that the Government had to take it away and start all over again. The second attempt was better, and we have now reached a point at which although it is still far from ideal, there has been considerable movement by the Government as a result of pressure from the Opposition and in the other place.

I put on record my thanks to my predecessors, my hon. Friends the Members for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) and for Newport West (Paul Flynn), and their Front-Bench teams, for their work during the Bill’s passage. I particularly thank my colleague Baroness Morgan of Ely and our team in the other place for the sterling efforts they made to secure numerous improvements to the Bill through debate and discussions with the Government, who took a largely constructive approach to concessions. We therefore support the Bill in its current, improved form, and will not attempt to frustrate its passage.

I shall not detain the House longer than necessary on matters on which there is agreement, but I wish to make substantial points on the Opposition amendments at the tail end of the selection list, on which I may wish to test the will of the House. We are hopeful that we can make good progress and reach those amendments.

Given the importance of the consequences of Lords amendments 9 and 44, it is right to put something on the record about them. They will raise the Welsh Government’s overall capital borrowing ability to £1 billion, and from April 2019 the annual capital borrowing limit will rise to £150 million—15% of the overall figure. As the Secretary of State pointed out, all that stems from the fiscal framework agreed by the Government here in Westminster and the Welsh Assembly Government. It is welcome news; I congratulate the Welsh Government. Like the Secretary of State, I particularly congratulate the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, Mark Drakeford, for working so hard to seal this important deal with the UK Government. I also pay tribute to the Government for moving on this issue.

The increase in borrowing ability is so important because the austerity that successive Conservative Chancellors have imposed on Wales has had severe consequences for the Welsh Government’s ability to invest, particularly in infrastructure. As has been pointed out, with the loss of European funding that Wales will experience once we leave the EU, the ability of the Welsh Government to invest in infrastructure becomes even more critical. Therefore, moves to enhance the Welsh Government’s ability to invest in and develop infrastructure for the future are of course welcome. It is all about investing in Wales and boosting our economy, and this measure will go a significant way towards doing that.

Sensible infrastructure investment led by the Welsh Government will help improve productivity rates in Wales and increase the gross value added of Wales. However, as Members will hear me say several times today, the Government plans do not go far enough. In the other place, my Front-Bench colleague, Baroness Morgan, tabled an amendment to raise the borrowing cap to £2 billion based on the Holtham recommendations. We accept £1 billion as a step forward, but it is clearly not enough to properly meet the demands of the Welsh economy. Before the Minister responds to that point, I caution the Government against viewing the cap as a target. The point is to see the flexibility and dynamism provided by the higher limit, rather than to look at only how much is borrowed.

Many successful businesses do not use 100% of their borrowing facility, but leverage their borrowing to a sensible percentage of the facility based on the economic context in which they are operating. The higher £2 billion that was sought would not necessarily have been used, but would have allowed greater flexibility and freedom for the Welsh Government to invest in a greater number and a greater scale of critical schemes and infrastructure projects.

I make these points to the Minister to put them on record and to push his conversations with the Treasury ahead of the forthcoming Budget, but, as I have said, we do welcome the step forward that Lords amendments 9 and 44 provide and we will not vote against them.

Paul Flynn: May I say that it is a matter of some pleasure to see this Bill going through the House? It started off, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) said, as a dreadful and ugly Bill. This is not the slap of firm Government, but the timid, limp wrist cringe of a weak, uncertain Government, who do not know in what direction they are going. None the less, the result is generally beneficial, and a step forward—a stuttering step forward and not one of which we can feel greatly proud. We also know that we will have to come back to it because the world has changed after Brexit.

I accept that there has been some improvement in this Bill. I am talking about the £1 billion in the amendment, but it should have been £2 billion. The Welsh Assembly has a very good record of investing in infrastructure and other projects, but we do need more investments in the future. The purchase of Cardiff airport was a great success.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): Much has been made of this £1 billion cap, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the M4 relief road, which is on his doorstep, has been talked about a lot. Access to borrowing has been available to the Welsh Government to crack on with scheme, but they have done nothing. The £1 billion is a sensible amount. Will he comment on the broader use of these powers?

Paul Flynn: The hon. Gentleman well knows why the delays have taken place on that scheme. Obstacles are in the way of the scheme going through the system of appeals and the public inquiry, but, certainly, there is unlimited enthusiasm. It is nice to see him sitting there among half an acre of empty green leather seats today. I noticed that, on a previous reading of this Bill, one party took great advantage, taking a video swipe that showed the Opposition Benches empty, apart from the three Members of Plaid Cymru. The visual image was that the Member who was speaking—a Plaid Cymru Member—was someone who habitually empties these Benches as people stampede to the Tea Rooms whenever he speaks. People should not lie by using these misleading pictures of the House.

What we have before us is an unprecedented challenge to Wales. We must understand what leaving the single market will do for Wales, for Welsh industry, for Welsh farming and for the health service. It will hit us much
harder in Wales than in England, and we must make allowances for that. However, we are not doing anything of the kind.

The hon. Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams) talked about roads, and we do have a great problem there. I am talking about the highway robbery of the Severn Bridge tolls. We have had 52 years of double taxation of local people, and that is set to continue. Perhaps the Welsh Assembly could look into that infrastructure project. It is an outrage that people are paying twice for the tolls: we pay our share of the national road scheme in Wales and the west of England, and we pay over again for the tolls.

It was accepted by this House, under the Severn Bridges Act 1992, that those charges should be in place for a certain period. That period will come to an end later this year or early next year, when the Severn bridges have the same status as every other piece of motorway in the rest of the United Kingdom, and should be treated as such. The cost of maintenance should be borne by national funding. That is an unquestionable argument in favour of the abolition of the tolls.

There is a similar argument for the abolition of the tolls on the Cleddau Bridge, though their genesis was rather different. We cannot allow this psychological barrier to Wales to continue to exist. We want to give the impression of complete accessibility as that will be beneficial to those living on both sides of the River Severn. I hope the Government will look at this again.

When we look at these Bills that come up year after year, we see a growing acceptance by the people of Wales of the idea of devolution. I am glad to see the absence of that band of Conservative MPs who tried to vote against a clause very similar to this one on Third Reading.

This Bill will give the Welsh Assembly greater dignity and status as a real Parliament. From that point of view, we welcome it, but what we have seen today in this Chamber is that grudged nature of devolution. I hope the Government will look at this again.

Stephen Crabb: I had not planned to say much this afternoon, but I thought that I would take the opportunity to contribute. First, let me put on the record my thanks to the Secretary of State and to Baroness Randerson who has not been mentioned this afternoon. Baroness Randerson was a Minister in the Wales Office when I was Secretary of State, and she was a fantastic rock of wisdom and support on matters relating to devolution. The amendments before us really give effect to the fiscal framework agreement, and represent the culmination of all those original aims that we set out for this next stage of devolution.

I remember sitting down with the then Prime Minister David Cameron two and a half years ago in the lead-up to the Scottish referendum—we all felt that it was a moment of unique constitutional history—and saying, ‘Well, where does this leave Wales? Do we need to do something further on Welsh devolution?’ We had already had the Silk reports. To be honest, they were on the shelf. My feeling was that it was not good enough to leave Welsh devolution in limbo. Yes, there was a bit of pressure coming from some of the opposition parties in the Welsh Government to give effect to Silk 2, but there was no overwhelming pressure. Conceivably, we could have resisted that pressure, but I thought that moving on to the next stage of Welsh devolution was the right thing to do.

I am immensely grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to Baroness Randerson who were with me at the time in the Wales Office. We really talked about the matter to see what we should do. Comments have already been made this afternoon about how the Bill has changed, but it has followed an entirely appropriate and correct process, including a draft Bill, a consultation, the taking of advice and guidance, and amendments. The tone throughout has been one of listening. However, the original objectives have not changed. We wanted to create a stronger, clearer devolution settlement for Wales to end the constant arguing that resulted in the UK Government and the Welsh Government trotting off to the Supreme Court to debate which Administration are responsible for which policies—it was absolutely ridiculous. We also want to create a fairer devolution settlement, which is where the financial aspect comes in.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman for what he has done. My colleague Jenny Randerson greatly enjoyed working with him. He has pushed this agenda forward. One test that he employed at the time was to see whether the settlement would stand the test of time and whether a chapter would be closed—would Wales get used to its new constitutional settlement and would we not have to return to devolution in future? Has that test been met?

Stephen Crabb: To be absolutely honest, I do not think that this represents the end of the book on Welsh devolution, but we need a prolonged period in which the Welsh Government learn to deploy their powers and use their competencies in a way that benefits the people of Wales. We were talking about the M4 upgrade earlier; an early deal that I did when I was Secretary of State for Wales involved making new money available to the Welsh Government to crack on with it. The project had been talked about for years. I remember taking a question on it during Welsh questions and William Hague leant across to me and said that people were talking about it 20 years ago when he was Secretary of State for Wales. We are still waiting for any substantial action despite the money being available. That is the challenge that risks corroding public support for devolution in Wales—the sense that the Welsh Government, despite their additional powers, seem unable to crack on and take big, bold decisions to improve the lives of people in Wales.
Returning to my previous point, the Bill meets the core objectives that we set out. The reserved powers model and additional powers for the Assembly and for the Welsh Government create a stronger devolution framework. Amendment 9 will create a clearer and fairer settlement as a result of the fiscal framework and the funding floor for the Welsh Government’s new borrowing powers. I remember being told two and a half years ago that the four things that we wanted to achieve had no chance of success. I was told that the Treasury would not agree to them, that the Welsh Government would not agree to take tax-raising powers—income tax powers—and that my own Back Benchers would not agree. However, all the parties worked together to sketch things out while respecting each other’s differences. Plaid Cymru has long-standing aspirations and ambitions for Welsh devolution that, frankly, no Wales Bill has met, but the tone was constructive and that has laid a good foundation and has provided smooth passage for a reasonably good Bill. It is not the end of the story, but I hope that it is the end of an interesting chapter for Welsh devolution.

Liz Saville Roberts: I am sure that the House will join me in wishing the best to my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), who is expecting the imminent arrival of the latest member of his family. [Hon. Members: “Hear, hear.”] I sympathise with all MPs who have to balance family life and parliamentary duty.

I, of course, welcome to an extent the fact that a fiscal framework is on the verge of being in place, giving the Welsh Government a degree of financial accountability that is intrinsic for any functioning democratic Parliament. Judgment is still very much out, however, on whether it can really deliver the economic accountability and levers for growth that are required in this tumultuous time. I therefore want to start with a few brief comments about the framework’s ambition, or lack thereof. I then want to ask the Minister a specific question about how the framework will operate before finally discussing the capital expenditure limit outlined in amendment 9.

Despite finally having this fiscal framework in place, we still lag behind every other devolved Administration in terms of powers and responsibilities. Earlier today—like most days—we were embroiled in the Brexit conundrum and all its unravelling economic implications, but the Government’s insistence on a patchwork approach to devolution means that Wales will not have the real levers for growth that it needs at this most difficult of economic times. If the Conservative party wants to talk about the real opportunities that a single market and customs union exit brings for Wales, it should be looking at the fiscal levers for growth, including VAT, the most important tax for Wales, and how it could be devolved. I hope the Minister will indicate that he plans to review the framework in the light of recent developments to ensure that Wales has such fiscal levers.

I briefly want to touch on a technical point that my party colleague, Adam Price AM, has already raised with the Welsh Government’s Cabinet Finance Secretary. The much trumpeted relative need provision of the fiscal framework—the 115% rule, which is referred to as the Welsh floor—was based on a set of criteria that determined Wales’s relative need in 2009-10. There seem to be no plans to conduct a review of that relative need when the floor is set to be implemented approximately three years from now, meaning that those relative needs will be based on figures that are 10 years out of date. This was discussed briefly in earlier interventions, but the 115% rule surely cannot be set in stone for all time, so I ask the Minister to propose a review to investigate that.

Alun Cairns: I am happy to clarify that the fiscal framework agreement, which is supported by the Welsh Government, includes opportunities for periodic reviews.

Liz Saville Roberts: I welcome those comments about periodic reviews as opposed to using 10-year-old statistics. I also have some concerns about the framework’s dispute resolution mechanism, but there may not be the time to discuss them here. We may be able to resolve that problem in future discussions.

I want to finish by emphasising the fact that both Governments lack ambition. In the Lords, Plaid Cymru called for a £2 billion capital expenditure limit, which was supported by Labour. However, under pressure from the devo-sceptic Tory party, we can see in amendment 9 that we are left with a capital expenditure limit of exactly half that. Although I am pleased that a fiscal framework is finally in place, I cannot avoid the observation that Wales is once again being short-changed through a lack of vision and ambition.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in a debate that is hugely important to me. As someone who served as a Member of the National Assembly for Wales for eight years before my six years here, almost all of my political life has been dogged—if I can use that word—by Wales Bills of one sort or another. I do not know whether I will still be a Member of this Parliament when the next round comes but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) said, I am sure that there will be one.

It is a great honour to debate a particularly important Wales Bill, which makes devolution much more stable than it has been since it was first established in 1999. I could speak about a host of matters and on some of them there would be disagreement across the Floor of the House, but two principles are hugely important to me. The first relates to the fiscal issues, which I will come to, but I believe also that moving to a reserved powers model is of fundamental importance. There will be disagreements about what should be reserved to the Westminster Parliament, but, generally speaking, moving to a reserved powers model will be a big step forward. People—including me—have been calling for it since 1999, and we should not forget that in the discussions about finance.

This debate is about financial issues, one of which relates to borrowing powers. I greatly support the measure, which gives the Welsh Government new and important borrowing powers. Other Members have suggested that the ceiling is not high enough, but I have heard Mark Drakeford, the responsible Minister in Cardiff, say that the Welsh Government will probably not borrow the £1 billion allowed in the first instance. I believe that the borrowing power will make a significant difference to the way the Welsh Government can operate.

3.30 pm

There has also been some debate about the 115% rule. Throughout my time in politics in Wales, we have heard people—usually Opposition Members—calling for a level
of spending in Wales that is the equivalent of spending in Britain, and that 115% is it. In fact, the UK Government are investing rather more than that, so the 115% is less than is being spent now. There has never been sufficient appreciation of the scale of the current Government’s funding for Wales. Complying all the time gives the wrong impression. What has been called for since I became a Member of the Assembly in 1999 has been delivered, and I think we should recognise that.

The devolution of income tax is particularly important to me. I have long believed that it is crucial if devolution is to move forward. For any Welsh Government to be accountable to the people, they have to be fiscally and financially accountable. The form of that accountability has to be one that the voting public recognise, and income tax is that form. If income tax is devolved, there will be a debate at every election about the appropriate level of income tax. People will vote looking at both sides of the ledger—what the Government intend to spend and what they intend to raise. Until now, all we have had is a spending plan. When I was a spokesman for my party on financial issues in the Assembly, I would not refer to the annual budget as a budget, which caused a bit of controversy; I would refer to it only as a spending plan. We have to have both sides, and that is where we are moving to with the devolution of income tax.

I am hugely proud to support this very good Bill. Of course, it is not the end of the story—who knows what will be down the road in the next Parliament and thereafter? But it is a good Bill that takes us to a much more stable place and gives the Welsh Government much more accountability. The Bill not only delivers a clear position within a unified United Kingdom but gives the Welsh Government a degree of influence and power to deliver the sort of devolution that we, the people who live in Wales, want.

Lords amendment 9 agreed to, with Commons financial privilege waived.
Lords amendment 44 agreed to.

Clause 21

TRANSFERRED MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 10.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments 28 to 32, 46 and 137.

Guto Bebb: The amendments deliver a comprehensive and lasting devolution settlement for Wales on water and sewerage. As right hon. and hon. Members know, water is of great symbolic importance as well as practical significance in Wales. Throughout the Bill’s passage, few issues have evoked more passion and debate. There is no question but that there cannot be a clear and lasting devolution settlement for Wales without resolving the issue of water devolution. The Government have therefore been determined to grasp the nettle and resolve the matter once and for all.

I was therefore delighted last autumn, when we were able to announce that we would replace the Secretary of State’s powers to intervene on water with a statutory agreement between the UK Government and the Welsh Government—indeed, the US Government. Replacing the intervention powers with a formal protocol represents a clear break with the past, and is another landmark in the history of Welsh devolution.

The existing intervention powers were put in place in the Government of Wales Act 2006, when the Labour party was in government. Since then, they have been used on almost totemic status, despite having never been used. Their removal is another important change—albeit many others in the Bill—that marks the coming of age of devolved government in Wales. Amendments 30 to 32 give effect to this historic change.

Amendment 30 sets out the statutory requirements for the protocol that will be agreed between the two Governments, and we are absolutely clear that the protocol will have teeth. Both Governments will be subject to a duty to act in accordance with the new agreement, and once it is in place, both will need to agree any changes to it. The agreement will also need to include a process that both Governments sign up to for resolving any disagreements. The new arrangements will need to be negotiated, and that may take some time, but the Bill, as amended in the House of Lords, ensures that the Secretary of State’s water intervention powers can be repealed once an agreement is formally entered into.

Amendment 31 is also a crucial part of this package, as it imposes a duty on UK and Welsh Ministers to have regard to consumers on either side of the border when exercising functions relating to water resources, water supply or water quality.

The removal of these intervention powers ensured we were able to conclude our consideration of the wider devolution issues relating to water and sewerage, including the questions of whether powers over water and sewerage should be aligned with the England and Wales border and whether the sewerage intervention powers that were in clause 46 of the Bill when it left this House could be removed.

Amendment 30 removed the sewerage intervention powers from the Bill, and a great deal of work has gone into the question of whether the devolution boundary should be aligned with the geographical boundary of Wales.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I welcome the giving up of the intervention power, but does the Minister remain concerned, as I do, that there will be no direct line of accountability between Ofwat and Welsh Ministers?

Guto Bebb: I dispute the view that there will be no direct line of accountability between Welsh Ministers and Ofwat. There will be an opportunity to consult and work through the Secretary of State. The protocol that is being put in place will also address that issue in more detail in due course. However, hon. Members should welcome the fact that we are moving in that direction on the mature basis of a protocol between the two Governments.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the Minister clarify the position on the Competition and Markets Authority? Its regulatory role is very relevant to water. Will it be accountable to the Welsh Government and the Assembly?
Guto Bebb: It is important to highlight that the Bill is not devolving competition power; it is being reserved. Therefore, the Welsh Government—and this place, obviously—will have the ability to ensure that the views of electors in Wales on this important issue are taken into account.

Of course, the Silk report recognised that water and sewerage devolution is complex and that further work was needed to consider the practical implications of implementing the commission’s recommendations. Immediately after the St David’s day agreement, the Government set up the joint Governments’ programme board with the Welsh Government to look at these issues and to report on the likely effects implementing the recommendations would have on the efficient delivery of water and sewerage services, on consumers and on the water undertakers themselves.

After considering the conclusions of that work, the Government brought forward amendment 28, which provides for new schedule 7A to the 2006 Act, which is inserted by schedule 1 to this Bill, to be amended to devolve water and sewerage policy as it relates to Wales. While, on paper, this simplifies the devolution arrangements, it will involve the unpicking of a considerable number of provisions in primary and secondary legislation to align respective ministerial powers and duties with the England and Wales border.

Amendment 29 provides an order-making power limited to making changes to previously transferred functions and to functions directly conferred by primary legislation relating to water and sewerage, so that we will be able to make the various associated changes through secondary legislation once the Bill has been enacted.

The amendments in this group provide a significant package of water devolution to Wales. They deliver a stable, mature and effective devolution settlement by aligning powers over water and sewerage with the national border and replacing the Secretary of State’s intervention powers relating to water with an intergovernmental protocol. These new arrangements are in the best interests of water consumers on both sides of the border. I urge the House to accept these Lords amendments.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): The devolution of water and sewerage matters to the Welsh Government is welcome—and, if we are honest, somewhat overdue. The tragedy of Tryweryn will never be forgotten, but the amendments in this group should, I hope, be another step forward in ensuring that something like it will never happen again. More broadly, while some cross-border aspects of water regulation will remain, we are pleased that the Secretary of State has given up his ability to intervene on this issue. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), I find myself in the somewhat strange place of thanking the Government for their intervention on this issue, albeit after some prodding both here and in the other place.

However, also like my hon. Friend, I still believe that these amendments do not go far enough. While they correct some problems, there remain discrepancies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) said, there is the issue of Ofwat’s accountability to the Welsh Government. While Ofwat is discharging its functions in Wales, surely it ought to be accountable in some way to the National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Ministers. As it stands, Welsh Ministers regulate water and sewerage operators in Wales, but with the Secretary of State being able to exercise his function of giving a general direction to Ofwat without any legally mandated consultation with Welsh Ministers. To be clear, we would argue that only Welsh Ministers should be able to provide directions in connection with matters relating to water and sewerage operators in Wales, or where licensed activities are carried out using the supply system of water or sewerage operators in Wales. Does that not seem a very reasonable and straightforward request? Surely it is not a step beyond imagining for the Minister that the regulator for a sector should be mandated to consult and speak to the politicians dealing with the implementation of that sector.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) may well detail, it is not sufficient to believe that regulation from London will always work in the interests of communities in Wales. I will let him expand on that point and the ramifications of these amendments for the campaign he is fighting in his community. I pay tribute to him for his work in raising the issue, and assure the House that we support him on it.

ECHOING MY HON. FRIEND THE MEMBER FOR CARDIFF CENTRAL, DESPITE THE GAPS IN THESE AMENDMENTS AND THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE WITH THEM, WE WILL NOT VOTE AGAINST THEM. HOWEVER, I WOULD LIKE THE MINISTER TO PROVIDE A SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE TO THE POINTS I HAVE RAISED, TO GIVE US AN ASSURANCE THAT THE ISSUE OF OFWAT AND THE WELSH GOVERNMENT COULD BE LOOKED AT, PERHAPS THROUGH SOME MECHANISM OUTSIDE THE BILL, AND TO KEEP THE HOUSE INFORMED OF HIS PROGRESS ON THAT.

Ian C. Lucas: I, too, welcome this Bill. As a firm believer in the adage that there are no coincidences in politics, I would go so far as to say that its existence is having an impact before it hits the statute book, because just as these amendments were being proposed in the Lords, the news came to my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) that our local water company, Dee Valley Water, was the subject of a takeover bid from Severn Trent Water. I suspect that the takeover bid is not unconnected to the existence of the clauses that will give more powers and a greater role to Welsh Ministers. As it stands, the Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. I suspect that, with the transfer of regulation and accountability from the UK Government to the Welsh Government, it will be much more difficult to advance the present policy course as the Severn Trent bid is being made.

I cannot say too much about that bid, because it will be in court tomorrow; it is, of course, the most important court case that is taking place this week. What I will say is that I am a great believer in local accountability and local services. We have in Wrexham a great water company, Dee Valley Water, which employs more than 300 people. The workforce, to my knowledge, are united in their wish for the Severn Trent bid to be rejected. Because water is a monopoly, the role of regulators—there are and will continue to be two regulators involved in the process, namely Ofwat and the Competition and Markets Authority—is crucial. The regulators have let me down, as a Member of Parliament and a local customer, and they have let down the workforce and the community. The Government have also let the community down by
standing aside while a very good, efficient local business is taken over by a much larger business in what I regard as a predatory way. The workforce are very worried about their future.

I do not want to be part of a customer base that pays into a pot to pay the chief executive of Severn Trent Water a salary of £2.4 million per annum. I think that is completely out of touch with the people I represent and I do not think it is an appropriate course. I do not agree either with our having one water company fewer as a result of the proposed takeover. That means that we will have less competition and fewer benchmarks against which to measure water companies on price and quality. I am disappointed that the Competition and Markets Authority and Ofwat have not got involved and that they have not referred the matter to a stage 2 inquiry so that it can be looked into in more detail.

The Government have let down local people in Wrexham and Chester, where Dee Valley Water supplies water, and the regulators have let the people down. The proposals in the Bill are very welcome indeed, but I wish that they had been introduced a year ago. If they had been, the people of the community that I represent would have been listened to by a Government who had influence and authority and who would have exerted influence to prevent the predatory takeover of our local business, which is serving our community well and being let down badly by the proposal.

**Liz Saville Roberts**: I rise to speak to the second group of amendments, led by amendment 10. My noble Friend Lord Wigley originally welcomed the Government’s announcement that they would devolve power over water, and in Committee he eloquently outlined how an historic wrong could be righted. He set out in great depth how the drowning of Welsh valleys has motivated his politics and the emotions of so many people in Wales, and how 50 years ago in Capel Celyn the compulsory eviction of families from their homes and land meant the destruction of whole communities. Llyn Celyn and Afon Tryweryn are in my constituency.

The high-handed way in which Westminster treated the people of Tryweryn still has repercussions in this place, as well as in communities across Wales. Amendment 30, in which the so-called water protocol is outlined, embodies the entrenched Tory resistance to addressing this injustice in any meaningful terms. What format the so-called protocol may take has never been fleshed out. In this Bill, we do not have a protocol or a draft protocol, and for that matter we do not have an outline of a draft protocol or a protocol by which to arrive at a protocol. However, despite that lack of clarity, the Government are willing to include clauses watered down this already thin provision.

Lords amendment 31 explicitly charges Welsh Ministers with the interest of English consumers when it comes to any changes to our water supply. It is important to note that the amendment specifically references English consumers. We are not concerned with communities or individuals even, but consumers matter and Wales’s natural resources are still not ours to dispose of to our best advantage. That is because the Government are prioritising the primacy of competition over the interests of Wales. The amendment refers us to the Water Industry Act 1991 to define consumers, but that Act was based on promoting competition. Does this mean that the protocol will be based on the Thatcherite dogma that the wellbeing of the consumer—in this case, the water consumer—is tied up with the tenets of free market competition?

**Guto Bebb**

**Liz Saville Roberts**: I thank the Minister for explaining this earlier, but perhaps he will explain it further.

**Guto Bebb**: The contents of the protocol and whether it includes a Thatcherite dogma are surely a matter for the Welsh Government to agree with Westminster, so there will be no Thatcherite dogma unless the Welsh Government agree to it.

**Liz Saville Roberts**: The Minister explained earlier that competition is a reserved matter. In this case, that prompts the question, what does such a dogma have to do with the reserved powers model for Wales, in relation to this most emotive of all subjects? My party and many people in Wales feel cheated. When the Minister played the card of water devolution, we were led to believe that this would be a real game changer, but I am afraid it is no more than smoke and mirrors.

We considered pushing Lords amendment 30 to a vote, but we will spare the Chamber such an exercise, given that we might only manage to tweak the wording of something we have already opposed. I want the record to reflect, however, that my hon. Friends and I will not be taken in by empty words dressed up as substance from the Government. This remains a cynical political sleight of hand—endeavouring to gain capital from an historical event of deep emotional significance in Wales.

**Susan Elan Jones**: As much as two words can ever encapsulate a feeling or a sense, the two words “Cofiwch Dryweryn”—“Remember Tryweryn”—probably do so. I hope that we will not look back at this year and think of another four words, “Cofiwch Dwr Dyffryn Dyfrdwy”—“Remember Dee Valley Water”—as encapsulating the spirit of our age.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) spoke very powerfully about a difficulty in our part of north-east Wales that threatens the livelihoods of many people working for the local water company. In a sense, it is a David and Goliath battle, but there is real fear that David may not win on this occasion. David is in the courts tomorrow, so we cannot speak about many of the intricacies of the situation. We can say, however, that one of the UK’s smallest water companies—indeed, it may be the smallest, but I need to check that—which has the fourth lowest bills of any water company in the United Kingdom, is in court against its Goliath on issues involving the votes of shareholders.

In north-east Wales, we have seen what used to be called the unacceptable face of capitalism, with a nasty, large predator coming in and trying to take over a local company quite against the will of the local workforce and the local consumers. That, I fear, is a cause of great regret. I will not repeat what my hon. Friend said about the issues concerning us—the role of the Competition and Markets Authority, and its lack of linkage in terms of devolution to the Welsh Assembly, and that of Ofwat—but he made some very serious and important points.
about the future of water in our area. I know that great symbolism attaches to Tryweryn, and rightly so. The chair of the action committee of Tryweryn, T. W. Jones, was also a resident of my constituency. T. W., as he was known, fought valiantly for that campaign.

I urge this House and Ministers, as we approach the welcome devolution of water, to think carefully about what is happening with Dee Valley Water and to look carefully at aspects of company law. Surely this cannot be right, given the views of local people, shareholders and the employees of the company. If local ownership matters to us, surely a predatory takeover is in nobody’s interests, other than the large predator itself. I urge the Minister to give thought to the points that my hon. Friend and I have made. I welcome the proposals that devolve water to the Welsh Government. I agree that it is totemic and symbolic, but most of all, I want something that works, especially for people in north-east Wales.

Mr Mark Williams: I will say a few words about clause 46 and Lords amendment 30 on the water protocol.

Every time I travel south in my constituency, I go past a famous piece of graffiti that says “Cofiwch Dryweryn” on the outskirts of the village of Llanhystyd. Intermittently, that acceptable bit of graffiti has been vandalised by others. No sooner has it been vandalised than it is restored to glory, as it should be. As the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) and the Government have acknowledged, such issues need to be dealt with sensitively and history does not always dim those sensitivities.

In that spirit, I reflect on the long gestation of the water protocol. It was recommended by Sir Paul Silk in February 2015. I remember being my party’s representative, alongside the predecessor of the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, Elfyn Llwyd, in the Wales Office when we went through the Silk recommendations and came across the devolution of water and sewerage responsibilities. It was altogether easier to dispense with sewerage than water. The officials were charged with looking at this issue because it was complex, not least because the responsibilities of water companies had to be assigned across national boundaries.

I am pleased that the Government—my party in association with the Conservative party—acknowledged in the St David’s day agreement that there should be a water protocol. On paper at least, the protocol makes eminent sense, although it would be a lot easier for us to pass judgment on it if we had a draft or, indeed, any assessment of the criteria under which it will work. Their lordships made the point that more detail would be needed to assess the criteria under which it will work. Their lordships were looking for a clear statement that the National Assembly has total legislative control over the creation of reservoirs in Wales and for the Assembly to have legislative control over all matters relating to water in all of Wales, coterminous with Wales’s border. Is the Minister satisfied that those questions will be adequately addressed by the protocol once it is enacted?

4 pm

On a pedantic point, the first line of new clause 46, as introduced by Lords amendment 30, states that Welsh Ministers and the Secretary of State “may” make a protocol. Should that not read “shall” make a protocol? If the protocol does not emerge, or if there are difficulties or delays in agreeing one, it would not serve the people of Wales well. I welcome the attempts made so far, but there remain unanswered questions, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister.

Lords amendment 10 agreed to.
Lords amendments 28 to 32, 46 and 137 agreed to.

Clause 1

PERMANENCE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES AND WELSH GOVERNMENT

Alun Cairns: I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 1.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:
Lords amendments 2 to 8, 11 to 27 and 33 to 35.
Lords amendment 36 and amendments (a) and (b) thereto.
Lords amendments 37 to 43, 45, 47 to 136 and 138 to 177.

Alun Cairns: As I stated earlier, we have engaged constructively with peers, the Welsh Government, the Assembly commission, colleagues on both sides of the House and a range of other interested parties on the issues raised, and we have made changes to improve the Bill where there is a good case to do so. The Bill today is a better one as a result. The large number of amendments in the group is testimony to the fact that the Government have been open to improving the new devolution settlement where possible. I do not intend to discuss each amendment in detail, but I will draw some of them to the House’s attention.

We have amended the Bill to deal with concerns about how universities are treated in the new reserve powers model. During the Bill’s passage through the other place, concerns were raised by the higher education sector defining universities as “Wales public authorities” might suggest that they should be classified more widely as “public authorities”. This was not our intention. Amendments 3, 4 and 115 resolve this issue by renaming “Wales public authorities” as “Devolved Welsh authorities”. This responds to calls from universities and Universities Wales. We have also ensured that the Open University will be defined as an authority that carries out a mix of devolved and reserved functions, reflecting its status as a UK-wide institution. This will allow the Assembly to legislate to confer functions on the Open University in devolved areas without requiring the consent of a UK Minister. We have also expanded the list of devolved Welsh authorities in response to concerns raised by the Welsh Government and others.

The Government have introduced several amendments relating to tribunals that resulted from extensive discussions with the Welsh Government, the Ministry of Justice and the senior judiciary and which are intended to
improve the management of the workload of devolved tribunals and to maximise flexibility in the deployment of judicial resources in Welsh tribunals. The amendments tabled in the other place will create a statutory office of president of Welsh tribunals to oversee the work of the devolved Welsh tribunals. New schedule 5 provides for a two-stage process for the appointment of a person to this new statutory role. The new clauses will also allow for the deployment of judges between Welsh tribunals and reserve tribunals in England and Wales so that they might share expertise in a way that cannot happen under current legislation. These are important amendments that are the product of constructive work with the Welsh Government, the Ministry of Justice and others.

The Government’s key aim in introducing the new reserved powers model is to deliver clarity on the boundary between the Assembly’s competence and the competence of this Parliament, particularly in the light of the Supreme Court judgment on the Agricultural Wages Board settlement. Many amendments therefore either alter or remove altogether reservations contained in new schedule 7A to the Government of Wales Act 2006.

The Government have tabled a number of amendments to deal with the planning system and the law that governs the construction of buildings, responding to concerns raised by the Welsh Government. Amendment 71 devolves competence for planning in relation to railways, making it consistent with the position in Scotland. We have also brought forward amendments that replace the full reservation of compulsory purchase with one that covers only compensation. This was again in response to discussions between the UK Government and the Welsh Government.

As for amendments to schedule 1 more widely, we have demonstrated our willingness to devolve significant further powers to the Assembly where a clear rationale can be made for doing so. Amendment 80 removes the reservation relating to teachers’ pay and conditions. This was something that I was keen to devolve from the outset, but I recognised concerns that were expressed by colleagues on all sides of the House as well as by the teachers’ unions. Following constructive engagement with the First Minister and discussions between officials, we are pleased that we both came to the same conclusion—that education is a devolved matter and that it makes more sense for the Assembly and Welsh Ministers to decide the pay and conditions of teachers in Wales, particularly in the light of the greater divergence between the education models that exist in England and the education model that exists in Wales. It is sensible to devolve teachers’ terms and conditions.

Amendment 72 devolves the community infrastructure levy in Wales. That was a priority for the Welsh Government, and has been for a number of years. We have listened to the case that they made and we are again delivering on a demand made by them. We were happy to respond positively and constructively to these calls.

Finally, amendments 36 and 52 devolve legislative and Executive competence to the Assembly and Welsh Ministers to regulate the number of high-stake gaming machines, authorised by new betting premises licences in Wales. This is an issue in which the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) showed particular interest and passion during the earlier stages of the Bill’s scrutiny. The Silk commission made no recommendation on the devolution of betting, gaming and lotteries, but we agreed as part of constructive dialogue with the St David’s day process to consider non-fiscal recommendations made by the Smith commission that it would be appropriate to take forward in Wales.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I, too, place on record my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on the success of her campaign on this issue. Does the Secretary of State agree that when statistics show that an average of £3,000 a day is being staked on these machines, it is very important to devolve these powers and for the regulations to be implemented?

Alun Cairns: I will come on to that specific point, because a review is being conducted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport which will address the specific issues that the hon. Gentleman raises. For the moment, I shall stick to explaining the rationale behind the amendments on fixed odds betting terminals.

One proposal was for the powers to be devolved to stop the proliferation of these so-called fixed odds betting terminals. We concluded that these powers should be devolved in Wales, as they are in Scotland, coming out of the Smith commission. Amendments 36 and 52 therefore ensure that the Bill mirrors the provisions in the Scotland Act 2016 in respect of high-stakes gaming machines. The amendments apply to sub-category B2 gaming machines, and would provide the Welsh Government with a means to address public concerns in Wales regarding the proliferation of these machines. These machines were regulated by the Gambling Act 2005, which was introduced when the Labour party was in power.

The Opposition amendments would go much further than what is already devolved in the Scotland Act by extending this provision to all existing gaming machines with a stake of more than £2, and by devolving powers over existing licences. We did not believe that that was appropriate. As I mentioned a moment ago, the Government have already announced a review into the issue because we recognised the flaws in the 2005 Act. As a result, we are carrying out a thorough process to examine all aspects of gaming machine regulation, including the categorisation, maximum stakes and prizes, location and number of machines, and the impact that they have on players and the communities in relation to, for instance, problem gambling and crime. All those factors are potentially relevant and interrelated. The powers that we have agreed to devolve are intended to enable the Welsh Government and the Assembly to take action to prevent the proliferation of fixed odds betting terminals.

The review that we have announced is the appropriate mechanism for consideration of all those issues in a far more holistic way. I urge Opposition Members not to press their amendments to a vote, but if they pursue them, I shall do my best to respond to some of the issues that concern them. I urge Members to support the Lords amendments.

Susan Elan Jones: I support Labour’s amendment (a) to Lords amendment 36, which would reduce the relevant stake for fixed odds betting terminals to £2. I welcome
the review that is being carried out by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and I also welcome the move to devolve this power to the Welsh Assembly. My reason for doing so is very much in line with all the work that has been done by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), but I fear that we could find ourselves in a ridiculous position. All of us—apart from certain advocates for the betting industry—know that what is happening with fixed odds betting terminals is deeply concerning. Figures as high as about £1.7 billion have been quoted as the profits made on these horrible machines, which cause so much devastation in our communities. We all agree that something must be done fairly urgently, but I fear that the House of Commons could collectively vote to put in place a stake of below £10 but then, if we pass the Lords amendment as it stands, the stake could be reduced only to a minimum of £10 in Wales. That does not seem right to me.

Let me put it another way. Collectively, the House could vote for a maximum stake of £2 in England and Wales, but once the matter is devolved to Wales, the Welsh Government would be limited to £10 and then the House of Commons could not go for a lower stake here, simply because the Government would tell us that that was a case of English votes for English laws and we would be banned from lowering the stake.

All we are asking for is something very pragmatic—something that would give us the right to decide the level of the stake and benefit communities. Let us make no bones about it; these machines, and what is happening in the gambling industry, are hitting our poorest communities the hardest. We see the impacts of it in our industrial villages and in our towns. Let us say once and for all to the harder elements of the gaming industry, some of whom I am sure will be e-mailing us all later, that the nonsense of what is happening with FOBTs must come to an end. Let us say, “Do not think you can intimidate us, or those in the communities who are fed up with the hold that you have on them.”

It is time for us to act firmly. It is time for us to give the Welsh Government full devolution in this regard. It is time for us to lower the stake even further, if possible. It is time for the Welsh Government to have the power to do that, and, hopefully, this place will as well.

Jo Stevens: As the Secretary of State has pointed out, there are a lot of amendments in the group, many of which are welcome and deal with important issues. Given the limited time that is available, however, I shall focus on Lords amendment 36 and our amendments to it.

We welcome the Government’s Lords amendment, as we did when it was moved in the other place, but, as has already been said, we want it to go further. Today gives us the opportunity to achieve that. Our main point of contention with the amendment is that it limits the powers that are being devolved to the Welsh Assembly to regulate fixed odds betting terminals. That ability to regulate will apply only to machines licensed after the Bill becomes law that have a stake of £10 and above.

The Campaign for Fairer Gambling has been campaigning on this issue for some time. It has been an invaluable source of help in our work on the amendments, so I want to put on record my thanks to it. I also thank the all-party group on fixed odds betting terminals, which is so ably chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). It has just completed its inquiry into the machines and is due to publish its report very shortly.

4.15 pm

Both groups are clear, as we are, that the £10 threshold set by Lords amendment 36 is still too high. FOBTs are the only machines on the high street with stakes of £2 and above; all other machines in pubs, arcades and bingo halls are capped at £2 and under. Amendment (a) to the Lords amendment would allow devolved regulation of machines with stakes of £2 or above, rather than £10. Only fixed odds betting terminals would be covered by the amendment, so any fears that the Welsh Assembly would be overstepping agreed devolution limits on gambling would be unfounded.

In a similar spirit, amendment (b) to the Lords amendment would ensure that the Assembly had the power to regulate all current and future licensed FOBTs from the point that the Bill becomes law. That is important because there are an estimated 1,500 terminals in Wales, and according to the latest figures, which cover 2015, £50 million was staked and lost on them during that period.

The financial and social problems and harm that these machines cause in communities across Wales is well known. Having the ability to regulate those terminals already in place would ensure that the Welsh Assembly did not have its hands tied when seeking to deal with this issue.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State mentioned how the Government are devolving teachers’ pay to the Welsh Government because education is devolved. FOBTs are now being devolved, but not full regulation, which simply means that we will be coming back with another Wales Bill to introduce the necessary regulations. Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government concede this point, it would simply mean we would have the measures in place now and would not need to return to this point in future Wales Bills?

Jo Stevens: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government have the opportunity to accept that we could lead the way in Wales. The Secretary of State has already pointed out that he is aware of the social and economic problems that these machines cause, and despite the Department for Culture, Media and Sport’s review, the Bill represents an opportunity. We know what the problem is, and we know we could deal with it right now.

The Secretary of State says that the Government’s intention is simply to match the powers given to Scotland, but the devolution arrangements for Wales, England and Scotland are already different—they are not in alignment—so there is no reason why the Government could not accept our amendments today and agree to the lowering of the stake and that all current and future machines should be covered. Anything less than that would be a bureaucratic nightmare for the Assembly and only half a solution to an already accepted problem.

Jo Stevens: It is unacceptable for the Government to refuse to give the Welsh Assembly the full powers that it needs to deal with this problem simply because Scotland does not yet have them.

There has been a 50% increase in betting shops in Welsh town centres since 2004, but that overall statistic masks the true story. The Campaign for Fairer Gambling
shared with me some research from Geofutures showing what many Labour MPs already know: there are four times as many betting shops in areas of high unemployment than in areas of low unemployment. The machines are deliberately placed so that people who are least able to cope with the drain on their finances that problem gambling can cause are subjected to the highest exposure to those machines most likely to cause it.

These terminals allow players to stake up to £100 every 20 seconds, which is why, although only 3% to 4% of the UK population use FOBTs, those players account for 66% of all UK gaming machine losses. Already massively profitable bookmaking companies benefit even more from the losses on those terminals, to the tune of £1.7 billion just in the last year across the UK.

It is not only Opposition Members who think that this is a problem. Polling carried out by 2CV for the campaign showed that 82% of betting shop customers received the use of fixed odds betting terminals as an addictive activity, with 32% of those borrowing cash to feed their habit. It also showed that 72% had witnessed violent behaviour emanating from players using the machines. Other research has backed this up, consistently showing that fixed odds betting terminals are one of the most addictive and problematic forms of gambling. One study published in a journal from the Cambridge Health Alliance, a Harvard Medical School teaching hospital, found that the terminals had a fourfold correlation with problem gambling, which is higher than any other gambling product available in the UK.

The machines are already causing real and lasting damage to some gamblers and they exacerbate problem gambling more than any other form of betting. If the UK Government will not tackle this issue now, they need to give the Welsh Assembly the power to do that in Wales. The power to regulate existing machines is crucial to tackle the harm that they are causing in many communities across Wales, and our amendments would help to ensure that all such machines were regulated. I urge the Minister to follow his own logic, to be innovative and to accept our amendments. If he does not do so, I am ready to test the will of the House, certainly on amendment (a).

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I welcome the consideration that colleagues in the other place have given to this matter. I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on fixed odds betting terminals, which are affectionately known as FOBTs. As many colleagues know, I have campaigned on this issue for more than a year. Sometimes I feel that it has taken over my life. There are 35,000 FOBTs located in high street bookmakers up and down the UK. These high-stakes, casino-style games are in low-supervision environments and are easily accessible to those who are most vulnerable to gambling-related harm. In Wales, there is a growing problem with FOBTs in local communities. According to the latest statistics, more than £50 million was lost on FOBTs in Wales in 2015.

The Lords amendment is welcome, but it does not go far enough. Powers should be devolved to the Welsh Assembly to allow local authorities to deal with existing clusters of betting shops in deprived areas. The most effective way to do that would be to reduce the maximum stake playable on a FOBT to £2, but the power to achieve that is not included in the Bill. There are growing calls for a reduction in the maximum stake, with more than 93 local councils across the UK, led by Newham Council, having now petitioned the Government to reduce the stake to £2.

The all-party group has concluded its inquiry into the machines. We found beyond reasonable doubt that the maximum stake on a FOBT should be reduced to £2 on a precautionary basis, in line with the objectives of the Gambling Commission. The full findings of the report are due to be published shortly, and we have been encouraged by the willingness of Ministers at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to work with us on this issue. I very much hope that they will respond positively by reducing the stake and properly regulating FOBTs. I eagerly await the result of the current stakes and prizes review.

These machines are directly linked to problem gambling, with four out of five FOBT gamblers exhibiting problem gambling behaviour at stakes in excess of £13 a spin, compared with one in five when stakes of £2 and under are involved. FOBTs cause significant economic and social problems. In particular, they lead to increased incidence of money laundering in bookmakers, as the gambling activity is largely unsupervised and it is therefore relatively easy for fraudsters to use it as a way to clean their money. They are also leading to more problems as players take out payday loans to sustain their FOBT usage. Increasing crime levels have also been reported, with betting shops now accounting for 97% of all police call-outs to gambling venues. Up to September 2014, there was also a 20% increase in police call-outs to betting shops. There has been a clustering of betting shops on Britain’s high streets, with a 43% increase in the number located in towns and city centres. This is destroying the health and vibrancy of our high streets.

The most effective way to limit the harm of such machines is to reduce the stakes, which are currently set at up to £100. A substantially lower stake would bring FOBTs into line with machines in other low-supervision environments such as adult gaming centres and bingo halls. The Gambling Commission itself says that if stakes were being set now, it would strongly advise against £100 stakes on a precautionary basis. A lower stake of £2 is the level that the previous Government said would bring adequate public protection. I encourage the Government to support amendment (a) to the Lords amendments, to devolve powers to Wales and to allow local communities to tackle the problems caused by FOBTs. Such a proactive move not only would recognise the danger of these addictive machines and establish good practice to protect our communities from it, but would be a positive step towards ensuring that we, as a society, take our moral responsibility seriously.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The third group of Lords amendments is wide-ranging and covers a variety of subjects. Some of those subjects are more welcome than others, and I regret to say that some resulted in my party voting down the Bill in the National Assembly. I will not address each amendment, as time is limited, but I will focus on key amendments that are salient to my colleagues’ decision making in the Assembly.

Under scrutiny, the Government have conceded on certain issues, for which I commend them. Those include areas where Plaid Cymru has pressed the Government...
in both places, resulting in Government amendments—that work should be noted. Lords amendment 73, for instance, devolves compulsory purchase, which was mentioned earlier. A previously silent subject, the National Assembly will now, without question, have the power to legislate to enable important infrastructure projects to go ahead. However, those are only small concessions that skirt around more substantive policy areas that could really make a difference.

Lords amendment 38, for instance, adds a new clause creating a statutory office for the president of Welsh tribunals; Welsh tribunals are already devolved. Although that is a welcome move on a practical level, it does little to satisfy those of us, including the Welsh Government, who have been calling for a separate legal jurisdiction to ensure a truly lasting devolution settlement. Without a strong and definitive legal jurisdiction of our own, surmounting the challenges that we all face in unpicking European law in the great repeal Bill will be even more difficult.

I would go so far as to say that the whole Wales Bill has been overtaken by Brexit. Leading constitutional lawyers and academics, and even the leader of the Welsh Tories, agree that the constitutional future of the British state is in flux. There are many possibilities and opportunities for both those, such as ourselves, who champion devolution and those who are sceptical about devolution. Famously, devolution is a process not an event, and we should be clear about the dangers of substantial rollbacks.

That brings me to the main focus of my speech, a series of Government amendments—all variations on Lords amendment 3—that will give Wales public authorities a different name, that of “devolved Welsh authorities.” The wording clarifies what constitutes a devolved public authority. Although, in isolation, the amendment is not a concern, it alludes to a more worrying aspect of the Bill: the ancillary measures in it have been the subject of damning criticism during scrutiny. As to any Assembly Acts deemed ancillary to any of the reservations, of which there are in excess of 200, the UK Government would be entitled to overrule the Assembly.

The Plaid Cymru group in the Assembly last week voted—rightly, I think—against the legislative consent motion for the simple reason that powers are being clawed back. The existing legislative powers of the Assembly were endorsed by a measure of 2:1 in the 2011 referendum, and the powers implicit in that vote are now being retracted. Some of the legislation enacted by the Assembly since that referendum was made under powers that will no longer be available to it when the Bill becomes law. We tabled amendments at several stages of the Bill's consideration to delete the word “normally”, so that there would be no doubt as to whether the Government would grant an Assembly LCM following today’s historic Supreme Court ruling. We will continue to take that stance, and my colleagues in the Assembly are drafting an LCM as we speak.

To finish, I quote no less a personage than the leader of the Welsh Tories. In a radio interview on 17 January, Mr Andrew R.T. Davies said:

“...This won't be the last Wales Bill. Brexit will require devolution changes to realign those responsibilities.”

I can assure the House that my party will do everything in its power to reverse the rollbacks to ensure that Welsh interests are taken seriously during Brexit and to build a truly lasting devolution settlement for Wales.

Alun Cairns: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to respond to the points that have been made. I thank all those Members who have made contributions today, and throughout the Bill’s passage through the House and the other place.

I am disappointed that the Opposition want to divide the House on the proposals we introduced in the other place on fixed odds betting terminals. Those proposals responded positively to calls that were made by colleagues on both sides of the House and by the Welsh Government. The Silk commission made no recommendations in that area, but having considered the Smith commission recommendations for Scotland we believe it is right to put the Assembly on the same footing as the Scottish Parliament and allow it to legislate on the proliferation of fixed odds betting terminals in Wales.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The Secretary of State asserts that only Members on this side of the House oppose the proposals, but Conservative Members agreed that that would in fact be true. He justified the Government’s position by stating that amendments we had tabled to rectify that rollback would “cut across one of the underlying core principles of the Bill: the Assembly should not be able to impose burdens on non-devolved bodies without agreement...To add a specific exception to the consent process for the Welsh language would undermine that principle.”—[Official Report, House of Lords, 10 January 2017; Vol. 777, c. 1935.]

So there we have it—an admission by the Government that the Bill does indeed take powers away from the National Assembly; any exemption for the Welsh language would undermine UK sovereignty.

Earlier I mentioned the dangers of a reverse devolution agenda post-Brexit, but it seems as though that is the reality we are already facing today. Unfortunately, that is not the only example of significant rollbacks in the Bill; the ancillary measures in it have been the subject of damning criticism during scrutiny. As to any Assembly Acts deemed ancillary to any of the reservations, of which there are in excess of 200, the UK Government would be entitled to overrule the Assembly.

The Wales Bill Wales Bill

In the other place, Lord Bourne outlining the fact that under the Bill there will be a loss has produced a briefing paper confirming our fears, reassurance, or indeed any justification, as to why the Bill

The effect of future Welsh language measure were to be proposed, it would no longer be applicable to many more reserved authorities, such as Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and the Crown Prosecution Service. Consent would be required to add to the list of devolved public authorities, which are contained in the Lords amendments before the House today. The Minister’s words offered no reassurance, or indeed any justification, as to why the Bill should include such a regressive step.

4.30 pm

The National Assembly for Wales research service has produced a briefing paper confirming our fears, outlining the fact that under the Bill there will be a loss of legislative power relating to the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. In the other place, Lord Bourne
of the Welsh Assembly oppose what the Government are proposing and have supported my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), including Darren Millar from north Wales. Has the Secretary of State consulted his Assembly Members on this point?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman makes a relevant point. We take the issue of problem gambling seriously. As I mentioned, we are committed to looking at all aspects of gambling machine regulations as part of a wide-ranging review of gambling. The regulation of fixed odds betting terminals is covered by the Gambling Act 2005, and we recognise that flaws exist in the current regulatory arrangements. They were introduced by the Labour party and it is time that they were reviewed. That is what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is doing. We will act when that work has been completed, so I hope hon. Members will vote against the Opposition amendments and in support of the Lords amendments tabled by the Government.

The hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) suggested that the Bill showed a half-hearted approach to devolution. In the positive spirit in which the Bill has come through both Houses, I remind him that legislative competence orders were in place when we came into power in 2010 and started this process. A conferred model was in place then; the Bill introduces a reserved model. We have in place a needs-based funding settlement—something that has been called for for decades—and we are devolving significant tax powers. We have removed the water intervention powers and extended the Welsh Government’s powers in a significant settlement—something that has been called for for decades—and we are devolving significant tax powers. A host of positive steps have been taken.

We all know that Members in the other place rightly pay close scrutiny to matters of constitutional importance in Bills such as this. Despite being in a minority in the other place, the Government were not defeated on the Bill, so I hope that Members from both sides of the House, and all Opposition Members, will recognise the significance of the Bill and, once and for all, welcome it.

Lords amendment 1 agreed to.
Lords amendments 2 to 8, 11 to 27 and 33 to 35 agreed to.

After Clause 48

GAMING MACHINES ON LICENSED BETTING PREMISES

Amendment (a) proposed to Lords amendment 36.—
(Jo Stevens.)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 170, Noes 281.

Division No. 129] [4.37 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi
Austin, Ian
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Coyle, Neil
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
De Piero, Gloria
Debbonaire, Thangam
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiell, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Fint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Glass, Pat
Glinson, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mears, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Morden, Jessica
Nandy, Lisa
Onn, Melanie
Onnurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shannon, Jim
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Mr Andrew
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smithy, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Starmer, Keir
Tellers for the Ayes: Vicky Foxcroft and Jeff Smith
The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): I beg to move,

That the Charter for Budget Responsibility: autumn 2016 update, which was laid before this House on 17 January, be approved.

This debate is not about the technicalities of fiscal policy. It is about our commitment to budget responsibility and delivering it in a way that is appropriate to our current circumstances. It is about supporting our economy through the uncertainty following the Brexit vote and preparing it to take full advantage of the new opportunities ahead. It is about securing Britain’s economic future, supporting working families and ensuring that our children are not burdened with debts that our generation chooses not to pay.

When my predecessor came into office in 2010, he inherited the highest budget deficit in post-war history, with Government borrowing £1 of every £4 that they spent. Debt had almost doubled since 2005-06, unemployment was at 8% and the UK’s percentage increase in national debt between 2007 and 2010 was the biggest in the G7. The 2008 recession showed us the price that is paid for seven years of irresponsible fiscal policy, and it demonstrated once again that it is always the poorest in our country who suffer the most when the economy crashes and unemployment rises.

We remain resolute in our determination to return the public finances to balance, to get debt falling and to pay our way in the world, but we have to do so in a way that protects our economy and our living standards in challenging times. At the same time, we must maintain our focus on the long-term challenge of productivity—a challenge we must rise to if we are to seize the opportunities that lie ahead for Britain.

In proposing this charter, I build on the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne). His plans, actioned by the hard work of millions of people up and down the United Kingdom, have turned our economy around. The employment rate is at a record high, unemployment is at an 11-year low and income inequality is at its lowest level in 30 years. The OECD and the International Monetary Fund expect the UK to have been the fastest growing economy in the G7 in 2016. The economic plan that has delivered jobs and growth also reduced the deficit from 10.1% to 4% of GDP last year, so that, in 2015-16, we borrowed £1 for every £10 we spent. These are significant achievements, but we have further to go.

In the medium term, we are well placed to take advantage of the opportunities that leaving the European Union presents. But at the time of the autumn statement, the Office for Budget Responsibility judged that, in the near term, uncertainty about our new trading relationship with the EU, coupled with the impact of higher inflation driven by the depreciation of the pound, is likely to reduce the rate of economic growth relative to its previous expectations.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): The Chancellor makes an interesting case about the strength of the economy. Does he not associate some of the growth in the economy with the fact that the Government borrowed and invested in the economy? Borrowing is therefore not necessarily a bad thing in itself.
Mr Hammond: I think my track record—of one fiscal event—answers the hon. Gentleman’s question. Clearly, I made the decision in November to borrow a discretionary £23 billion to invest in areas specifically focused on raising productivity in the UK economy. So, of course, the answer to the question “Can borrowing to invest ever be sensible?” is yes—if the circumstances are right, if it is a judicious amount of borrowing and if it is precisely targeted to achieve a purpose.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): This point is related to the one raised by the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan). Does the Chancellor believe that improving our productivity gap is becoming more of a priority than the urgent need for improvements in living standards?

Mr Hammond: As I shall explain in a moment, one purpose of the charter and the new fiscal rules is to allow sufficient flexibility to deal with any unexpected, unforeseen shocks during a period of more-than-usual uncertainty in the economy.

The OBR’s judgment at autumn statement implied £84 billion of additional borrowing over the forecast horizon, although I should say that the OBR acknowledges a higher-than-usual degree of uncertainty in that forecast. So, at autumn statement, I had to make a judgment: I could have looked for further savings to maintain the trajectory of consolidation my predecessor set out, but I judged that that would not have been the responsible way to support the economy in present circumstances. So, at the autumn statement, I set out our new plan, which offered fiscal headroom, if needed, to deal with unforeseen, unforecast economic shocks, and scope to invest in raising productivity and so to lift real wages and living standards.

Let me set out the principles that inform the fiscal rules I have placed before the House today. First, the public finances should be returned to balance at the earliest date that is compatible with the prudent management of the economy. I judge, in current circumstances, that that will be in the next Parliament, after our EU exit is complete. In the interim, I have committed to reducing the structural deficit to below 2% of GDP by the end of this Parliament. Targeting a structural deficit means that I can let the public finances respond to any unforeseen short-term fluctuations in the economy through the operation of the so-called automatic stabilisers. The OBR forecast at autumn statement 2016 that I will meet this rule two years early. This leaves some headroom—about £27 billion—for a discretionary response to any further shocks, should such a response be necessary.

Secondly, I have committed to getting debt falling by the end of this Parliament. This will be the first time since the start of the century that debt has fallen. Again, the OBR forecasts that debt will begin falling two years before our rule requires.

Delaying the return to balance until the next Parliament not only ensures that we have fiscal headroom to respond to shocks, but means that the Government have scope to invest to improve the UK’s productivity. The productivity gap is the biggest challenge facing the UK economy. It has been said many times before, but I am going to say it again: it takes workers in Germany less than four days to produce what we produce in five days. That means that many British workers work harder—longer hours—for lower pay than their counterparts. This has to change if we are to build an economy that works for everyone.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to point to the productivity gap, but may I gently chide him by letting him know that in this respect the Nissan plant in Sunderland is second only to the plant in Yokohama in Japan—its headquarters? It is, outside Japan, the most profitable and productive engineering plant in the Nissan group.

Mr Hammond: It is always a pleasure to be gently chided by my hon. Friend, who is of course absolutely right. That is the concern about Britain’s productivity. We have some of the most fantastically productive companies and businesses—indeed, some of the most productive cities—in the world, but we also have some of the poorest examples of productivity performance. The challenge before us is to work out how to spread across the economy the best practice in productivity that we see in our economy so that all regions, and all corners and sectors of our economy, can share in this productivity performance and thus deliver the higher real wages and living standards that that implies. This is the biggest challenge facing the UK economy, but one that successive Governments have failed to do anything effective about.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I am certainly not in the mode of wanting to chide my right hon. Friend for anything in particular, but it is worth putting the productivity issues into context. It is also the case, as it has been during his time in office, not just as Chancellor but since 2010, that our unemployment rate has been rather lower, and that may have been a factor in the poor productivity that the UK economy has had relative to many of our European partners. This Government—or perhaps more importantly, British businesses—have made keeping employment rates a higher priority than the urgent need for improvements to productivity to which he refers.

Mr Hammond: My right hon. Friend, who represents one of the most productive sub-regions in the entire European Union, is of course right. There is a perfectly respectable economic argument that, as participation in the labour force increases, bringing more marginally productive workers into the labour force, that may have a depressing effect on labour productivity overall. However, the employment participation rates in Germany and in the UK are not all that different. I do not think we can explain a 30% productivity performance gap by differences in levels of participation in the economy. Indeed, there is much debate among economists about the cause of this productivity gap, and the cause of the generally poor productivity performance of developed economies over the past few years.

We chose at autumn statement 2016 to invest an additional £23 billion through a national productivity investment fund, which aims to raise productivity, support job creation, and boost real wages and living standards. Every penny we spend from this fund will be used to boost economic infrastructure, research and development, and housing. It will bring total investment in these areas to £170 billion over the next five years. It means that...
productivity, and I wonder what measures the Chancellor will take.

Surely, one of the lessons that we can learn from his predecessor, Fabian, is that new technology can help businesses grow. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) spoke is a new one with new technology. Surely, one of the lessons that we can learn from his experience is that getting corporates to invest will boost productivity, and I wonder what measures the Chancellor is hoping to bring forward in that area.

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Public investment in infrastructure is part of the story, as is public and private investment in skills. Increasing the stock of capital available for each worker to use is also part of improving labour productivity.

We know that business hates uncertainty, and the uncertainty that has been created by the Brexit vote has undoubtedly slowed down business investment decisions. However, the problem of productivity that we are looking at is not a short-term problem in response to the Brexit vote; it is a much longer-term challenge in the UK economy. Large companies in the UK are well capitalised, and their levels of capitalisation are similar to those of comparable businesses elsewhere. I suggest that there is a challenge over the capitalisation of smaller businesses in the UK, and that access to long-term capital in the UK is one of the challenges that we need to address.

The Government undertook at autumn statement to conduct a review of the availability of patient, long-term capital for smaller businesses in the UK.

The money that I have just spoken about for public investment through the national productivity investment fund will provide the financial foundations for our industrial strategy, which was launched yesterday and builds on Britain’s strengths. Let me be clear that this charter is not consistent with Labour’s proposal to increase public investment, as that would cost £220 billion, welfare represents 25% of all Government spending. In the absence of action, we will not hit a surplus in the next near-term, the report also shows that without further policy action we will not hit a surplus in the next Parliament.

That is why at autumn statement 2016 I reiterated that the tax and spending commitments for this Parliament set out in the 2015 spending review will be delivered, and we will meet our manifesto commitments to protect the budgets of priority public services. I also confirmed that the Government will review public spending priorities and other commitments for the next Parliament in the light of the evolving fiscal position at the next spending review. There will be more difficult choices to make before we have completed the job of restoring the public finances to health.

Controlling our welfare bill is a vital element of getting back to balance. At £220 billion, welfare represents a quarter of all Government spending. In the absence of an effective framework, spending on working-age benefits tripled in real terms between 1980 and 2014. By 2014, each person in work in this country was contributing, tripling in real terms between 1980 and 2014. By 2014, each person in work in this country was contributing, and we will maintain that stability.

The charter before the House introduces a new medium-term welfare cap, which is set to reflect the current forecast of eligible welfare spend, taking into account the policy changes made since the last Budget. The cap will apply to welfare spending in 2021-22, and performance against this cap will be formally assessed by the OBR. Action taken since 2010, including the welfare cap in the previous charter, has stabilised welfare spending, and we will maintain that stability.

The charter before the House introduces a new medium-term welfare cap, which is set to reflect the current forecast of eligible welfare spend, taking into account the policy changes made since the last Budget. The cap will apply to welfare spending in 2021-22, and performance against this cap will be formally assessed by the OBR once—in the year before that, 2020-21. In the interim, progress towards the cap will be monitored by the Government, based on the OBR’s forecasts of welfare spending. Shifting from an annual to a medium-term...
The previous Chancellor made a political choice to impose the surplus target. Therefore, the austerity measures that the target required were not just cruel, but unnecessary. Members will recall that those measures meant that people living with disability were suddenly threatened with the loss of their independence, and those going to work, doing the right thing, looking after their children and just attempting to get by were suddenly faced with serious cuts to their income. The tragedy is that all those sacrifices and all that suffering were in vain.

The record of this Government in office speaks for itself: at the same time as imposing grinding spending cuts, they have added, as of this morning’s figures, almost £700 billion to the national debt. That is not just more than the previous Labour Government borrowed; it is more than the borrowing of every post-war Labour Government added together. It is equivalent to £25,600 of extra debt for every household in the country.

Mr Philip Hammond: For clarification, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that it is still his policy to borrow another £500 billion on top of that?

John McDonnell: That is interesting; I am pleased the Chancellor has raised that point. We have seen £700 billion borrowed over the last seven years as a result of economic failure. The Labour party’s policy, based on the recommendations of the CBI and others, is to spend £500 billion on investment over a decade. There would be £200 billion of mainstream direct funding and £100 billion would go to a national investment bank, which would raise from the private sector and elsewhere, on European Investment Bank rates, £250 billion. Such long-term investment in our economy has been recommended. Infrastructure investment is required to tackle the productivity crisis that has been caused by his Government.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I am a little confused and wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman can clarify things. He has just decried the fact that our national debt has increased by £700 billion. Is he saying that he would not have spent that £700 billion? Would he maintain the current deficit and spend £500 billion on top of that? I am not quite sure of his maths.

John McDonnell: We would have invested from the beginning in our infrastructure and skills, so we would have grown the economy and would not have had to borrow another £700 billion for failure, rather than for growth success. Because the focus of the Government was on chasing an unachievable surplus target, they did not use the borrowing wisely. The sound policy, as recommended by international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the OECD, and by the CBI and the TUC here in Britain, is to put the Government to work in supporting investment. Instead, over nearly seven wasted years, the Government have cut investment to the lowest level in a decade.

Mark Field: The right hon. Gentleman is right that we have borrowed a hell of a lot of money, probably too much, since 2010—£700 billion—but does that not give the lie to the idea that there has been grinding austerity? We have borrowed a huge amount of money and struck a balance in trying to maintain welfare. One of the most insidious forms of investment under the last Labour
Administration was the public-private partnership and the private finance initiative, much of which we will be paying off for decades to come—a colossal amount of so-called investment that actually is just adding more to our ongoing debt.

John McDonnell: The right hon. Gentleman will recall my opposition to PFI and its failures, but let me be clear: to borrow for investment, to ensure that people have the skills and resources necessary to tackle the productivity crisis and thereby grow the economy and create the high skills and wages which mean that people can pay their taxes and fund our public services, is creditable; however, what we have seen over the last seven years is borrowing because of the failure of the Government’s economic policy.

In the past seven years, the Government have actually cut investment, and the consequences of insufficient investment are painfully clear. Austerity measures and low investment have fed directly into what the Governor of the Bank of England has called a “lost decade” for earnings. Productivity growth has stagnated, as even the Government’s own industrial strategy White Paper acknowledged. I share the Chancellor’s concerns; every hour worked in Britain now produces a third less than every hour worked in the US, Germany and France. We have been arguing that case at least since I became shadow Chancellor, but we had no acknowledgment of it from the Government until yesterday.

With that record of under-investment, it is no use those on the Government Benches talking about a post-Brexit Britain taking on the world. An economy with low productivity can compete only on the lowest common denominator, and that means, as has happened, slashing wages and salaries and hacking at social protections, such as the NHS and pensions. This is the grim reality of the Conservative’s low-investment, low-productivity, low-wage economy, and it can easily get worse. For some on the Government Benches, an economy shorn of basic protections in the workplace, with rock-bottom wages and social spending provisions stripped to the barest minimum, would be a desirable goal. We have had a glimpse of that future in the Chancellor’s own threats to turn Britain into a tax haven. Even to have had a glimpse of that future in the Chancellor’s own threats to turn Britain into a tax haven is a desirable goal. We

Michael Fabricant: I have been in opposition, so I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is doing, but there has to be a little reality in his speech. We are the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Like him, I have been to France, Germany and Spain. Is he aware of the rates of unemployment in those countries?

John McDonnell: Let us look at what is happening outside in the real world. We welcome the growth in employment, but we have also experienced the biggest fall in wages among OECD countries over the past seven to 10 years—the figure of 10.4% is matched only by Greece. One in five employees in this country were low-paid in 2015. Mark Carney has called this the biggest lost decade for income growth since the 1860s. The number of self-employed people has increased dramatically, but on average they earn less than 20 years ago. So, yes, I welcome the growth in employment, but I do not welcome the growth in poverty pay, whether for the self-employed or those being exploited on zero-hours contracts.

Michael Fabricant: The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation says that the gap between the rich and the poor has actually reduced since 2010. In addition, when people on zero-hours contracts were polled, more than half said that they wanted the flexibility of those contracts. Yes, people in self-employment often earn less, but it is their decision. I was self-employed when I created my own company, but I chose to do that, rather than earning more in a larger corporation.

John McDonnell: What we now have in our economy is a scandal of bogus self-employment. A lot of the growth in self-employment has happened on that basis, and it includes the most exploitative aspects. The hon. Gentleman mentions inequality, so let us look at some of the figures. If we use an index other than the Gini coefficient, which does not take into account the real outrusting of the super-rich, such as the P90/P10 ratio—this looks at the 10th and 90th percentiles of income distribution—we find that inequality has risen every year over the past five years. Let us look at what has happened out there in individual companies. If we compare the average total pay of FTSE 100 chief executives with that of their employees in 2015, we find a ratio of 129:1; in the mid-1990s, it was no more than 45:1. That shows the grotesque levels of inequality that result from the economy that has been created over the past seven years.

Yesterday’s Green Paper seemed to recognise the failure of previous policy, and there has certainly been a change of rhetoric. The Prime Minister has suddenly been won over by the merits of an active industrial policy. The recognition that the six previous years have failed badly is welcome, but nowhere is it clear that the Government recognise the scale of the problem. The weaknesses and inequalities in our economy stem from decades of underinvestment, when decisions about what and where to invest have been taken by too few people at the top and to the benefit of that tiny handful. That leads to an economy in which the Government are planning for more than £5,000 of investment per head in London, compared with just £413 in the north-east of England. It is an economy in which a single London capital project receives more Government backing than the whole of Yorkshire, and in which the £500 million promised yesterday for the north of England is set against £18 billion of cuts from local authority budgets since 2010.

Mark Field rose—

John McDonnell: I see that the right hon. Gentleman is ready to jump in again.

Mark Field: The shadow Chancellor will recognise that he should be doing the same as me by defending London’s honour to a certain extent. Surely he recognises that if the significant amounts coming into our capital city were not invested here, they would go to another global capital, so it is not a case of money coming to
London rather than another part of the UK. It is also the case that many of the cranes in my constituency—and, indeed, those in his constituency near Heathrow—are engaged in infrastructure projects involving large-scale investment. Such projects are producing huge numbers of construction jobs and are contracting well beyond the capital city. A lot of investment goes on here in London, but it has a benefit well beyond the capital city—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I call John McDonnell.

John McDonnell: Don’t worry, Madam Deputy Speaker; I was enjoying that.

The reality is that this is Government investment, and those figures are just not acceptable. Investment of £5,000 per head in London compared with £400 in the north-east is an unacceptable level of inequality that has to be challenged. The right hon. Gentleman is usually fair, so I am sure that he would accept that, no matter how much we are both champions for our capital city.

While the shift in rhetoric is welcome, it must be backed up by meaningful action, and that is where the revised charter still falls short. It is good to see the Chancellor taking on board Labour’s recommendations and ditching the surplus target. In doing so, he has held out at least the possibility of lifting some of the burden of the austerity measures that have led to crises in health and social care. I deeply regret, however, that he failed to take that option at last year’s autumn statement. His failure to act on both NHS and social care funding has contributed to the worst funding crisis in the NHS for decades and a social care system pushed beyond breaking point.

An image can sometimes capture the plight of a particular situation. A couple of years ago, it was the image a child’s body on the shores of the Mediterranean that brought to our attention the plight of people in the refugee crisis. Last year it was that photo of a child in an ambulance, covered in blood and dust after being pulled out of the debris in Aleppo. Two weeks ago, the image that put the NHS crisis into focus for me was that of a child below the age of five, in a hospital corridor, being treated on two plastic chairs that had been pushed together. That is unacceptable in the sixth richest country in the world, and it is the result of a failure to address underfunding in the autumn statement.

I have written to the chair of the Office for Budget Responsibility to ask whether it will look into providing an assessment of healthcare funding against expected need. In the last month, the British Red Cross has described the ongoing situation as a “humanitarian crisis”. The Government’s response has been to play down the situation, despite the volume of continuing complaints from frontline NHS staff. I strongly believe that this is leading to widespread public distrust of the Government’s presentation of funding and support for the NHS and social care. It makes sense to attempt to provide an objective assessment of the real needs of the NHS to help to prevent the real-terms funding cuts that have taken place under this Government. Let me say to the Chancellor again that he can and must take action now to ensure that both health and social care are properly funded in this period of crisis.

I am afraid that the charter represents only the smallest improvement on the previous dire fiscal policy. Unbelievably and, I think, contrary to all advice, it still attempts to keep investment spending within the spending control framework. That has already been criticised by experts from the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Keeping the investment spending cap inside the overall spending cap means that every pound delivered for investment comes at the expense of possible spending on public services. At a time when the capital costs for the Government are close to their lowest in history, that choice makes little sense. As we face Brexit, the challenge for us all is to think boldly about how this country can respond, and the amended rule falls far short of that.

Mr Philip Hammond: What is the right hon. Gentleman’s position on public debt? Ours is set to peak at just over 90% of GDP, yet he is setting out a course of action that would cause it to rise indefinitely—it would go on rising forever. Is he comfortable with such a position?

John McDonnell: That is clearly not the case. If the Chancellor had looked carefully at Labour’s fiscal credibility rule—[Interruption]—and, indeed, adopted it, he would have seen that what we would actually be doing is reducing debt in the lifetime of a Parliament as a result of ensuring that we invest properly in tackling the productivity gap, in bringing people back to work and in ensuring that they have the highest skills. Those skills will produce the high wages that will make it possible to fund the economy through a tax regime that is fairer than the existing one.

It simply will not be possible to deliver the scale of support and investment that is needed to rebuild our economy within the strictures of the rules that the Chancellor is proposing. We will get half-measures and rhetorical commitments. What we will not get is a serious commitment to delivering the economic transformation that we now need, because that would require the Government to take on a few too many vested interests. Such a commitment would involve a serious attempt to clamp down on tax avoidance, reversing handouts to giant corporations and the super-rich, and ending—in reality, not just in rhetoric—the colossal imbalance in investment between a few favoured places in the south-east and the rest of the country.

In changing the rule, the Government are admitting their prior failure, but then failing to address its causes seriously. Investment is too low, productivity is too low and wages are too low. Labour’s own fiscal credibility rule follows the recommendations of world-leading economists, business organisations and trade unions by keeping day-to-day spending entirely separate from the Government’s plans to invest. In contrast, this Government’s fiscal rule is excessively tight on Government investment at the same time as being excessively loose on Government control.

The primary reason for introducing a rule is to show that a Government’s fiscal plans are consistent and planned well in advance. That allows businesses and investors themselves to plan, and reassures markets that a Government will not attempt to spend excessively. An ideal rule should be the basis of the strict enforcement of borrowing limits—we accept that—but it should also contain the flexibility for Governments to respond when unexpected shocks occur. Getting the balance between
these two points is difficult so, following the best available
economic advice, Labour’s fiscal credibility rule places
the power to determine when we are outside normal
times in the hands of the Monetary Policy Committee,
which can declare under the terms of the fiscal rule that
it is necessary for fiscal policy to adjust in response to
an unanticipated shock. The freedom to determine the
fiscal stance is a significant power for a Government, so
it has to be used responsibly.

Labour does not believe that it is desirable to return
to the days when Governments would produce their
own economic forecasts and then decide on their own
terms where the business cycle was and how much extra
fiscal leeway they were allowed. That meant that the
Treasury had excessive power to determine fiscal policy,
and that in turn meant Governments would have the
power to favour short-term quick fixes at the expense of
longer-term action to rebuild the economy. A credible
fiscal rule should not allow that to happen. It should be
bolted into place, compelling a Government to act for
the longer-term good.

Labour’s fiscal rule does that by handing power to
recognise economic shocks over to the MPC, yet the
new charter for budget responsibility appears to hand
the power to recognise economic shocks straight back
to the Treasury. It returns us to the bad old days when
short-term Treasury thinking would be allowed to dominate
economic policy making. It could mean that once again
Conservative Chancellors would be tempted to ease off
on or tighten up their spending not because of the
economy, but because an election is due. In other words,
it largely defeats the purpose of having a fiscal rule in
the first place. Instead of breaking with the short-term
thinking of the past, it bolts it more firmly into place.
How can the rule be taken seriously when it is so
obviously open to being undermined? In other words,
the revised charter leads us dangerously close to the
worst of both worlds. It is excessively tight on Government
investment when building a post-Brexit economy should
demand Government intervention, yet it is excessively
loose on the Government themselves, handing too much
power back to the Treasury.

The Chancellor and the Government are squandering
an opportunity here. They could have ditched the failing
existing fiscal rule and put in place a new fiscal mandate
that would grant the space needed to rebuild and transform
our economy as we prepare for Brexit. Instead, they
have handed more powers back to the Treasury while
the Chancellor has insisted on maintaining austerity
spending cuts. No part of the Government’s new fiscal
rule can be supported and we will be voting against the
charter as a whole.

5.37 pm

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): I am somewhat
in awe that you are back in your place, Mr Speaker.

The Chancellor was very measured in his defence of
the new charter, and his presentation was without the
usual gimmicks and flamboyance of his predecessor,
and was none the worse for that, but I have read my
Sherlock Holmes and it is the dog that did not bark in
the night that we have to look out for. It is only
15 months since we last debated a new set of Treasury
rules. I am in favour of such rules; rules are put in place
to create stability and sustainability in the national
finances, to give confidence to lenders, and to restrain
politicians from using the public purse for party advantage.
That said, it should be obvious to anyone that if this
Conservative Government are bent on rewriting the
fiscal rulebook only 15 months after the last time they
did so, their motivation and seriousness are open to
question.

The Chancellor did not address that serious point. If
he keeps changing the rules, even though he stands up
and makes a very measured defence of the new set of
rules, he has to explain why he keeps changing them if
he wants people to have confidence in the next set of
rules, and the Chancellor patently failed to do that.

Mr Philip Hammond: Let me explain to the hon.
Gentleman. We suffered an exogenous shock that, according
to the OBR, implied an extra £84 billion of additional
borrowing over the forecast horizon. I would say that
when the facts change, we should change our plan.

George Kerevan: That is not what rules are for. The
rules should not change when the situation changes; the
policy should change. The rules are there to protect our
sustainability and the ability of the markets to feel
confidence in the Government. Yes, of course Brexit
produced an exogenous shock, the full force of which
has yet to arrive in the British economy. And, yes, the
Chancellor is preparing the ground for when the wave
hits the economy, but the point is that that is a policy
issue. Why should the rules change? The rules are there
to protect sustainability. If they change every time the
circumstances change, what is the point of having rules?

Mark Field: But surely the hon. Gentleman must
recognise that the proof of the pudding will be in
whether there is a sense of confidence drifting away
from banks and corporates in relation to that shock.
They recognise that Brexit is a major event, and we all
recognise that its impact still lies some way ahead, but
that impact means that it is quite legitimate not to be
bound by rules that pertained 15 months ago in a rather
different world from the one that we are going to have
to experience in the months and years to come.

George Kerevan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for
illustrating clearly the point that I am trying to
make. Conservative Members are saying that rules are a
hostage to fortune. They are saying that the rules will
change when the circumstances change and when they
need to change them to get the result they want. What,
therefore, is the point of having rules at all? The right
hon. Gentleman confirms the point that the shadow
Chancellor and I are putting forward, which is that
rules are flexible politically, and that they are therefore
not rules.

We can prove this by looking at this Government’s
borrowing record. Between 2010, when this Government
were elected, and 2015, the national debt rose by 50%.
The latest forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility
suggests that between 2010 and the end of this Parliament,
the national debt will have almost doubled. The
Conservative Government cannot continue to blame
that on the former Labour Government. This Government
have doubled the national debt during their tenure of
office. The Chancellor and his predecessor have got
away with that because they keep coming to the House with rules and pretending that they are fiscally responsible, yet they have doubled the national debt.

Mr Philip Hammond: We must remember the size of the deficit that we inherited in 2010. There would have been a way of avoiding doubling the national debt, but it would have involved an even harsher period of consolidation of the public finances. The hon. Gentleman's party and the Opposition voted against every single measure to consolidate. The previous fiscal rules called for a surplus in 2020-21. The hon. Gentleman seems to be advocating a policy response that would squeeze the economy harder in order to meet the old rules in the new circumstances. Is that what he would like?

George Kerevan: I am glad that the Chancellor has now admitted that this Government will have doubled the national debt by the end of this Parliament; so much for their fiscal prudence. I am happy to admit that, yes, actually it was in favour of doubling the national debt. That does not give me a problem. In fact, I think that that is what saved the economy. What I cannot abide is the rank hypocrisy of a Government who keep coming up with rule after rule in order to pretend that they are fiscally prudent—

Mr Speaker: Order. We need to be clear that the hon. Gentleman is not accusing any individual Minister of hypocrisy. That would be completely disorderly—[Interruption.] This is not a debating matter. Nor is it something on which I am looking for his interpretation. I am gently saying that if that is what he is saying, he must withdraw it. If he is making a charge at a collective, however, he can just about get away with it under our procedures.

George Kerevan: I am suitably chided, Mr Speaker. I cast no aspersions on the character of any individual on the Government Benches. As a collective, however, they have changed the rules to suit themselves, as the Chancellor has admitted. That is the basic point I am trying to get across. What possible faith can we have in this new set of rules that they will not be changed in another 15 months?

John McDonnell: I do not want to interfere in private banter, but I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that, in 2009, the person who is now Chancellor—he was then shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury—condemned any concept of rules. In the rule that he eventually helped to develop in opposition, and that eventually came into force, there was a welfare cap that has now been completely disregarded. The deficit was meant to be not reduced but eliminated by 2015, with a reduction in debt. The rules seem to have gone out the window very early for this Chancellor.

George Kerevan: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman.

The Chancellor came to the Treasury Committee, and he answered questions clearly and in great detail. He pressed the point he has made today, that the new fiscal rules and the autumn statement were designed to give the Government enough fiscal headroom to meet any unforeseeable circumstances, should economic growth slow as a result of the Brexit decision. I respect that, but why give himself headroom for a future dangerous event? Why not take action now to forestall that event? In essence, the fiscal charter gives the Chancellor room, if the economy begins to slow in two, three or four years' time, to use a fiscal surplus to invest in the economy and crank up growth. Why not do that now? The new fiscal charter gives the dangerous impression that somehow it will prevent the ill effects of Brexit because the Chancellor can intervene if something goes wrong. Why not use that fiscal headroom now?

The problem, of course, is that the underlying strength of the economy is nowhere near as strong as the Chancellor tried to make out in his introduction. Yes, there is growth but, the underpinnings of that growth over the last year are largely an expansion of consumer spending underpinned by unsecured consumer borrowing.

At the same time, post the Brexit vote, the pound has fallen substantially on international markets, which is stoking up inflation. I cannot imagine a more dangerous situation than for growth to be dependent on unsecured consumer borrowing when inflation is starting to rise.

Jeremy Quin: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the growth in inflation, but does he not regard it as in any way contradictory that he may be advocating a massive increase in Government expenditure while warning about the risks of inflation?

George Kerevan: Not if we take into account the fact that if inflation starts to rise, the Bank of England, as the hon. Gentleman knows, has decided to let that inflation flow through the economy. The Bank explains that inflation in terms of the falling pound, and it is going to let inflation rise to about 3%, the top of its current forecast range. The Bank thinks that inflation will then start to decline again, but others, such as the Federation of Small Businesses, think that inflation will go above that core forecast. We could be looking at 5% inflation in two years' time, which would have a crippling effect. [Interruption.]

The Chancellor shakes his head. All I am doing is quoting the Federation of Small Businesses, which is not an irresponsible organisation. It thinks that the Bank of England's core forecast—taking us up to 3% against the consumer prices index—will actually be exceeded, which is a strong possibility. If we go beyond 3% inflation and head up to 5%—and remember that the Bank of England said that it will not raise interest rates to combat such a rise in inflation—consumer spending will start to fall.

In reply to the question I was asked by the hon. Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin), my argument is that if consumer spending tanks, we are in a hard Brexit, foreign investment is falling and firms are reluctant to conduct business investment, the only agency left to plug the gap is the Government. I am pointing out that the Chancellor, rather than waiting for that to happen, beyond which point it would take two or three years for the fiscal policy to kick in, should be doing it now. That is the basic point that I am trying to make.

Michael Fabricant: I am listening to the hon. Gentleman with great interest and I like his debating style—it reminds me of an old professor I had at university—but has he not just contradicted himself? Early on, he said that he does not see the need for any change, although
we are changing the rules, and then he gave us a nightmare scenario of the future because of Brexit and said we do need change. He has to make up his mind.

George Kerevan: I am very clear. I do not say that the rules should be changed, because I do not like the original rules and I do not like the rules that are being proposed. I do believe in the principle that there should be fiscal rules; there should be a fiscal mandate to restrain a Government. So my primary point, to begin with, was that if we keep changing the rules that mandate does not exist, and this Government only pay lip service to them.

Under my set of rules—I do not have the time tonight to go substantially into them and I will not press the patience of the Speaker—there would be a restraint on current expenditure, although I am more liberal when it comes to capital expenditure, which, provided it is linked to trend growth, can be counter-cyclical. We can go into that another time. It does not matter what the present rules are. The fact that the Government keep changing them is the point at issue, which is why the charter is not worth the paper it is written on—they will change it in a few months anyway. They say that is their general principle.

Let me try to come to some conclusions. Back in 1956, Harold Macmillan gave his one and only Budget speech as Chancellor. What was the ratio of the national debt to GDP? It was 150%—almost double what it is today. I read that speech the other day; I forbear to read it out, but it quoted Macaulay. Macmillan read out half of one of Macaulay’s essays—we had quite sophisticated Chancellors in those days, Mr Speaker.

Macmillan went through practically every Administration since the 1600s. In every Administration, somebody got up and complained about the level of the national debt. Macmillan’s was an expansionary Budget, let me say, with a debt to GDP ratio of 150%. Macmillan, having worked his way through Macaulay, made the point that when we look back we see the benefits of that borrowing and investment, but when we look forward all we see is the dangers. Macmillan said that the trouble is, that stops us being bold.

I would like this Chancellor to be bold. I would like him to spend more money. I would like him to spend the money before the Brexit recession hits, rather than wait until it happens and then say, “Well, I have some weapons in the armoury to deal with it.” Let us deal with the problem before it happens. That is my point.

5.53 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): The credibility of the Government’s fiscal plan as outlined in the charter for Budget responsibility has been called into question time and again. Labour opposed the Government’s amended charter in 2015 as it epitomised the Government’s austerity agenda and refusal to intervene and invest in our nation’s future. Today, this Chancellor is seeking Parliament’s approval to break with his predecessor’s fiscal targets and amend the charter.

Is that good news? Has the Chancellor accepted the policy advice of the IMF, the OECD, the CBI and the TUC that austerity is not a credible economic model and that the Government’s role is to support investment?

Well, no, sadly, he has not. The amendments to the rules that we are considering today still commit to the Government’s austerity agenda, which has forced misery on the most vulnerable people in Britain. It also fails to allow the investment necessary for future growth and prosperity.

As my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor outlined earlier, it is encouraging that the previous surplus target for 2020 has been ditched—the Government now seek to balance the books at some point in the next Parliament—but, crucially, capital and current spending are still lumped together and subject to the framework, so the Government’s ability to make large-scale investments is significantly constrained. That is quite the opposite of Labour’s fiscal position, which has been outlined today: £250 billion of direct Government investment, with a further £250 billion mobilised, with private sector support, through a national investment bank and a network of regional development banks. The Government’s own infrastructure pipeline lists £500 billion-worth of projects—that is the scale of investment deemed necessary by organisations such as the CBI simply to put us on a level footing with other industrial countries around the world.

We know that the rules in the charter simply do not work effectively, and so do the Government, but, rather than put in place a new fiscal rule that would provide the structure needed to rebuild and transform our economy as we prepare for Brexit, the Chancellor has chosen to cut off the oxygen needed to create a fertile environment for business. It is time he realised that we must forge a new economic destiny that ensures that Britain has a prestigious place at the world’s table, rather than simply threatening to turn us into a tax haven.

We need to rebuild those communities that have been left behind for far too long. If anything should have woken the Government up, Brexit should. It was those communities up and down Britain that had been starved of investment for decades that were angry, and they were right to be angry. They had endured nearly seven wasted years in which investment had been allocated on almost a lottery basis; an economy in which the Government promised £5,000 of investment per head in London but just £413 per head in the north-east; an economy in which local authorities had lost £18 billion of Government funding in real terms between 2010 and 2015, with the poorest bearing the brunt; an economy in which the Government slashed the budgets of vital services such as social care and then asked local areas to find the money themselves through council tax increases.

But, we are told, it is all part of a bigger plan, so let us assess whether the strategy has actually worked. We were told that, if we pulled together and dealt with the sting of austerity for a while, things would improve. So, is the deficit at zero? Have we slashed the national debt? Well, no. As we have heard today, the Government have, to date, added more than £700 billion to the national debt. We have an economy driven by consumer spending, not trade and exports. Even the Bank of England has voiced concerns about the sustainability of the model going forward, because much of that spending is fuelled by extremely worrying levels of household debt—debt that is incurred by people who simply cannot make ends meet.

We have what the Bank calls a “lost decade” of earnings, with wages having stagnated to the extent that most non-retired families have less money now than
they did before the financial crash, according to the Office for National Statistics. We have heard that productivity growth has stagnated. German workers produce the same in four days as UK workers produce in five—I am pleased that the Chancellor brought that up in his contribution. They had a Government who invested in industry; sadly, we do not.

All that is not the soundtrack of a Government who are jostling to make us one of the world’s leading economies post-Brexit. They have carved us out a future based on low investment, low productivity, low wages and skeleton public services. I am a northern MP, as Members can tell by my accent, and I can recall the Conservative Government of the 1980s stripping away industry from northern towns and cities. Our communities suffered immeasurable damage. The Government back then simply allowed our northern towns and cities to enter into a state of managed decline. What we see today in the amended charter is no better than that managed decline, which is why we will not be approving it today.

5.59 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): What the British people want is a stable and successful economy—one that means jobs, opportunity and a high quality of life. That is what this Government are delivering, and what we will continue to deliver, because, unlike the Opposition parties, we are not ignoring economic realities, but facing up to them. We are not paying lip service to our responsibilities, but shouldering them, and we are not pretending that every problem can be solved by spending more, borrowing more or taxing more. We are restoring our public finances to health and investing sensibly and in a well-targeted way in the future success of this country.

That is how we have turned our economy around. Not only are we forecasting to achieve faster growth than any other G7 economy last year, with near record employment and unemployment at its lowest rate in more than a decade; but, at the same time, we have made great progress on getting to grips with the public purse, cutting our deficit from its post-war high of 10.1% in 2010 to 4% last year, and borrowing £1 in every £10 we have spent, not the £1 in every £4 that we saw under the Labour Government. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has pointed out, the recent fiscal sustainability report from the OBR reminds us of the action that we must continue to take to address our deficit.

The fiscal rules that we are looking at today strike the right balance for the challenges and opportunities that we face. They include a credible plan to return our public finances to balance; enough headroom to guard against economic shocks; and scope to invest in improving productivity. The structural deficit must be below 2% of GDP by the end of this Parliament, which sets the right course to ensure that the deficit is eliminated altogether next Parliament, and that debt will be falling by the end of this Parliament. The new medium-term welfare cap is an important component of the plan. A medium-term cap rather than an annual one allows us to ensure that we can control welfare spending without needing to make short-term changes to react to fluctuations in the forecast for spending.

To reiterate: the Government will deliver the overall total of welfare savings already identified, but we have no plans to introduce further welfare savings in this Parliament beyond those already announced. With welfare accounting for around a quarter of all our spending, the right course of action is not to refuse to consider any kind of control, but to ensure that our expenditure is stable and sustainable. We have already announced all the measures that we will take in this Parliament for savings in this area.

This then is a credible fiscal plan for three reasons: first, because it means tackling the deficit and bringing our public finances into balance, the importance of which continues to be completely overlooked by the Opposition party; secondly, because it sets feasible targets—in fact the OBR forecasts that we will meet our aims for this Parliament two years early—and, thirdly, because it also gives us the space to react to any short-term fluctuations in our economy in this period of adjustment. It also gives us the scope to address the long-term structural changes and invest in our future success. I refer specifically to the additional £23 billion that we will be investing in our national productivity—borrowing to fund improvements for businesses and families alike in our infrastructure, research and development and housing.

The charter enshrines our commitment to fiscal restraint. It reflects our refusal to allow public spending to skyrocket as it did under Labour; our determination not to put ourselves again in such a vulnerable position as Labour did in running up the largest structural deficit of any G7 country ahead of the great recession; our rejection of the reckless economics that the Labour party continues to favour, which is one of blank cheques, unfunded spending commitments and magic money trees. Is it not time that Labour finally started learning from its mistakes and caring about the economic security that the people of this country deserve? It clearly does not have a credible fiscal plan of its own. It clearly does not have much interest in the matter, because not a single Labour Back Bencher even attended this debate until the 67th minute of it. Let me invite them to join us in voting for a plan that is not only in the interests of working people today, but in the interests of their children and grandchildren who follow. I commend this charter to the House.

Question put.


Division No. 130] [6.04 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Akins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard

Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Sir Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
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**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Heather Wheeler and Andrew Griffiths

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Resolved, that the Charter for Budget Responsibility: autumn 2016 update, which was laid before this House on 17 January, be approved.
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England (Appointment)

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee for their scrutiny, has identified an outstanding candidate. The recommendation contained in the report, which was published last Friday following Mr Behrens' pre-appointment hearing, forms the basis of the Government's motion, which I commend to the House.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's comments and fully endorse his sentiments. I add the thanks of Her Majesty's Opposition to the outgoing Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Dame Julie Mellor. The Minister and I both served as members of the Health Committee, so we know of her hard work. I thank the interview panel, which was chaired by Philippa Helme, Principal Clerk of the Table Office; all the panellists were extremely formidable. I thank the Health Committee and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee for their scrutiny at the pre-appointment hearing.

Mr Behrens is an extremely qualified candidate for the role of parliamentary and health service ombudsman, with all the expectations of that role from the public. He has shown that as the independent adjudicator and chief executive of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for higher education, and, more importantly, in his work on the transformation to democratic rule in South Africa, for which he was personally commended by the late President Nelson Mandela and the now Lord Robin Butler. There was also his transformative work as complaints commissioner to the Bar Standards Board of England and Wales, which delivered a review that led to 52 changes into how the NHS failed to properly investigate the discharge from hospital.

Having been involved in the recruitment process, although I did not take part in the pre-appointment hearing, I would like to welcome Rob Behrens as the new Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. From his time as the independent adjudicator for higher education in England and Wales and as a senior adviser to the European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education he has gained considerable experience of complaint handling and a detailed understanding of the role of an ombudsman. I am sure that that will enable him to make a success of his new role. I should point out that the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and the Health Committee were unanimous in approving his appointment; we held a joint pre-appointment hearing.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Dame Julie Mellor for all that she has done to take forward the work of the PHSO. She has built on the work of her predecessor with vision and commitment, and under her leadership the PHSO is much more engaged with Parliament than ever before. I thank her for staying at the helm of the PHSO while her replacement was appointed. Under her leadership the PHSO has had to face many challenges, not least a cut of more than 24% in its spending between now and 2020. It has been the target of critical public scrutiny—perhaps it is justified; some of it certainly is—which has made the PHSO's recommendations are properly heard and followed through by whichever Department they are addressed to. We have become the accountability mechanism that makes the PHSO's reports and work effective. In the past few months, we have scrutinised PHSO reports such as “Driven to despair: How drivers have been let down by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency”, and “Learning from mistakes: An investigation report by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman into the death of a three-year old child”. Our report on the latter will be published on 31 January. More recently, we published our report on the PHSO report on unsafe discharge from hospital.
whether that is realistic, but it is important for Dame Julie’s successor to understand such criticisms, and I hope he will seek to work closely with organisations such as the Patients Association in the years ahead.

It is also reasonable to point out failings such as the Morecambe Bay catastrophe. The ombudsman did not handle that terribly well in my view and the view of many people who take an interest in these matters. For the future, I very much hope that Mr Behrens will repeat the review process that his predecessor undertook in 2012 to ensure that the office he holds is maximising its effectiveness—that is a worthwhile undertaking—and that he will consider it carefully.

I hope that Ministers will consider the suggestion made by Sir Bruce Keogh that petitioners might complain to the Care Quality Commission at an intermediary stage, thus relieving some of the burden that falls on the PHSO. Over the years, that burden has been responsible for some of the backlog of cases, and the office has recognised that as a major block in the way of its work and the responsiveness that it is able to offer people who complain to it.

In conclusion, I commend Dame Julie for her work during the past four years. In particular, I congratulate her on doing more with less as she has found that her resources have necessarily been curbed.

6.32 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): We want to commend the recruitment process that has led to this appointment. I always think that the best way to measure how effective any process is is to look at the outcome. Any reasonable person looking at the track record of Rob Behrens will recognise that tribute must be paid to all those involved in this process. When we look at his track record in South Africa or Europe, as has been mentioned, and the range of areas in which he has worked, from higher education to the law, and when we look not only at how he has discharged his roles, but at how in so many of them he has conducted studies and produced reports that have been meaningful and influential, we can all wish him well for the future with great confidence.

Question put and agreed to.

Business without Debate

STANDING ORDERS (PLANNING: NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENTS)

Ordered,

That, with immediate effect, the following amendments be made in respect of Standing Orders:

(1) That paragraph (7)(a)(i) of Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended by inserting, in the appropriate place, “Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy”.

(2) That paragraph (2)(a) of Standing Order No. 152H (Planning: national policy statements) be amended by inserting, in the appropriate place, “Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy”. —(Michael Ellis.)
Stem Cell Transplants

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

6.33 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): It is a pleasure to rise at 6.33 pm. When I secured an Adjournment debate several years ago, I expected it to start at 7 o’clock, but I seem to recall that I got up to speak at 11.15 pm. Those were the days when we could debate European documents until any hour.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): History could well repeat itself.

Mark Tami: I hope that it will not do so tonight, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I declare an interest as co-chair of the all-party group on stem cell transplantation. I am very pleased to see my co-chair, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), in the Chamber; I am sure he will make some comments later. May I also put it on record that my oldest son received a life-saving stem cell transplant a number of years ago?

A stem cell transplant offers a last chance of life to people with a blood cancer or blood disorder. It works because stem cells have an incredible ability to replace damaged blood cells. This remarkable treatment has great potential in our healthcare system. There are different types of stem cell transplant. Some involve people taking back their own cells, while others involve cells from a donor, who can be a relative. Tonight I will talk about stem cell transplants that come from a donor.

About 2,000 people in the UK need such a transplant each year. Two thirds of them will not find a matching donor in their family and will therefore require an unrelated donor. In that regard, I pay tribute to Anthony Nolan trust, which provides patients with matching donors from its stem cell donor register. As well as sourcing transplants, it supports patients and, importantly, their families through the transplant journey and advocates on their behalf. Last year, Anthony Nolan helped to find a match for more than 1,200 people with a blood cancer or blood disorder. I know that the House will join me in thanking the selfless stem cell donors who might donate in the future, of whom there are more than 600,000.

Sadly, one in eight people does not receive the life-saving transplant they need because there is no donor available or a donor cannot be found quickly enough. The odds drop dramatically for patients from a black, Asian or ethnic minority background. Anthony Nolan is working hard not only to build but to diversify its stem cell donor register to ensure that it is able to provide people with the best match. After a lot of work, the situation is much better than it was a number of years ago, but it is still shocking that the chance of finding a donor is so much slimmer for people from a BAME background than for white people. I am sure that the Minister will show her support for efforts in that area.

Despite the fact that stem cell transplants are a well-established treatment, the huge financial pressures on the NHS are causing problems for patients. The situation is most serious for those who need a second stem cell transplant. Sometimes, after having a first transplant, a patient’s blood cancer or blood disorder will come back or relapse. That is devastating news in itself. For about 20 patients a year, the clinician will recommend a second stem cell transplant as their best, and often only, chance of life.

It is worth emphasising that this is not some unknown, experimental treatment that people are simply taking a punt on. We know that one in three patients who receives a second stem cell transplant will reach the milestone of five-year survival, and the results for children are even better, as seven in 10 will reach that milestone. We know that the medical profession recommends the treatment, which is routinely available in other parts of the UK, as well as in countries across Europe and the United States. We also know that the treatment used to be available in England before 2013 and that many people are alive today, leading active lives with their families, because they received a second stem cell transplant.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important issue. In my time as a nurse, I have looked after patients who have had a stem cell transplant. My haematology colleagues would agree with his statement that between 20% and 40% of patients who have a second stem cell transplant can be cured. The treatment is indeed offered in many parts of Europe and in the US, so it is shameful that it is not offered here.

Mark Tami: I totally agree with the hon. Lady. We are talking about a very small number of people but, for them, it is their only chance after they relapse.

Despite everything we know, NHS England confirmed in December 2016 that it would not routinely fund second stem cell transplants. In effect, it decided that these people’s lives were not worth the money.

One of those people is Sasha Jones, a 34-year-old mother of two from Greenwich, who, in March 2015, was given the devastating news that she had acute myeloid leukaemia, a type of blood cancer. Over the next few months, she had rounds of chemotherapy and her first stem cell transplant. It was not without its difficulties, but by the beginning of October 2015, she was well enough to go home to her husband, Lloyd, and their two young children, aged just 13 and eight at the time. In August 2016, she was told that the blood cancer had come back, but by this time NHS England had decided that it would not routinely commission second transplants for patients in Sasha’s situation, despite such treatment being recommended by her doctor.

Doctors tried to get Sasha a second transplant by going through the individual funding request route, which allows NHS England to fund treatment for patients on an individual basis if they are deemed to be an exceptional case, but what is an exceptional case, how is that decided and, importantly, how long does it take to be considered? It has to be done at a time when the family and patient are dealing with the devastating news that their illness has not been cured but has come back, so they have to cope with that while also going through this process.

Sasha’s request was turned down and she has effectively been left with no alternative treatment. She now has two choices: find the money to pay for the second transplant herself; or accept that she might have only
months to live and that her two young children could be left to grow up without their mother. I think it is fair to say that Sasha and her friends and family are desperate. A petition that they started to call for a reversal of NHS England's decision not to fund second stem cell transplants now has more than 165,000 signatures, while a fund that was set up to raise the money that Sasha would need to pay for a second transplant currently stands at £90,000, but that is still not enough. Can hon. Members imagine the enormous pressure on Sasha and her family? In Sasha's own words, she has been "condemned to death". She says:

"In having been denied access to a second stem cell transplant, it has been decided that 'I'm not worthy of a second chance a life; my children do not need a mother, my husband will become a widower'.

It is a scandal that someone like Sasha should find herself in this situation—denied life-saving treatment that other patients have had in the past because NHS England says it is neither affordable nor justifiable.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I apologise for not being here on the dot for the start of the debate. The hon. Gentleman is outlining the case for second transplants. Does he agree with the analysis from Anthony Nolan that shows that the cost of caring for someone who is refused a transplant is upwards of £130,000, while a transplant would cost only £120,000 and might save a life and prevent devastation being caused to a family? Does he agree that there is a financial as well as a moral incentive?

Mark Tami: Yes, I do. This is to do with how we assess the cost of treatment. I fully accept that the up-front cost of the transplant is a lot of money, but if that works the longer-term cost is not so great. However, we seem willing and able to fund drugs that might not cure people or extend their lives by very much, although the cost of them, when added up, might be more than the transplant. It is not right that we are saying to these people, "No, we're not going to fund a second transplant".

Sasha's case is not unique, and there will be many more like hers if we do not change our position. Will the Minister please respond directly regarding Sasha's case and those of others in the same situation? In the months and years ahead, there will be other people in this situation, and their voices need to be heard.

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): I declare an interest in that my husband had a successful stem cell transplant in 2014. Does my hon. Friend agree that for patients with blood cancer, the fear of relapse causes great anxiety? Patients speak of a common feeling of dread when they go to collect routine blood results—that certainly resonates with me. Following NHS England's decision, the thousands of patients who have received a first stem cell transplant now have the added fear that if the worst happens and they relapse, the NHS will not provide them with the treatment that would save their lives. I hope my hon. Friend and the Minister will acknowledge that this decision affects not only the 20 desperately ill patients a year who need a second transplant to survive, but the many thousands who live in fear of relapse every day.

Mark Tami: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. From personal experience, I know that that is always a fear. Every time someone goes for a check-up on their blood, there is obviously a feeling at the back of their mind, "Let's hope that everything's okay." It is a very rocky road.

I am sure that the whole House will wish Sasha well as she continues her journey. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce), who has been working tirelessly to support Sasha and her family at this incredibly difficult time.

The Department of Health must accept responsibility in this case and others. Over the past few weeks, we have been told about the enormous pressures that the NHS is under during this winter crisis, with hospitals on black alert across the country, A&E waiting times being missed and cancer patients having their operations cancelled. Treatments such as second stem cell transplants are being rationed. I accept that the NHS is underfunded—perhaps it always will be, as I accept that it is always possible to spend more money—but we are now reaching a crisis. We really need to start to be honest and address issues such as social care. Until we do that and we are honest with everyone, we will not sort out the funding situation for the NHS. I am not making political points; I just want to say that we need to stand up for patients such as Sasha whose lives—it really is their lives—are at risk.

When NHS England originally announced its decision not to fund second stem cell transplants in July 2016, it caused outrage among patients and their families. More than 6,500 people wrote to their MPs and 18,000 signed a letter to the Secretary of State for Health in a bid to get the decision changed. In addition, 30 leading clinicians wrote to the editor of The Times saying:

"NHS England is ignoring the advice of the clinical community, thereby effectively handing most of these patients a death sentence".

They were all ignored. As we know, NHS England confirmed its decision in December 2016.

On a positive note, the good news is that there is a chance to make things right. NHS England will look again at what it funds in the spring. I therefore urge the Minister and her Department to intervene to ensure that every patient who needs a second transplant can access one. As I said, we are not talking about huge numbers, but for the small number of people who are affected, this is their only chance.

I do not wish to pre-empt the Minister's remarks, but I suspect that she may highlight that this was a decision taken by NHS England, not the Government. However, the Department of Health is ultimately responsible for the treatment that patients receive, and in the case of second stem cell transplants, access to that treatment has been denied.

I want to make three important points. First, as I have explained, second stem cell transplants are supported by the evidence. The treatment is standard practice in many countries, yet NHS England seems to have ignored that completely. It has also ignored the potential to offset much of the cost of a second stem cell transplant, as was pointed out earlier, owing to the cost of alternative treatments.

In its own impact assessment, NHS England acknowledged that the mortality rate among patients who were given alternative treatments "was extremely high", and that, while the costs of such treatments were always "difficult to quantify" and varied according to patients' circumstances, there was "considerable scope" to offset some of the costs of transplants if the costs incurred over a patient's lifetime were taken into account.
Moreover, a patient who had had a successful transplant was far more likely to return to, or join, the workforce, and pay back some of the costs. It is important to factor that in.

Secondly, NHS England has not been remotely transparent in its decision making. All it has said is that second stem cell transplants are “not currently affordable and will not be routinely commissioned at this time”.

That tells us nothing about how NHS England reached its decision. Neither the minutes of the Clinical Priorities Advisory Group nor those of the Specialised Services Commissioning Committee are publicly available. The Government agreed with the Public Accounts Committee when it said that NHS England’s decision making in relation to specialised services should be far more transparent. Will the Minister please ensure that the minutes of those two groups are published on NHS England’s website in future?

Thirdly, the way in which NHS England’s decision has been communicated to patients has been shocking. It consists of a single bullet point retrospectively added to the bottom of a press release under the heading “Further information”. Does the Minister agree that that is unacceptable, and that far more needs to be done to ensure that decisions that could cost patients their lives are shared in a sensitive and caring manner, rather than merely being added as some sort of footnote?

With all that in mind, let me now ask the Minister the most important question. Does she accept that her Department must do more to hold NHS England to account, and will she agree to take steps to ensure that every patient who needs a second stem cell transplant has access to one?

I suspect that the Minister may say that, despite NHS England’s decision not to routinely commission second stem cell transplants, patients will be able to access the potentially life-saving treatment that they need by taking the individual funding request route. However, patients and their doctors know that, in reality, the chances of success through that route are very slim indeed. In November 2016, the all-party parliamentary group on stem cell transplantation had the pleasure of meeting Emma Paine. Emma was diagnosed with a blood disorder called severe aplastic anaemia in 2005. After her first transplant she relapsed, and, as with Sasha, her doctors recommended a second stem cell transplant. They tried to organise that via the individual funding request route, which meant that Emma had to prove that she was an exceptional case.

Emma was left waiting in the dark for four months, and her doctors had to fight her corner. During that time she was very unwell with infections, and her consultant decided to gamble and start her chemotherapy in preparation for a second stem cell transplant early, fearing that she would die if it did not start then. Although Emma eventually heard from her doctor the good news that the request had been successful, she did not receive her second stem cell transplant until January 2016, some six months after she had relapsed.

Emma said:

“I always assumed that if there was one treatment that could save my life, I would be offered it without question, and the biggest barrier to having my second transplant would be to find another donor—not having to fight the NHS to get it funded...I thought, ‘I’m a 28 year old woman, and a panel of people will decide whether I get to live or die’”.

Does the Minister agree that the individual funding request route will never be successful for all the patients who need a second stem cell transplant, and that even for those for whom it is successful, it is an incredibly tortuous route?

I close by urging the Minister, and indeed the whole House, to remember the patients caught up in all this—not just those who are waiting for a second stem cell transplant today, but the countless individuals who will be left without the chance of a second stem cell transplant in future, and therefore will be left without their last hope of a cure. I hope that the Minister will not wash her hands of the problem—I am sure she will not—and will instead fully accept that her Department has to play a key role in this, to make sure that action is taken to ensure that every patient who needs a second stem cell transplant can access one. The lives of people like Sasha and Emma depend on it.
been very pleased, that the Government have responded to our urgings and have been investing in cord blood collections, and have wanted to ensure they join with us in terms of the ambition for a national stem cell transplantation trials network.

The Minister back in September 2015 also talked about the great partnership work that we have recognised today involving the Anthony Nolan charity and NHS Blood and Transplant, and how the Government had worked very hard in supporting and directly funding a unified registry, and how the trials acceleration programme had provided additional quality research that helped provide the outcomes we are talking about today for transplantation and saving lives.

There has been good progress. There were four new blood and transplant units back in 2015 and, as the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside has said, there has been a recognition of the shortage particularly in relation to black, Asian and minority ethnic groups—and it was noted in 2015 that, because of the targeted recruitment, there had been an improvement in their life chances, with the rate going up from 40% to 60%. The residue now from the cord blood bank—there were some 12,000 or so samples back in 2015, and that has no doubt increased—has enabled there to be much greater opportunities for providing quicker and easier transplantation. And that is what it is all about. That context is important to the focus of this debate, which is about the prospects for those needing a second transplant. We are talking about the small number of people who relapse, some 16 to 20 a year—

7 pm
Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Chris Heaton-Harris.]

Mr Burrowes: We are talking about the 16 to 20 people a year for whom the clinical recommendation is that they have a second transplant. NHS England made a decision on this in December 2016. We have talked about percentages for black and minority ethnic groups, and the case has rightly been made that it is a scandal that people from other backgrounds are more able to provide the outcomes we are talking about today for transplantation and saving lives.

Mr Burrowes: We are talking about the 16 to 20 people a year for whom the clinical recommendation is that they have a second transplant. NHS England made a decision on this in December 2016. We have talked about percentages for black and minority ethnic groups, and the case has rightly been made that it is a scandal that people from other backgrounds are more able to provide the outcomes we are talking about today for transplantation and saving lives.

We know of many other patients with a chronic illness who go back to their doctor or to hospital because they have had a relapse. We have to recognise that that happens in this field, where people are getting better outcomes. There is still an issue of resistance, however, which needs extra research and clinical expertise. When a clinician says that a transplant is the only option available to that small number of patients, and when we are investing so much in ensuring that there is greater access nationally to treatments for blood disorders and blood cancers, it makes no sense to cut those people off and give them no further opportunity for treatment.

Maria Caulfield: I am listening to my hon. Friend’s powerful argument. I do not know of any other illness in which, if a patient would have a 30% chance of a cure if they had a second transplant but otherwise had no chance, they would be denied that treatment.

Mr Burrowes: Indeed, that 30% chance is taken away from those people. The chance of recovery is even greater for children, but that chance is taken away from them as well. We are getting into the issue of the exceptionality of circumstances here, but children are losing out too. These decisions seem to be made regardless of whether someone has a better chance of a cure. Routine commissioning has gone, but we are also finding that the treatment is being refused even in relation to individual funding requests. I will say more about that in a moment. People need not take our word for this—we are not the experts—because 30 clinicians wrote to The Times to make the point that these decisions were effectively passing a death sentence on the individuals involved.

We have heard about the desperate situation facing Sasha, but there are other individuals who will perhaps be able to overcome these obstacles. One who is more fortunate than most is Emily. She was studying when she was first diagnosed with leukaemia at the age of 21. She had a transplant from an unrelated donor in February 2014, but she discovered in December 2015 that she had relapsed, as can often happen. She was told that she would die without a second transplant, so she applied via an individual funding request, which was turned down by NHS England. The situation was the same for Sasha and others. Emily’s consultant felt strongly that she had a good chance of survival and, despite the financial risk, the hospital paid for the transplant itself. She had her second transplant in March 2016. She was very fortunate.

Sadly, because of the decisions that have been made since December, the edict now is that routine commissioning has gone. No risks will be taken by any hospital. Even though crowdfunding initiatives are trying to raise the money for Sasha and others, they will not be in such a fortunate position as Emily, who says:

“I am so grateful I have doctors who will fight my corner and who refused to give up on me. But it shouldn’t be the case that they have to find loopholes and face an uphill struggle to push this lifesaving treatment through. How many others wouldn’t be so lucky?”

Frankly, after the decision in December, hardly anyone will be so lucky now.

I appreciated and recognise that NHS England has difficult choices and decisions to make in prioritising specialist services, and they have to be based on evidence.
We are pleading with NHS England to look at the evidence in this particular case. Treatment must be prioritised in cases where the alternative presents significantly lower survival rates.

As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, it is an issue of cost. We need to look at the value and cost-effectiveness of such treatment. Second stem cell transplants are well established and are potentially curative treatments, as evidenced by the survival rates. The treatment is recommended by leading clinicians. The alternatives have to be carefully considered but, without such treatments, the mortality rates and the costs can be considerable.

After the original decision was made in July 2016, patients were effectively dependent on making individual funding requests. We have to ask whether that is the way out, whether it is the safety net. Frankly, it is not. Although it says on the tin that people can make the case for there being exceptional circumstances, and we might think it sounds pretty exceptional if, say, someone is facing death and there is no alternative—whether they are a child or an adult—such requests are highly bureaucratic and highly stressful. Sadly, the APPG has seen evidence that people are being pretty much routinely refused.

We are talking about small numbers of people. There is a lack of transparency, and the responses to IFRs do not give full reasons for refusing exceptionality. They appear to be refusals based on policy, rather than discretion based on the available evidence. I implore the Minister to look at the need for transparency on such decisions, which sadly at the moment only add to the anguish and distress of these very vulnerable patients.

For patients with a blood disorder, the fear of relapse is real—relapse is a real and present danger. The decision not to fund second transplants means that, from their first transplant, patients now fear they may relapse and not be able to access a second transplant, which is part of their treatment cycle. The situation is desperate: a death sentence is essentially hanging over them when they should be able to look to a more positive future. We need to be there alongside those patients in the long term, to the end, whatever happens, to ensure that they have the best alternatives.

The impact assessments need to look at the situation properly, and the offsetting of costs must include not only the specific treatment cycle but the overall treatment costs and the cost of not funding this treatment, including the cost of palliative care. In recognising the NHS’s degree of independence, I hope the Minister will use her good offices to ensure that it recognises that all steps need to be taken in conducting a full cost-benefit analysis of second transplants so that, when we revisit the decision in the spring, we will not be back in this situation; otherwise, we will be back here again to make the case and to say that it is not acceptable. A full understanding of the benefits of second transplantation is essential, so that those 16 to 20 patients a year can receive what all clinicians say they need. Their lives should not be lost.

7.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicolा Blackwood): I congratulate the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) on securing this important debate and on his moving contribution. I also thank his co-chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), for his contribution, which was characteristically informed. I join them in thanking the all-party parliamentary group on stem cell transplantation and the Anthony Nolan trust for all their hard work and advocacy in this field on behalf of patients and their families. I particularly want to thank all those who have allowed their personal stories to be shared in the Chamber tonight. They are a powerful reminder of why we are all here. Their importance cannot be overstated.

As the hon. Gentleman said, stem cell transplants promise a life-saving cure for many patients, but the key is finding a suitable matching donor. While many patients are able to find suitably matched family members, for more than 1,000 patients a year, that is not possible and they have to rely on the generosity of others. I am sure that the whole House will want to join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the more than 800 people in the UK this year who donated their stem cells.

I will go on to speak about improving patient care and the importance of research, as my hon. Friend mentioned, but both my colleagues raised commissioning as a particular concern, so I shall start there.

Over the past few months, there have been particular concerns raised regarding the commissioning by the NHS of second stem cell transplants for patients with relapsed disease. I recently had the chance to visit Anthony Nolan’s research labs at the Royal Free, where I was introduced to Emma Paine. Emma is alive today, as the hon. Gentleman said, thanks to a second stem cell transplant. She looks extraordinarily well and she is a powerful advocate for the cause. She spoke to me with extraordinary eloquence about the difficulties of the commissioning process, so I am in no doubt about the importance of the issue.

Decisions regarding prioritising specialised commissioning are always going to be difficult, which is why I believe that they are rightly a clinically led operational matter for NHS England, as the hon. Gentleman anticipated I would say. Knowing that I was coming here tonight, I asked for an update from NHS England. Contrary to some reporting on the issue, NHS England has not withdrawn the provision of second transplants. Second transplants have been, and remain, routinely commissioned for patients where the grafting process has failed, but NHS England has recently reviewed a proposal, alongside all the other priorities that were put forward, to begin routinely commissioning second transplants for patients with relapsed disease, for the first time since it was established in 2013. That would have replaced the current case-by-case provision of those transplants.

To prioritise funding for specialised services, as colleagues will know, NHS England has an established mechanism to evaluate proposals for new areas of investment. This reviews proposals on the basis of their clinical benefit and cost, as colleagues have discussed. The clinical benefit is based on the latest published clinical evidence.

As the hon. Gentleman said, that proposal was not approved. NHS England explained to me that its decision not to recommend routine commissioning of second transplants was based on the associated cost of the treatment, which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned and the clinical evidence that suggests that less than one third of patients with relapsed disease survive more than five years after the second
transplant. However, as I think colleagues mentioned, there is also evidence to suggest that, in that area, clinical practice is ahead of published evidence. For that reason, work is ongoing to ensure that the evidence base is updated before the decision is next reviewed.

Prioritisation decisions are kept under review in the light of new evidence and NHS England tells me that proposals for second transplants will be reviewed again later this year. Until the completion of any review, as the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside said, clinicians can continue to apply for funding for second transplants for relapsed disease where NHS England assesses that the patient is clinically exceptional or has a clinically critical need, although I accept what colleagues have said about how difficult that process can be.

I shall certainly put to my colleague, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the point raised by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside about the transparency of decision making and the sensitivity in communicating that decision. I shall ask that my hon. Friend take it up with NHS England.

Mark Tami: Does the Minister accept that, for a whole host of illnesses, we fund, probably rightly so, drugs that may cost vast sums for people for whom the prognosis is that their lives might be extended by weeks, whereas we are now discussing not only extending people’s lives for years but potentially enabling them to live a full life over which they could pay back some of the cost of the treatment?

Nicola Blackwood: As a politician, I do not feel I am qualified to make the judgment about the different clinical priorities, which is exactly why that decision is supposed to be made by clinicians. We are, though, hearing that there is a difference between the published evidence that is going forward to the board for decision making and that at the coalface. That is what needs to be rectified before the decision is made. We are working hard to try to ensure that that happens so that patients such as Sasha, Emily and others have the best possible chance.

It is precisely because of the extreme stress and the fear of relapse that the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) identified—the hon. Gentleman agreed with her—that in the meantime we are trying to focus our efforts on improving patient care and driving forward research, so that we can improve the outcomes of first stem cell transplants and explore all possible treatments and therapies for these very hard-to-treat conditions. That is why the Department of Health has not washed its hands of stem cell treatments. We have provided more than £19 million to our delivery partners, NHS Blood and Transplant and Anthony Nolan, since 2010, and a further £2.5 million this year.

Support from the Department is shaped by expert advice from the clinical community and has led to a number of tangible improvements that mean that patients are now significantly more likely to find a matched donor. Better matching of donor and recipient means that the stem cell transplants are much more likely to work the first time, which is a better outcome for the patient anyway. We have also supported the creation of a unified donor registry, which, combined with advances in tissue-typing, means that the time taken to identify a suitable donor has been significantly reduced. As many colleagues have said, patients in need of a stem cell transplant are often very ill and do not have time to waste, so that progress is very important.

Despite significant improvements in the chances of finding a suitable donor, there remains a global shortage of donors for patients from minority groups, which is unacceptable. That is why we are continuing to support the expansion of the cord stem cell bank. Stem cells from umbilical cords tolerate minor mismatches in tissue type, so are disproportionately used to treat patients from minority groups, for whom finding an exactly matched donor may be impossible. We are trying to combine that with the targeted recruitment of adult donors from under-represented communities. The chances of patients from minority groups continue to improve, but we recognise that there is still more to be done and are working closely with charities and hospitals to try to ensure that that happens.

Recent high-profile donor search campaigns, such as Match4Lara, have done a lot to help to raise awareness of the particular challenges that some patients face in finding a donor. Through that and other campaigns, Anthony Nolan has demonstrated the value of using social media to reach young people in all sections of the community. Overall, it is estimated that investment by the Department and the work of delivery partners such as Anthony Nolan means that, compared with 2010, more than 130 additional lives are being saved each year. We are making progress, but there is no complacency, and we recognise that more needs to be done.

Mr Burrowes: I am the first to congratulate the Government on making that investment, and on that commitment and partnership work. Nevertheless, is there not a mismatch? The investment commitment to collections at source is no doubt meant to ensure that there are outcomes in relation to transplantation. Our issue is that it seems that, at the end of the day, when a patient gets to the second transplant, which is sadly part of the complicated life-cycle for them, we seem to be just pulling the rug from under them.

Nicola Blackwood: My hon. Friend will have heard my answer on that. We are trying to address that as we go through the commissioning process by ensuring that the best possible evidence is there and that it is the most up-to-date clinical evidence, so that, through what has to be a robust prioritisation process, the second stem cell transplantation for relapse has the best possible chance. I also think that it is important that we address the other areas of stem cell transplantation to ensure that patients have the most improved outcomes at, for example, first transplant level, so that the research is available to feed through into that prioritisation process, and also so that patients have the best possible experience going through the process.

Finding a suitable donor is only the start of a long recovery process for patients, as Emma said very clearly to me. The report from the independent Cancer Taskforce, with which hon. Members are familiar, identified a number of ways in which people living with and beyond cancer could and should be better supported. In the case of patients receiving stem cell transplants, NHS England has set out the pathway in its service specifications. It is widely recognised that patients receiving a stem cell transplant often experience severe psychological and
emotional stress. The aggressive nature of the treatment and the need for prolonged hospital stays mean that the psychological impact on patients can be particularly severe.

Transplant centres recognise that the long-term management of these effects is an important aspect of the transplantation process. It is important that we stay by those patients for the long term, as has been mentioned. There is also an urgent need to improve the clinical outcomes of stem cell transplants and to track those outcomes so that we have the evidence to present. The planned impact project is an important aspect in addressing the development of the best possible clinical practice. This network, supported by the charities, Anthony Nolan and Leuka, will complement the existing National Institute for Health Research clinical trials network. It aims to recruit 20% of stem transplantation patients into clinical trials. We believe that it is only through further research supported by clinical trials that the survival rates for these transplants can be improved.

During my recent visit to the Anthony Nolan laboratories, I was particularly impressed to see that they are involved in applying the latest genomics technology to improve the matching of donors and recipients. It is a clear example of how we are directly improving care and access through our research and through the 100,000 Genomes Project.

Mark Tami: I thank the Minister for giving way; she is being very generous. She has touched on a key point there, and it is something that I have raised with her before. We are rightly prepared to spend a large sum of money on treatment to give people the transplant they need. As she says, it is a very difficult process for the patient. Afterwards, there is virtually no support for that patient and for their mental health. They may have a lot of questions and a host of issues—a child, for example, may want to know why it has happened to them and why they look different—but they really have to search for support. The support should be part and parcel of the whole package, rather than something that is applied as some sort of add-on.

Nicola Blackwood: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is very important that we look at the whole child as well as the psychological impacts of long-term illness—whether it is a cancer or any other kind of long-term illness. He will know that we are developing a Green Paper for children’s mental health, and I do intend, and hope, to be addressing the ways in which we can look at not only the broad spectrum of children’s mental health, but those who have particular challenges that they need to overcome. He has raised the matter with me before. I gave him a commitment that I would follow through on it, and I reassert that commitment tonight.

The way in which we are working on this, which is to build up the research to improve patient care and to ensure that we are allowing the NHS to deliver world-leading therapies based on genetic information, is essential to ensuring that every patient receives the appropriate treatment. That is what colleagues say they want to happen. It also highlights the importance of having the right infrastructure in place throughout the NHS, because if we do not have that, we will not be able to provide the best support.

That is why we announced in September an £816 million investment for biomedical research centres over the next five years. We also specifically support translational research into stem cell transplantation through the stem cell and immunotherapy research unit—one of four NIHR blood and transplant research units, each of which is a partnership between a university and NHSBT. The stem cell unit at University College London is involved in the development of new and potentially transformative forms of treatment involving immunotherapies. Such therapies are perhaps the most exciting and promising area of cancer therapy and may eventually entirely replace the need for stem cell transplantation. I appreciate, however, that those advances cannot come soon enough for the patients mentioned tonight.

As ground-breaking as our research efforts undoubtedly are and as necessary as they are for the long term, we must always remember that research is not an end in itself. Ultimately, we are all working to deliver better, more targeted patient outcomes that offer hope to the thousands of people living with an incurable condition. In doing so, we must ensure that we are helping to improve the lives of those patients and their families while we work to transform NHS care for generations to come. That is what we are working to deliver. I hope that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside and my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate will work with me as we try to do that.

Question put and agreed to.

7.25 pm

House adjourned.
Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Infrastructure Developments

1. Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) external stakeholders on infrastructure developments in Wales.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): The Minister will be aware of the campaign by the Daily Post newspaper to improve mobile phone hotspots. What is he doing to help to improve mobile phone services for voice and data in north Wales?

Guto Bebb: I pay tribute to the Daily Post’s campaign in north Wales, which has highlighted this issue. That is partly why I was very keen to convene a summit of mobile providers to look very carefully at ways in which we could give them practical support in helping to deal with hotspots in Wales. One of the key issues is the planning regime in Wales, which can be much more flexible in ensuring that the money being invested in Wales goes much further and deals with the hotspots in all parts of Wales, whether rural or city.

2. Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Happy St Dwynwen’s day, Mr Speaker.

Eighty-four per cent. of Conservative councillors, 83% of Conservative MPs, a former Conservative Energy Minister, both Wales Office Ministers and the Conservative party manifesto all support the Swansea bay tidal lagoon project. The Minister failed to answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), so I will give him another opportunity: when will his Government kick-start the tidal lagoon project?

Guto Bebb: I restate that this decision will have to be made across Government: other Departments will have to look at the issue. I am sure the hon. Lady would agree that in an age where we are seeing industry in Wales worried about the cost of energy, any deal for the Swansea bay tidal lagoon must not only be good in terms of the tidal lagoon but right for the taxpayer and the energy user in Wales.

3. Jo Stevens: Last week in Westminster Hall, the Minister said that “it is difficult to offer guarantees that”

European Investment Bank

“loans would be supported”.—[Official Report, 17 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 264WH.]

By that, he meant supported by a guarantee from the Treasury when we leave the EU. What benefits has the European Investment Bank brought to Wales, and how much has it invested in Wales over the past 10 years?

Guto Bebb: There are no grounds for further delaying the start of the review’s detailed road map for a new industry, but is a “no regrets policy”. There may be much to digest in the energy user in Wales.

4. Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): EU structural funding has really helped to improve key road routes across Wales. Can the Minister confirm that once we have left the European Union, equivalent funding for projects like renewing the Heads of the Valleys road will continue?

Guto Bebb: EU funding has had a clear impact in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency in terms of the Heads of the Valleys road, and indeed investment in the railway infrastructure. The south Wales metro scheme will generate an estimated £500 million of funding from the UK Government. This Government have delivered a fiscal framework to Wales that has been described as both fair and sustainable, and I can assure him that Wales will be protected when we come to the negotiations to leave the European Union.

5. Chris Elmore: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): This Government recognise that delivering world-class infrastructure in our transport and digital sectors is vital to improving productivity and driving economic growth. I hold regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and local partners on issues relating to Wales. Earlier this month I convened a mobile summit which brought together key stakeholders from the mobile network operators and the UK and Welsh Governments to explore ways in which we can work in partnership to improve mobile reception for people and businesses throughout Wales.

Chris Elmore: I notice that the Minister failed to mention the Swansea bay tidal lagoon report. That six-month independent review conducted by ex-Energy Minister Charles Hendry could not have been more conclusive in saying that moving ahead with a pathfinder lagoon at Swansea bay “as soon as is reasonably practicable” is a “no regrets policy”. There may be much to digest in the review’s detailed road map for a new industry, but there are no grounds for further delaying the start of that industry. When will the Government give the green light to this crucial infrastructure project?

Guto Bebb: I am delighted to state that Charles Hendry is in Cardiff Bay today providing more information about his report to the Assembly, and he is being supported there by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies). The report was comprehensive and detailed on the issues relating to a tidal lagoon. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree, however, that any decision must also be good for the taxpayer and good for the electricity end user.
Guto Bebb: I am sure that the hon. Lady will join me in highlighting the success of the Swansea campus development as an example of European Investment Bank investment in a Welsh context. I am sure that she will also join me in paying tribute to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer for securing and guaranteeing EU funding up to the point of departure from the European Union. The key point that she must be aware of is that thus far, this Government have delivered a degree of protection for EU funding in Wales, and in due course further announcements will be made about further funding support in a Welsh context.

Leaving the EU: Business Links

2. Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of Wales’s international business links since the UK’s decision to leave the EU.

3. Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of Wales’s international business links since the UK’s decision to leave the EU.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): The UK, including Wales, remains the same outward-looking, globally minded country that we have always been. To support Wales’s international business links further, I am jointly hosting a Wales business export summit in Cardiff in early March to ensure that businesses in Wales have full access to UK Government support.

Stephen Crabb: The Republic of Ireland is one of Wales’s most important trading partners, with around 360,000 trucks passing through Welsh ports to Ireland every year. May I encourage my right hon. Friend to get really involved in the discussions about future UK-Irish border and customs controls to ensure that future arrangements not only uphold the peace process with the north, but protect Welsh interests by minimising checks and delays on trucks that use Welsh ports?

Alun Cairns: My right hon. Friend is a true champion of the port in Milford Haven and the links and benefits that it brings to the Welsh and UK economies, and he has played a significant part in developing it. As we negotiate our exit from the European Union, and the special situation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the Welsh situation is not being ignored. At every Joint Ministerial Committee it has been recognised not only by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, but at the Joint Ministerial Committee involving the Prime Minister.

Karl McCartney: Given the first-class universities in Wales, including my alma mater Coleg Prifysgol Dewi Sant, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will highlight their expertise as part of his assessment of international business links?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have mentioned that the Joint Ministerial Committee involving the devolved Administrations plays an important part, but that does not mean that universities will not have a part to play in influencing the negotiations on exiting the European Union. I spoke to the vice-chancellor of Cardiff University last week. I am happy to maintain a close relationship with my hon. Friend’s former university and to ensure that all universities across the United Kingdom have their say as we negotiate our exit from the European Union.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The Secretary of State’s response to the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) was not good enough, to be frank. We have had the same response to that question for some time now. We are going to have a common travel area, and it is going to impact heavily on Welsh ports. Will the Secretary of State put the case for Welsh ports and meet Welsh Members of Parliament to ensure that that important trade has a Welsh dimension?

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I am very pleased that the Secretary of State mentioned universities in his response about international business links. Is he aware of the profound concern that is shared by most vice-chancellors, including Professor Hinofelaar at Wrexham Glyndŵr University, about the impact that changes to migration rules will have on students from within the EU and outside it? Will the Secretary of State discuss the matter in detail with those vice-chancellors?

Alun Cairns: As well as the universities that I have highlighted, I am in close engagement with Universities Wales, which represents all universities, but I am happy to meet any of the vice-chancellors about the situation. Many assumptions have been made about migration controls. Clearly, it is in our interests to ensure that universities can succeed and prosper, and that international students are an important part of the model. Controlling immigration does not mean stopping immigration.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): I am glad of my right hon. Friend’s concentration on universities in his answers. He will be aware that just before Christmas, Cardiff University school of chemistry was formally presented with a royal warrant, officially awarding the department a regius professorship of chemistry in recognition of the exceptionally high standard of research at Cardiff University. What are my right hon. Friend and the Wales Office doing to make sure that our institutions and professors get such accolades and that we can stand on the international stage?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the success and the role of universities. The UK Government have a part to play in recognising, championing and promoting that, as well as using Innovate UK money. He is right to highlight the new regius professorship that was awarded to Cardiff University. That underlines its expertise and success in the field of chemistry, and we are determined to ensure that that plays a significant part on the global stage.
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): As the Secretary of State considers Wales’s business links post-Brexit, will he give the highest priority to the Welsh steel industry, and will he not rule out a trade defence mechanism for steel if that is what is required to save Welsh steelworkers’ jobs?

Alun Cairns: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the steel industry. It is an extremely important industry for communities in Wales, but it is also of strategic importance for the whole of the United Kingdom. Last week, I met all the unions relating to steel, and we discussed the challenges that exist, as well as how the company, the pension trustees, the pensioners and the employees of the steelworks need to work their way through this. The Government stand ready to support the industry—we are determined to find a long-term, sustainable future for the steel industry—and I recognise its importance for Wales and for the UK.

Industrial Strategy

3. Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What discussions his Department has had with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on ensuring that the Government’s industrial strategy benefits the whole of the UK. [908305]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): This Government have put in place an industrial strategy that will work for all people in every corner of the UK. Wales is home to world-leading sectors, be it compound semi-conductors in Cardiff, agri-tech in Aberystwyth or advanced manufacturing in Deeside. We are committed to building on our strengths to create an economy where everyone can share the benefits of our economic success.

Mrs Villiers: One of the most important themes of the Government’s industrial strategy is the determination to ensure that all nations and regions of the UK can benefit from economic prosperity. An important aspect of that is science and research, which I hope the Minister will agree offers real potential for businesses in Wales to prosper and create jobs.

Guto Bebb: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend about the importance of investing in skills and high-tech industries in a Welsh context. I know that our university sector stands ready to support the Welsh economy to ensure that we have such skills.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): What representations has the Minister made to his Government about placing steel at the heart of their industrial strategy, and how will the UK Government support the innovative products and projects coming out of Swansea University that will future-proof steel making for many generations?

Guto Bebb: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has stated, he recently met the trade unions in relation to the steel sector, and one of my first visits as a Minister was to the Tata plant in Deeside, so we understand the importance of steel to Wales. This Government have been unyielding in our support for the steel industry in Wales, and that will continue.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The UK has lacked a strategic approach to industrial policy for many years, and Wales has suffered as a result. What specific measures in the Government’s industrial strategy will be brought in to help Wales?

Guto Bebb: It is very important to state that the industrial strategy in a Welsh context must be a partnership between the two Governments that Wales has—we have the UK Government and the Welsh Government—and Wales will succeed and prosper if those two Governments work together. I am glad to be able to say to the hon. Lady that in relation to skills for the energy sector, support for the car manufacturing sector and support for the steel sector, the two Governments are working together to ensure the best for Wales in terms of industrial strategy and developing new opportunities for the people of Wales.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): As the Minister has said, we have many important employers on Deeside—Airbus, Tata, Toyota—but we also have many companies in the supply chain that are very important. We must not only keep those companies post-Brexit, but encourage more to come in.

Guto Bebb: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. Deeside is a great success story for the UK economy, not just for the Welsh economy. He is absolutely right that we need to build on that success by drawing in more investment, and that is why the Secretary of State and I will be holding a summit with the Department for International Trade in Wales in the very near future.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): One of the biggest infrastructure projects we are about to engage in is the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster. Will the Minister make sure that this is part of an industrial strategy for Wales? We do not have enough people in this country to complete the work, and we need academies in every constituency in the land to give young people the skills they need to work in this building.

Mr Speaker: The question is certainly part of an ingenuity strategy, on which I congratulate the hon. Gentleman.

Guto Bebb: I will obviously not comment on the issue of the refurbishment of the Palace, but I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of getting skills that are relevant to the fabric of buildings in Wales, historic buildings especially. I pay tribute to Coleg Llandrillo Menai, which is doing exactly that—training young people not just in building skills, but in traditional building skills as well.

Leaving the EU: Agriculture Policy

4. Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): What assessment he has made of priorities for Welsh agriculture policy after the UK has left the EU. [908306]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): We are determined to get the best deal on leaving the EU. We want a world-leading food and farming industry and the cleanest, healthiest environment for generations. Agriculture is clearly a devolved area,
and I am keen for Welsh farmers to add value to their products. We have the capacity and scope to be innovative, not only in growing great products and producing great food, but in processing and selling them worldwide.

Tom Elliott: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he confirm whether, once the UK leaves the European Union, agriculture policy and funding will be devolved to the regions or remain here with the United Kingdom Government?

Guto Bebb: It is certainly the case that agriculture policy is currently devolved. Clearly, there will be a repatriation of powers from Brussels to Westminster as a result of the decision to leave the European Union, but there is an ongoing and positive discussion between Westminster and the Welsh Government in relation to where powers will lie. I say categorically that that partnership is essential for the success of agriculture. That partnership must be not only constructive but objective in respect of what works for the farming industry in Wales and the UK.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Many of my constituents farm cross-border and produce excellent, high-quality British agricultural produce. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure there is the widest possible market access for that produce post-exit?

Guto Bebb: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, who knows the agricultural sector in north Wales and Cheshire extremely well, and who understands the cross-border nature of much farming in Wales. The key point is that we must be aware that we have a great product to offer the rest of the world. It is essential that we go out and sell that product, which is why the Wales Office is forging such a close relationship with the Secretary of State for International Trade. It is essential that we grow the markets for Welsh products, rather than be defensive about the issue.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Is this not a wonderful opportunity to reform agricultural subsidies to decouple Wales from the system in England that rewards people for owning land and not, as they are rewarded in Wales, for producing food? Should we not end the system of paying millionaires and billionaires up to £1 million each a year, while Welsh farmers have to struggle with small subsidies? Can we have Welsh policies for Welsh farmers?

Guto Bebb: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the aim of the Government is to have a farming policy that is right for the UK and right for Wales. He was much more positive about our farming industry in a recent Westminster Hall debate and I agree with the comments he made in that debate. It is essential that we support the farming industry in Wales, while moving forward following our exit from the European Union.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that Brexit gives us the opportunity to set a new agricultural policy in Wales, starting with positive changes to the common agricultural policy?

Guto Bebb: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that, in view of our decision to leave the European Union, it is essential that we develop an agricultural system that works for farmers in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom. The common agricultural policy was guilty of the fossilisation of Welsh farming, because it encouraged people not to retire. It is essential to look at the problems created by the common agricultural policy while we design a new system for Wales.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Sixty-eight per cent of Welsh exports, including those from the Welsh agricultural sector, go to the European Union. Perhaps the Minister can tell us how leaving the single market and the customs union will lead to a better deal for Welsh exporters.

Guto Bebb: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the percentage of Welsh exports that go to the European Union, but he should realise that access to the single market is what is now crucial. It was very apparent from the decision to leave the European Union that we will not be a member of the single market. We need to negotiate the best possible access deal with the European Union and I think that will be possible in due course.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Last Friday, I visited Trewen farm in Botwnnog with the Farmers Union of Wales. This dairy farm has contributed over £150,000 to the local economy in the last three years, yet only three years from now Welsh farmers are set to face a perfect storm. Can the Minister reveal what transitional arrangements will be put in place to safeguard our rural economy?

Guto Bebb: I thank the hon. Lady for her question and the use of the term “perfect storm”. It is an acknowledgement of the press release sent out by the Farmers Union of Wales. I can reassure her that the issue should be about access to the single market, and while the FUW has expressed its concern about the decision to leave the single market, my discussions and meetings with farmers’ unions in Wales, both the FUW and the National Farmers Union, have highlighted access to it as the crucial issue for Welsh farmers.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): During Welsh questions last April, the Minister said: “The extent of Welsh agricultural produce that is exported to the EU shows how important that market is; 90% of Welsh agricultural produce is exported to the EU and we should not risk losing that.”—[Official Report, 13 April 2016, Vol. 608, c. 341.]

Given those comments, will he explain why his Government wish to leave the single market?

Guto Bebb: At the risk of repeating myself, let me point out that the hon. Gentleman is right that 90% of Welsh farming exports go to the EU, which is why I have repeatedly stated that the issue that farmers in Wales are concerned about is access to the single market. That is the issue that will make a difference to Welsh farmers and towards which the Department and the Government will be working.

Mr Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) and wish him and his colleagues a happy Burns night.
EU Single Market: Jobs

6. Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on jobs in Wales of the UK leaving the EU single market. [908309]

7. Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on jobs in Wales of the UK leaving the EU single market. [908310]

8. George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on jobs in Wales of the UK leaving the EU single market. [908312]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): Since the vote to leave the EU, we have seen employment hit record highs, and there are now 4,000 fewer people unemployed than six months ago. Trade with the EU is important to Wales, but it is clear that we need to increase our trade with the fastest-growing markets across the world. It is time for Wales, like Britain, to rediscover its role as a great global trading nation.

Alan Brown: I hope the whole Chamber will celebrate Robert Burns today.

This week, Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Government published a White Paper outlining their concerns about Wales and our leaving the EU. What actions will the UK Government take to address the concerns raised by the two largest parties in the Welsh Parliament?

Alun Cairns: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was awaiting the document from the Welsh Government. It was received on Monday, and of course we will work through the details. It will be subject to discussion at the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations—the right place for it to be considered and discussed—but much of the language around accessing the single market is not incompatible with what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said.

Kirsten Oswald: The Supreme Court ruling yesterday concluded that the Sewel convention was a convention and therefore not a matter on which it could rule. Our friends in Plaid Cymru are moving to table a legislative consent motion in the Welsh Parliament, and the Scottish Parliament will also vote on a legislative consent motion. Does the Secretary of State agree that the devolved Administrations are best placed to determine the future of the people living and working in our nations? [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. We would like to hear the reply.

Alun Cairns: It is a matter for the devolved Administrations whether they choose to table legislative consent motions, and yesterday’s judgment was quite clear. The approach of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the whole Government is to engage positively with the devolved Administrations—the Scottish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Welsh Government—but we will also want to engage with other stakeholders in the nations as well.

George Kerevan: North Wales has been designated the central maintenance centre for all European F-35 fighters. Can the Minister assure the House that the aerospace companies in north Wales will be given the same assurances as Nissan that leaving the single market will not result in tariff barriers or a loss of access to European skilled labour?

Alun Cairns: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman highlights the success of Sealand in winning the F-35 contract. It will be the global repair hub. I was there on Monday celebrating and recognising the effects and the impact that employees had on winning that global contract. The significance should not be understated. It offers positive prospects for the supply chain and that centre for decades to come.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): The Prime Minister has talked of a bold new trading relationship with New Zealand. Will the Secretary of State relay to the Prime Minister—she is here, so he can do so directly—the genuine concern of many Welsh upland farmers that they could lose access to the biggest market on the continent in favour of a market, and direct competitor, on the other side of the world?

Alun Cairns: Welsh produce, and Welsh lamb and beef in particular, is world leading, and there are great opportunities as we exit the European Union to explore and exploit new markets. Hybu Cig Cymru specifically recognised that £20 million could be brought to Wales from accessing the north American market. These are the ambitions that we want to have, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will of course put Britain first in any negotiations.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I am not seeking a running commentary or any detailed negotiating information, but a special deal was cut for the car industry in the north-east. Did the Secretary of State seek a similar deal for the car industry in Wales?

Alun Cairns: I do not recognise the basis of the question. The automotive sector is exceptionally strong in Wales, partly as a result of the Nissan contract in Sunderland, for which many of the supplier companies are based in Wales. I also draw attention to the great success of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in bringing Aston Martin to Wales. We should recognise and celebrate the fantastic success on that MOD base.

Hywel Williams: Up to 200,000 jobs in Wales depend on our membership of the European Union, the single market and the customs union. I am not going to go through every sector, but will the Secretary of State seek sectoral deals for important parts of the Welsh economy as we leave the European Union?

Alun Cairns: It is clear that we want to get the best deal for the whole of the United Kingdom. We want to ensure that the market within the United Kingdom works effectively. After all, the most important market for Wales is the market from within the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman can take confidence from the fact
that, on the back of this Government’s policy and success, Wales has been the fastest growing economy outside London since 2010.

Mr Speaker: Order. Colleagues, we are visited today by Speaker Win Myint, the Speaker of the Hluttaw, the Burmese Parliament. He is accompanied by a delegation of his parliamentary colleagues. I am sure the House will wish to join me in welcoming Mr Speaker and his colleagues.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

**PRIME MINISTER**

*The Prime Minister was asked—Engagements*

Q1. [908363] Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 25 January.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** As the response from the whole House showed, we all indeed welcome the Speaker of the Burmese Parliament and his colleagues to see our deliberations today.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending our thoughts to the friends and family of the police officer who was shot in Belfast over the weekend. The Police Service of Northern Ireland does a superb job in keeping us safe and secure, and has our fullest support.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in this House I shall have further such meetings later today. Later this week, I will travel to the United States for talks with President Trump.

Helen Jones: I join the Prime Minister in sending good wishes to the police officer who was shot in Belfast.

They are the best drivers of social mobility, and 99% of them are rated good or outstanding, while 65% of their places are in the most deprived areas of this country, so why is the Prime Minister introducing cuts that threaten the very existence of maintained nursery schools? Is it not true that when it comes to social mobility, her actions speak far louder than her words?

**The Prime Minister:** I want to ensure, and this Government want to ensure, good-quality education at every age and every stage for children in this country. That is why we are looking at improving the number of good school places. The hon. Lady talks about my record speaking louder than words, so let me point out that I was very proud as chairman of an education authority in London in the 1990s to introduce nursery school places for every three and four-year-old whose parent wanted them.

Q2. [908364] Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): The Prime Minister laid out a clear and bold plan for Brexit in her speech last week. Hon. Members quite rightly want an opportunity to scrutinise the plan. Does the Prime Minister agree that the best way of facilitating that scrutiny would be a Government White Paper laying out our vision for a global Britain based on free trade in goods and services that will be to the benefit of us and other European countries?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises the question of parliamentary scrutiny. I have made clear, as have senior Ministers, that we will ensure that Parliament has every opportunity to carry out such scrutiny as we go through this process. I set out that bold plan for a global Britain last week. I recognise that there is an appetite in the House to see it set out in a White Paper—I have heard my hon. Friend’s question, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) asked a question in the same vein last week—and I can confirm that our plan will be set out in a White Paper published for the House.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in expressing the condolences of, I am sure, the whole House to the family of the police officer who lost his life over the weekend in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister has wasted 80 days between the original judgment and the appeal. She has finally admitted today, after pressure from all sides, that there will be a White Paper. May we know when that White Paper will be available to us, and why it is taking so long for us to get it?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman asked for debates. I made very clear that there would always be debates in the House, and there have been and will continue to be. He asked for votes. There have been votes in the House; the House voted overwhelmingly for the Government to trigger article 50 before the end of March this year. He asked for a plan. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), I have set out a clear plan for a bold future for Britain. He and others asked for a White Paper, and I have made clear that there will be a White Paper.

What I am also clear about is that the right hon. Gentleman always asks about process—about the means to an end. The Government and I are focusing on the outcomes. We are focusing on a truly global Britain, building a stronger future for this country, the right deal for Britain, and Britain out of the European Union.

Jeremy Corbyn: My question was not complicated. I simply asked when the White Paper would come out. Will it be published before or at the same time as the Bill that is apparently about to be published?

Last week I asked the Prime Minister repeatedly to clarify whether her Government were prepared to pay to secure tariff-free access to the single European market. She repeatedly refused to answer the question, so I will ask her again. Are her Government ruling out paying a fee for tariff-free access to the single market or the bespoke customs union to which she also referred in her speech?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman has mentioned the issue of timing. There are actually two separate issues. The House has voted overwhelmingly that article 50 should be triggered before the end of March 2017. Following the Supreme Court judgment, a
Bill will be provided for the House, and there will be proper debates on it in the Chamber and in another place. There is then the separate question of the publication of the plan that I have set out, a bold vision for Britain for the future. I will do that in the White Paper. The right hon. Gentleman knows that one of our objectives is the best possible free trade with the European Union, and that is what we will be out there negotiating for.

Jeremy Corbyn: Some of this is very worrying for many Members, but, more important, it is worrying for many other people. For example, the chief executive of Nissan was given assurances by the Prime Minister’s Business Secretary about future trade arrangements with Europe, but now says that Nissan will “have to re-evaluate the situation” in relation to its investments in Britain.

The Prime Minister: I expect us to get a good deal for trading relationships with the European Union, but I am also clear that this Government will not sign up to a bad deal for the United Kingdom. As for the threats that the right hon. Gentleman claims might happen—he often uses those phrases and talks about workers’ rights—perhaps he should listen to his former colleague in this House, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who today said, “to give credit to the Government...I don’t think they want to weaken workers’ rights”, and goes on to say,

“I’ve seen no evidence from the conversations I’ve had with senior members of the Government that that’s their aspiration or their intention or something they want to do. Which is good.”

As usual with Labour, the right hand is not talking to the far-left.

Jeremy Corbyn: The evidence of what the Tory party and this Government really think about workers’ rights was there for all to see yesterday: a private Member’s Bill under the ten-minute rule by a Tory MP to tear up parts of the International Labour Organisation convention, talking down the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) to protect European workers’ rights that have been obtained in this country. That is the real agenda of the Tory party.

What the Prime Minister is threatening the EU that unless it gives in to her demands she will turn Britain into a bargain basement tax haven off the coast of Europe. Labour Members are very aware of the consequences that that would have—the damage that it would do to jobs and living standards, and to our public services. Is the Prime Minister now going to rule out the bargain basement threat that she made in her speech at Lancaster House?

The Prime Minister: I again point out to the right hon. Gentleman that it is this Government who have introduced the national living wage and this Government who have made changes to zero-hours contracts.

On the issue of my visit to the United States of America, I am pleased that I am able to meet President Trump so early in his Administration. That is a sign of the strength of the special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America—a special relationship on which he and I intend to build. But I also say to the Leader of the Opposition that I am not afraid to speak frankly to a President of the United States; I am able to do that because we have that special relationship—a special relationship that the right hon. Gentleman would never have with the United States.

Jeremy Corbyn: We would never allow Britain to be sold off on the cheap. How confident is the Prime Minister of getting a good deal for “global Britain” from a President who says he wants to put America first, buy American and build a wall between his country and Mexico?

Article 50 was not about a court judgment against the Government. What it signified was the bad judgment of this Government: the bad judgment of prioritising corporate tax cuts over investment in national health and social care; the bad judgment of threatening European partners while offering a blank cheque to President Trump; and the bad judgment of wanting to turn Britain into a bargain basement tax haven. So will the Prime Minister offer some clarity and certainty and withdraw the threats to destroy the social structure of this country by turning us into the bargain basement she clearly threatens?

The Prime Minister: We will be out around the world with the EU, America and other countries negotiating good free trade deals for this country that will bring prosperity to this country. The right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about Brexit, but I have to say to him that
he is the leader of his party and he cannot even agree with his shadow Chancellor about Brexit. The shadow Chancellor cannot agree with the shadow Brexit Secretary, the shadow Brexit secretary disagrees with the shadow Home Secretary, and the shadow Home Secretary has to ring up the leader and tell him to change his mind. He talks about us standing up for Britain; they cannot speak for themselves and they will never speak for Britain.

Q3. [908365] David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con): On 27 December, another young woman lost her life driving through the west country on the A303. In the past decade, more than 1,000 people have been killed or injured on that road. For 40 years, Governments have promised to dual the lethal parts of the road where two lanes become three or three lanes become two, with no central reservation. The queues on the road are also legendary. I know that the Government are committed to an upgrade, but will the Prime Minister assure us that the proposed tunnel beneath Stonehenge will not hold up essential work elsewhere, and that we will soon see cones on the road and spades in the ground?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important issue, and he is absolutely right to do that. I can assure him that we are working generally to improve the safety of our roads. He refers specifically to the issue of the A303 and to the tragic incident that happened on 27 December. We have committed to creating a dual carriageway on the A303 from the M3 to the M5. I understand that Highways England has recently launched a consultation into the route under Stonehenge, and my hon. Friend will want to look closely at that issue. This is all part of our £2 billion investment in road improvements that will improve connections in the south-west, but I can assure him that we have road safety at the forefront of our mind.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): May I begin by wishing everybody a happy Burns day, and by extending congratulations to The Scotsman newspaper, which is celebrating its bicentenary today?

Yesterday, the Government lost in the Supreme Court, and today we have had a welcome U-turn on a White Paper on Brexit. In the spirit of progress for Parliament, and in advance of her meeting President Trump, will the Prime Minister tell Parliament what she wants to achieve in a UK-US trade deal?

The Prime Minister: First, I join the right hon. Gentleman in wishing a happy Burns day to everybody and in recognising the bicentenary of The Scotsman. I am sure everybody in the House will join me in that. He asks what we want to achieve in our arrangements with the United States. It is very simple: we want to achieve an arrangement that ensures that the interests of the United Kingdom are put first, and that is what I will be doing. We want to see trade arrangements with the United States, and with other parts of the world, that can increase our trade and bring prosperity and growth to the United Kingdom. Then, my aim for this Government is to ensure that the economy works for everyone in every part of the United Kingdom.

Angus Robertson: The European Union, which we are still part of, has among the highest food safety standards anywhere in the world, and we are proud on our continent to have public national health systems. The United States, on the other hand, is keen to have health systems that are fully open to private competition and it wants to export genetically modified organisms, beef raised using growth hormones and chicken meat washed with chlorinated water. Will the Prime Minister tell President Trump that she is not prepared to lower our food and safety standards or to open our health systems up for privatisation? Or does she believe that that is a price worth paying for a UK-US trade deal?

The Prime Minister: We will be looking for a UK-US trade deal that improves trade between our two countries, that will bring prosperity and growth to this country and that will ensure that we can bring jobs to this country as well. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that, in doing that, we will put UK interests and UK values first.

Q4. [908366] Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Historic per capita spending in our regions, including Yorkshire, when compared with London is up to 40% lower for our local authorities, up to 50% lower for our schools and up to 60% lower for our transport projects. Does the Prime Minister agree that, if we want to build a country that works for everyone, we need a fair funding deal that works for everyone?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the issues that my hon. Friend has raised, and I can assure him that our commitment in relation to the northern parts of England, including Yorkshire, is absolutely clear. We want to back business growth right across the north, and we are backing the northern powerhouse to help the great cities and towns of the north to pool their strengths and take on the world. Yorkshire local enterprise partnerships have received an additional £156 million in Government funding this week, and we are spending a record £13 billion on transport across the north. As a result, there are more people in work in Yorkshire and the Humber than ever before, and the employment rate is at a record high. That is good news for people in the region and good news for our economy as a whole.

Q5. [908367] Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The European Medicines Agency provides a single drug licensing system for 500 million people and results in the UK having drugs licensed six to 12 months ahead of countries like Canada and Australia. Yesterday, the Health Secretary stated that the UK will not be in the EMA, so can the Prime Minister confirm this and explain how she will prevent delayed drug access for UK patients?

The Prime Minister: There are a number of organisations that we are part of as members of the European Union. As part of the work that we are doing to look at the United Kingdom’s future after we leave the European Union, we are looking at the arrangements we can put in place in relation to those issues. The pharmaceutical industry in this country is a very important part of our economy, and the ability of people to access these new
drugs is also important. I assure the hon. Lady that we are looking seriously at this and will ensure that we have the arrangements that we need.

Q7. [908369] Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Too few British entrepreneurs are connecting with the capital they need to start and grow. As part of her industrial strategy, which will be looking at access to capital, will the Prime Minister order a review of the enterprise investment scheme and the seed enterprise investment scheme in the hope that they can be simplified, helping to create the large pools of buccaneering capital that British industry needs?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. He has long been a champion of entrepreneurship in this country, and I can tell him that in the industrial strategy we are committed to providing the best environment for business. The Treasury has established a patient capital review, for example, with a panel chaired by Sir Damon Buffini to look at the barriers that exist to long-term investment. We are also increasing investment in venture capital by the British Business Bank by £400 million, and that will unlock £1 billion of new finance. The Treasury is going to be publishing a consultation in the spring examining these issues, and I am sure my hon. Friend will wish to contribute and respond to that.

Q6. [908368] Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Four-and-a-half years ago, my constituents Chris and Lydia Leek were on a family holiday on the Greek island of Zante when their son, Jamie, was hit and killed by a speeding motorbike—it was his ninth birthday. The rider was convicted but has appealed against his sentence and, to date, remains a free man. Will the Prime Minister agree to meet Chris and Lydia to discuss how they can finally secure justice for Jamie?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to look at the tragic case that the hon. Lady describes. Our thoughts must be with Chris and Lydia at the terrible loss they experienced. As to the issue of what is happening in terms of the Greek criminal justice system, of course that is a matter for the Greek authorities, but I will look seriously at this case and see if there is anything that the Foreign Office can do.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): President Trump has repeatedly said that he will bring back torture as an instrument of policy. When she sees him on Friday, will the Prime Minister make it clear that in no circumstances will she permit Britain to be dragged into facilitating that torture, as we were after 11 September?

The Prime Minister: I assure my right hon. Friend that our position on torture is clear: we do not sanction torture and do not get involved in it. That will continue to be our position.

Q8. [908370] Andy Slaughter (Hammers smith) (Lab): Seventy per cent. of my constituents voted remain, 15% are citizens of other EU countries, and almost all do not trust the Prime Minister’s Government to negotiate a deal that secures the future prosperity of London and the UK. Will she give this House a veto on the deal that she does, or will she put the deal to a referendum of the British people?

The Prime Minister: People voted differently across the country. Parts of the country voted to remain and parts of the country voted to leave. What we do now is unite behind the result of the vote that took place. We come together as a country, we go out there, we make a success of this, and we ensure that we build a truly global Britain that will bring jobs to the hon. Gentleman’s constituency and for his constituents.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): This week, Milton Keynes celebrates its 50th birthday. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] We have been the most successful of new cities and have one of the highest rates of economic growth. Does the Prime Minister agree that Milton Keynes has a great future and will be central to delivering this Government’s ambitions?

The Prime Minister: I join my hon. Friend in marking Milton Keynes’ 50th birthday. I understand that he has secured a Westminster Hall debate on the subject later today, so I congratulate him on that. Milton Keynes is a great example of what can be achieved with a clear plan and strong local leadership. We are providing additional funding for the east-west rail project, which he supported through his chairing of the east-west rail all-party parliamentary group, and the Oxford to Cambridge expressway road scheme. We will see a country that works for everyone. Milton Keynes has had a great 50 years, but I am sure that it will have a great future as well.

Q9. [908371] Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): Last week, a freight train from China arrived in Barking after using the channel tunnel, demonstrating the massive potential of rail freight. However, continental rail wagons and lorry trailers on trains cannot be accommodated on Britain’s historic rail network because its loading gauge is too small. Will the Prime Minister therefore consider giving positive support to the GB freight route scheme, which will provide a large-gauge freight line linking all the nations and regions of Britain both to each other and to Europe and Asia? It would take 5 million lorry journeys off Britain’s roads every year.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises the difference in gauges on railways here and on the continent, which has obviously been an issue for some considerable time. We want to encourage rail freight, we have been encouraging it, and we will continue to do so.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): The Ministry of Cake trades across Europe and into China. Does the Prime Minister agree that that demonstrates confidence in our economy—in that a European company has bought into it—that we can unlock global trade and that the south-west is a terrific place to do business?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The investment of a French company into the company in her constituency shows people’s confidence in the future of our economy, the fundamental strengths
of our economy and that we can unlock global trade. Of course, the south-west is a very good place to do business.

Q10. [908372] Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Robert Burns once spoke that whatever damages society, or any least part of it,

"this is my measure of iniquity."

Does the Prime Minister agree that that description applies perfectly to the detained fast track system, recently found to be illegal by British courts, under which 10,000 asylum seekers were denied a fair trial, some of whom were probably illegally deported to face death and torture?

The Prime Minister: The issue of the detained fast track system in the asylum system is one that I obviously looked at when I was Home Secretary, and we made a number of changes to how we operated it. However, it is built on a simple principle: if somebody’s case for asylum is such that they are almost certain to be refused that asylum, we want to ensure that they can be removed from the country as quickly as possible, hence the detained fast track system.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister assist in efforts to get an enterprise zone in my constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale as part of the industrial strategy? It turns out that the Labour council and county council are talking about an enterprise zone-esque project in the area but have not applied for any funding whatsoever. Will she please assist me in this endeavour?

The Prime Minister: I know what a champion for Morecambe and Lunesdale my hon. Friend is and has been as a Member of Parliament, and I am sure that the Chancellor and the Business Secretary will look at the issue he has raised. I should also say how sad it is that Labour councils are not willing to put forward proposals to increase the prosperity and economic growth in their areas.

First Minister of Scotland: Meeting

Q11. [908373] Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): When she will next meet the First Minister of Scotland.

The Prime Minister: I will meet the First Minister and leaders of the devolved Administrations at the Joint Ministerial Committee on Monday, but of course we regularly engage with the Scottish Government on a wide range of issues.

Patrick Grady: When the Prime Minister does eventually meet the First Minister, will the Prime Minister confirm whether she supports the principle in the Scotland Act that whatever is not reserved is devolved? Will she be able to tell the First Minister what powers will come to the Scottish Parliament in the event of Brexit? Will she confirm that the great repeal Bill will not be the great power grab?

The Prime Minister: I have been very clear, and this was echoed yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, that no powers that are currently devolved are suddenly going to be taken back to the United Kingdom Government. We will be looking at and discussing with the devolved Administrations how we deal with those powers that are currently in Brussels when they come back to the United Kingdom. We want to ensure that those powers are dealt with so that we can maintain the important single market of the United Kingdom.

Engagements

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): It is currently an offence to assault a police officer, immigration officer or prison officer, but it is not a specific offence to assault an NHS worker, whether they are a doctor, nurse or paramedic. Does the Prime Minister agree that we should consider extending a specific offence to cover such people, to make it absolutely clear that the public will not tolerate violence towards our hard-working members of the NHS?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Of course, we condemn assaults on anybody and any violence that takes place. The Secretary of State for Health has heard the case that my hon. Friend has put and will be happy to look into that issue.

Q12. [908374] Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): When the Prime Minister introduces a UK agricultural policy because we have left the common agricultural policy, will the Duke of Westminster still receive £407,000 a year, will the Duke of Northumberland still receive £475,000 a year, and will the Earl of Iveagh still receive £915,000 a year from the British taxpayer?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman seems to know a lot about these ducal matters; it is most interesting. I am fascinated by the reply, so let’s hear it.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right that one of the tasks we will have when we leave the European Union is to decide what support is provided to agriculture as a result of our being outside the common agricultural policy. I assure him that we are taking the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom into account when we look at that system and what it should be in future.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah, yes, a Hampshire knight.

Sir Gerald Howarth: Last weekend, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made a welcome visit to Ukraine, where he said that freedom and democracy are not tradeable commodities. As we mark the 25th anniversary of relations between our two Parliaments, I hope to be able to meet President Poroshenko on this issue. We provide significant support to Ukraine, and I hope to be able to meet President Poroshenko soon and talk about the support we provide.
Q13. [908375] Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): In her speech last week, the Prime Minister said that Parliament would get a vote on the final deal between the UK and the European Union. Will she set out for the House what would happen if Parliament said no to the terms of that deal? In those circumstances, would she negotiate an alternative deal, or would her no deal option mean our falling back on World Trade Organisation rules, which would mean 10% tariffs on cars, 20% tariffs on food and drink, and a host of other barriers to trade, investment and prosperity in the UK?

The Prime Minister: As I also said in my speech last week, I expect that we will be able to negotiate a good trade deal with the European Union, because it will be in our interests and the interests of the European Union to do so. There will be a vote on the deal for this Parliament. If this Parliament is not willing to accept a deal that has been decided on and agreed by the United Kingdom Government with the European Union, then, as I have said, we will have to fall back on other arrangements.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): It was a great pleasure to welcome my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her Cabinet to Sci-Tech Daresbury earlier this week. I welcome the Government’s industrial strategy, which will bring high-skill, high-wage jobs that will help close the north-south divide. The message is that Britain is open for business.

The Prime Minister: I and the whole Cabinet were very pleased to be able to visit Daresbury. I was pleased to sit down and meet small businesses on that particular site and to hear their support for what the Government are doing in the industrial strategy. We should be very clear that Britain is open for business. We will be out there trading around the world. We will be a global leader in free trade, bringing jobs, economic growth and prosperity to every part of this country.

Q14. [908376] Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): We are all aware of the hundreds of thousands of women around the world who marched on behalf of women’s rights last weekend. In this House, we have been lobbied by members of the Women Against State Pension Inequality. Many MPs have lodged petitions asking the Government to act. Can the Prime Minister tell us how many MPs have lodged such petitions?

The Prime Minister: I think the number of petitions presented in this Parliament is a matter for the House authorities. The hon. Gentleman also knows that the Government have already taken action in relation to the issue of women’s pensions by reducing the changes that will be experienced by women and putting extra money into that.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Following her excellent EU speech last week, will the Prime Minister consider unilaterally guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens living and working in the UK? Not only is that the decent thing to do, but, by taking the moral high ground, it will be a source of strength going forward in the negotiations. We can always return to the issue of non-reciprocity by the EU, if necessary, later in those negotiations.

The Prime Minister: I recognise the concern that my hon. Friend has raised, but my position remains the same as it always has been. I expect, intend and want to be able to guarantee the rights of EU citizens living here in the United Kingdom, but, as the British Prime Minister, it is only right that I should give consideration to the rights of UK citizens living elsewhere in what will be the remaining 27 member states of the EU. That is why I want that reciprocal arrangement, but, as I said in my speech last week, I remain open to this being an issue that we negotiate at a very early stage in the negotiations. There are a good number of other European member states that want that too. Some do not, but I am hoping to settle this at an early stage.

Q15. [908377] Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on disability, we recently compiled an important inquiry report into the Government’s pledge to halve the disability employment gap. Research shows that that pledge will not be met for 50 years. To date, no Minister has met the APPG to discuss the report. Will the Prime Minister place people with disability at the heart of policy and ensure that her Ministers engage with the APPG and its recommendations?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises an important issue about disabled people in the workplace. It is one of which we are aware. Of course, as we see unemployment going down, the ratios do change to an extent. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is looking very seriously at how we can ensure that there are more disabled people in the workplace. I am sure that he will see the requests that she has made in relation to the APPG.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): May I welcome the Prime Minister’s meeting with the President of Turkey on Saturday, when we can show our solidarity in the fight against terrorism and deepen our trading relationship? Will she also seek support for a united and independent Cyprus, free from Turkish troops?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that matter. There are important issues that I will be discussing with President Erdogan and with the Prime Minister of Turkey when I meet them on Saturday. On Cyprus, I am hopeful that the talks will continue and that we will come to a solution—we are closer to a solution now than we have been before. I have already spoken to Prime Minister Tsipras and to President Erdogan about the need to ensure that we are creative in the thinking and in the finding of a solution. I had a further telephone call with Nicos Anastasiades over the weekend about this very issue. We stand ready as a guarantor to play our part in ensuring that we see a successful conclusion of these talks and the reunification of Cyprus that people have been working towards for some time.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I join the Prime Minister in wishing a speedy recovery to the police officer who was shot and injured in my constituency.
in north Belfast on Sunday night. Thankfully, he was not killed—but of course that was not the terrorists’ intention. It is clear that the political instability brought about by Sinn Féin’s collapse of the Assembly is not in anyone’s interests in Northern Ireland. It is also clear that it is Sinn Féin’s intention to try to rewrite the history of the past. Will the Prime Minister make it very clear that the one-sided legal persecution of police officers and soldiers who did so much to bring peace to Northern Ireland will not be allowed to continue?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman indicates, political stability in Northern Ireland has been hard earned over some considerable time, and none of us wants to see that thrown away. He raised the issue of the current situation with a number of investigations by the Police Service of Northern Ireland into former soldiers and their activities in Northern Ireland. It is absolutely right that we recognise that the majority of people who lost their life did so as a result of terrorist activity, and it is important that that terrorist activity is looked into. That is why one of the issues that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is looking at is the legacy question and how the issue of investigation on all sides can take place in future.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Social care provided by Labour-led Derbyshire County Council is failing miserably, with serious errors in process leading to shameful consequences for some of the most vulnerable people in my constituency. It is clearly not about funding, as the council sits on reserves of about £233 million. Will my right hon. Friend instigate an urgent review of social care practice at the county council, because the people of Derbyshire deserve better?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The success of social care is not wholly about funding. It is about practice on the ground, which is why we have made it clear that it is important to see integration between social and health care at a local level, and local authorities should play their part in delivering that. This is an issue that needs to be addressed for the longer term as well. It has been ducked by Governments for too long in this country, which is why this Government are determined to introduce a sustainable programme for social care in future.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab) rose—

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman never knew he was quite that popular.

Edward Miliband: I was going to say, Mr Speaker, that it brings back memories. As the first foreign leader to meet President Trump, the Prime Minister carries a huge responsibility on behalf not just of this country but of the whole international community in the tone that she sets. Can I ask her to reassure us that she will say to the President that he must abide by, and not withdraw from, the Paris climate change treaty? In case it is helpful, can she offer the services of UK scientists to convince the President that climate change is not a hoax invented by the Chinese?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the role that the right hon. Gentleman has played in looking at the issue of climate change, and I hope that he recognises the commitment that the Government have shown to this issue, with the legislation that we have introduced and the changes that we have brought about in the energy sector and the use of different forms of energy. The Obama Administration signed up to the Paris climate change agreement, and we have now done so. I would hope that all parties would continue to ensure that that climate change agreement is put into practice.
Points of Order

12.45 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP) rose—

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) rose—

Mr Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman should be preserved; we should build up a sense of anticipation for him. I will take a point of order first from the hon. Lady.

Alison Thewliss: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At 2 o’clock last Friday, just 58 minutes before the House rose, and on the day the world was watching the inauguration across the pond, the wee, sleekit, cow’rin, tim’rous beasties of the Department for Work and Pensions sneaked out their consultation response regarding the medieval rape clause and the pernicious two-child policy. The response included a number of concessions, but not nearly enough to give women and families comfort. I seek your clarification on whether at any point last week a DWP Minister indicated to you or your office their intention to make a statement to the House on this hugely important matter, or should right hon. and hon. Members be left to conclude that the Government hoped that this abhorrent news would be caught up in the avalanche of appalling policies emanating from the White House?

Mr Speaker: The short answer is no. However, I genuinely wish to thank the hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving me notice of her intended point of order. I am aware, as other Members will be, that she has a longstanding interest in this sensitive issue. That said, I must tell the hon. Lady and the House that I have received no notice from Ministers of any intention to make a statement to the House on this subject. That, of course, is a judgment for them, rather than for me. However, I am sure that her words will have been heard on the Treasury Bench, not least by a senior Whip, upon whom I trust we can rely to convey her sentiments to those who need to be aware of them. We will leave it there for now. Having built up a due sense of anticipation, let us now hear the point of order from Mr Ian Paisley.

Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for preserving me. During Prime Minister’s questions, the Leader of the Opposition said that a police officer was shot dead in Belfast at the weekend. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) has clarified, thankfully that is not the case—thank God. But for the family and for police officers generally, could we have that corrected by a Front Bencher urgently so that the record of this House does not contain the spurious suggestion that a police officer was murdered in Belfast?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said. He will appreciate that in matters of this kind I benefit from advice, and the advice that I have just received, and that I accept—it is my responsibility whether or not to accept it—is that there is no need for any further correction. It was an error. I recognise how upsetting that will have been, but it was a mistake. It has subsequently been corrected, and the hon. Gentleman himself has now quite properly used the opportunity of a point of order to correct it. I do not think that anything further needs to be said. The hon. Gentleman is a wily character and he has found his salvation.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will be aware that Members from across the House have the opportunity to sign the book of commitment for Holocaust Memorial Day. I am pleased that more than 200 right hon. and hon. Members have signed the book, but that does mean that more than 400 have not. May I, through your good offices, draw to the House’s attention the fact that the book is available for signature at the bottom of the Members’ Staircase between 2 pm and 4 pm?

Mr Speaker: That is a very helpful notice to colleagues. No disrespect to the hon. Gentleman, because that is very helpful for others, but my office had already planned for me to sign the book when I leave the Chair today, and I certainly shall, as I always do. I think that it would be a wonderful thing if a very large number of colleagues—preferably all colleagues—took the opportunity to sign the book, as the hon. Gentleman helpfully suggests.
Town and Country Planning (Electricity Generating Consent)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

12.50 pm

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the disclosure, consideration and approval of proposals for onshore power plants that produce 50 MW or less; to require the application of Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) terms and conditions in certain circumstances; to require sector-specific collective national workforce agreements in other circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Power plants that produce 50 MW or below are not subject to the terms of national planning consent. Instead, these plants, including those that produce energy from waste, are regulated by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This system was supposed to give local people more control over developments in their locality, but it has also created loopholes and cover for unscrupulous employers seeking to undercut and exploit construction workers who work on these plants. That is because the hard-won terms and conditions of the national agreement for the engineering construction industry have not been applied to construction contracts for power stations of 50 MW or less. I raised this issue, and indeed presented this Bill, earlier in 2016, but as my Teesside colleagues who supported me then and support me today—my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Anna Turley), for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald)—and the GMB and Unite unions, with which we have worked, know, the problem still exists and has not been dealt with.

Some employers that build these smaller power stations are still using deliberating confusing contracts to employ workers on bogus self-employment terms. Indeed, they are still exploiting migrant workers. Rather than paying local workers the national industry agreement rate for skilled workers of between £16.28 and £16.97 an hour, depending on the competency level involved, they are importing and exploiting migrant workers, paying them between just £8 and £10.

One particularly egregious example is the Croatian company Duro Dakovic TEP. This firm’s model of work is simple: bid for construction subcontracts from companies that refuse to work under the “blue book”, or NAECI terms, and then undercut local wages by bringing over workforces wholesale from Croatia to work at Croatian wage levels. This same firm was exposed by GMB and Unite as underpaying its largely migrant workforce in 2015 when constructing a power station in Yorkshire. That job fell under the NAECI independent audit facility, so Duro Dakovic was made to repay every penny owed to its employees. However, disgracefully, it took the money back from employees under duress once they returned to Croatia. That is exploitation plain and simple, and it demonstrates the disregard that this firm has for all its employees.

Unfortunately, this very firm has since won six further contracts to build energy-from-waste power stations in the UK from the Danish firm Babcock & Wilcox Volund. Unite and the GMB have worked to highlight and tackle this exploitation. Members have organised protests with members of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians outside sites owned by BWV in Teesside, as well as other energy-from-waste power stations in Yorkshire, Wales and Scotland. National officers from Unite and the GMB have travelled as far as Denmark and Croatia to try to educate the appropriate trade unions about this exploitation of their members.

Despite such hard work, any real solution to this problem must come from the House. The exploitation of migrant employees and the undercutting of British workers have happened only because of an unintended loophole in legislation—namely, that the trade union-negotiated NAECI standards do not need to be complied with in construction contracts for power stations producing less than 50 MW. Requiring these NAECI “blue book” standards to be written into contracts with companies constructing power stations of any size on British soil is the only way to prevent that undercutting and to allow workers of all nationalities to bargain collectively to improve their pay and conditions.

Since the vote to leave the European Union, Members from both sides of House have attempted to address the concerns about immigration that are felt in neglected industrial areas across the country. If, as a House and as a nation, we are to address those concerns, we must take action on such loopholes that allow companies to bring in migrant workers on a temporary basis and exploit them, thereby undercutting the wages and conditions of British workers. These pockets of exploitation lead to resentment among all workers from our communities, who are prevented from seeking and achieving meaningful employment. Instead, when they are able to get work on such sites, they work under confusing contracts that class them as self-employed and can sometimes cause them to pay national insurance contributions twice to benefit their employers.

In this case, as in others, our leaving the European Union presents both the threat that we will lose well-intentioned but inadequate EU protections against such practices, which afford migrant employees the host country’s minimum standards, and the opportunity to strengthen protections to ensure compliance with not only minimum standards, but industry standards such as NAECI. We do not need to wait until we have left the EU to do that; we can act now and put a stop to the manipulation of migrant workers and the undermining of hard-fought employment standards in the UK.

This issue can and should be addressed to protect the integrity of hard-fought collective agreements, and the conditions and pay of workers. I therefore make no apology for raising it yet again and for again presenting this Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Tom Blenkinsop, Anna Turley, Sir Kevin Barron, Sarah Champion, John Healey, Andy McDonald, Alex Cunningham and Mr Iain Wright present the Bill.

Tom Blenkinsop accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 131).

Bill read in the First Reading Committee for the last time.
Opposition Day

[19TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Prisons

[Relevant documents: Sixth Report from the Justice Committee of Session 2015-16, Prison safety, HC 625, and the Government response of Session 2016-17, HC 647; and oral evidence taken before the Justice Committee on 29 November 2016, 14 December 2016 and 18 January 2017 on prison reform, HC 548.]

12.56 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern recent serious disturbances at Swaleside, Birmingham, Lewes, Bedford and Moorlands prisons against the backdrop of a reduction of more than 6,000 frontline prison officers since 2010; notes that a planned recruitment drive has a target of hiring fewer than half the number of officers lost, and that previous recruitment drives have failed to achieve their targets; recognises that violence in prisons is at record levels with assaults up by 34 per cent since 2015, assaults on staff up by 43 per cent since 2015, and more than 60 per cent of prisons currently overcrowded; and calls on the Government to reduce overcrowding and improve safety while still ensuring that those people who should be in prison are in prison.

The last Opposition day debate on prisons took place nearly a year ago to this very day. Back then, as hon. Members will recall, my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) opened the debate for the Opposition. He told the House:

“The inescapable conclusion is that the prison system in this country...is not working, contrary to the famous pronouncement of the noble Lord Howard.”—[Official Report, 27 January 2016; Vol. 605, c. 333.]

A year on, the conclusion drawn by my hon. Friend remains inescapable.

Since 2010, Conservative Justice Secretaries have cut the number of frontline prison officers by more than 6,000. It was the political decision to impose austerity on the nation and our prison service that brought us to this point. That was married with an erratic prisons policy that veered first this way and then that way. First, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Michael Gove) wanted to decentralise and hand autonomy to governors. The current Justice Secretary, Heath (Michael Gove) went on to introduce benchmarking and book-banning, both of which failed. Next, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) wanted to decentralise and hand autonomy to governors. The current Justice Secretary wants a bit of policy from each—prison policy à la carte.

The number of officers was cut with no check on the number of people being imprisoned, but the effect of that ought to have been obvious. The Government are imprisoning more people than they have decided they can afford. In the 12 months to June 2016, there were 105 self-inflicted deaths—nearly double the number five years previously, and an all-time high.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Before my hon. Friend moves on from this point, may I draw his attention to the Select Committee report that said that if we are to try to cut the cycle of prisoners reoffending, it would be good to try to provide employment for them, particularly by reducing national insurance contributions for employers? While that would not be a silver bullet, would it not play some part in reducing the pressure on prisons if such a policy were adopted by the Secretary of State?

Richard Burgon: My right hon. Friend makes a very valuable point about rehabilitation, a subject to which I will return.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): The hon. Gentleman quite rightly says that there is, as I think everybody will acknowledge, a serious crisis in our prisons, which at the moment are overcrowded slums and breeding grounds for crime. He sets out a rather interesting range of options for tackling this but, with respect, his motion merely concentrates on the Prison Officers Association’s answer, which is to spend more money and hire more prison officers, probably with improved pay and conditions. Does he have any views on the range of options that includes reducing the number of prisoners by addressing foolish sentencing policies so that there is room for the rehabilitation measures recommended by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field)?

Richard Burgon: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for that constructive contribution. We are talking about far more than just staffing, so I will touch on sentencing and prisoner numbers later.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that there are too many people with mental health conditions in our prisons who should not be there in the first place? Was he as appalled as I was to hear the outcome of last week’s inquest into the tragic death of Dean Saunders, one of 113 people who took their life in one of our prisons in the past year? The inquest found that he should never have been in prison in the first place—he should have been in a mental health in-patient unit.

Richard Burgon: I share my hon. Friend’s concern, which she raised in Justice questions yesterday. I will deal with the tragic death of Dean Saunders later.

As I said, the Government are imprisoning more people than they have decided they can afford. There were 345 deaths in custody last year. In the same period, serious assaults on staff increased by 146%, and incidents of self-harm increased by more than 10,000. Within the space of just a few weeks, there were prison riots in Lincoln, Lewes, Bedford, and Moorland—not “Moorlands”, as it says in the motion. In December, HMP Birmingham saw what many described as the worst riots at a category B prison since Strangeways a quarter of a century ago.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): A lot of the hon. Gentleman’s criticism is predicated on the concept of austerity under this Government, but surely he will concede that the previous Labour Government, in much more benign economic circumstances, released 82,000 prisoners under the end of custody licence scheme, of whom 2,657 were recalled for licence breaches and over 1,200 for reoffending. In better financial times, there was still mismanagement of the prison estate.
Richard Burgon: The prison system has never been perfect, but under a Labour Government there was not a prison crisis, and under this Conservative Government there is a prison crisis.

In Birmingham, it took 13 Tornado teams more than 12 hours to regain control. Some estimate the cost of the damage as £2 million. The Ministry was warned back in October that urgent action was required in the light of staff worries about personal safety, but it remains unclear whether it did anything at all. Last October, in an unprecedented intervention—

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend as worried as I am that not only has there been the huge reduction in the number of prison officers, but there seems to be a deliberate strategy to get more experienced, more expensive prison officers to stand down—to retire—and to replace them with cheap apprentices and graduates? There is a real lack of experience in our prison sector as well as a dangerous lack of officer numbers.

Richard Burgon: My hon. Friend makes a vital point. We have a dangerous cocktail of experienced prisoners and to replace them with cheap apprentices and graduates?

Richard Burgon: A future Labour Government will not treat our hard-working, hard-pressed prison officers as the enemy—[Interruption.] I hear the roars of disapproval from those on the Government Benches. Anybody would think they were presiding over a successful Prison Service and there was not a prison crisis. If they would listen rather than roar at me, I would be grateful.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con) rose—

Richard Burgon: I really do need to make progress, I am afraid.

The ambition set out in the White Paper to increase staffing levels is welcome, but 2,500 officers represent less than half the number of prison officers cut by Conservative Justice Secretaries since 2010, and in order to get 2,500 extra officers, 8,000 will have to be recruited in just two years. I wonder whether the Justice Secretary has confidence that that will happen, because I do not come across many in the justice sector who think it any more than a pipe dream under her management. In the year to September 2016, she had about 400 fewer officers. There is a crisis in staff retention; they are leaving more quickly than she can recruit them. The Prison Officers Association membership has very recently rejected a pay deal offered by the Government. What plans has she made to improve the offer and begin to make those jobs more attractive to the public? She currently faces a recruitment drive that is in danger of failing before it has begun.

Announcements that ex-service personnel will be recruited to the Prison Service might grab quick headlines, but in truth this is nothing new. There have always been former members of our armed forces taking jobs in our Prison Service. The role of soldier and prison officer are not exactly the same, but in the way, as prison officers who have been in the Army have told me. The Secretary of State must explain how she can compensate for the fact that, as we have heard, so many experienced officers have left, and are leaving, our Prison Service.

Overseeing a transformation to a prison estate populated by more experienced prisoners and more inexperienced prison officers presents a clear and present danger. Inadequate staffing levels have a range of consequences. Prisons are less safe because staff are far outnumbered. Prisoners are spending more time in their cells because they cannot be managed outside, and prisoner frustration is heightened by the lack of time out of their cells.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I commend my hon. Friend for his excellent speech. Does he agree that one way to reduce the prison population would be for the Government to make better progress in the transfer of foreign national offenders? At the moment, there are 10,000 foreign national offenders in our prisons, representing 12% of the prison population. The Government sign agreements, but very few prisoners get sent back.

Richard Burgon: I thank my right hon. Friend for making that important point. In Justice questions yesterday, the Minister with responsibility for prisons, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Gyimah), said that he was in discussions with the Department for Exiting the European Union about the matter. We need to hear more about the progress of those discussions.
The Justice Secretary frequently points to the emergence of new psychoactive substances as a major factor in the current crisis. Does she know that in Scotland, where prison policy has been stable for some years and where staffing has remained constant, violence has not rocketed as it has across the rest of the prison estate? Scotland has NPS issues, too, but it did not axe staff in vast numbers.

Our prisons are overcrowded. Armley prison, in my city of Leeds, holds nearly twice the number of prisoners that it was built to house. Wandsworth, Swansea, Brixton and Leicester are not far behind; they are all full to capacity with another 50% on top.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Burgon: This will be the final time that I give way, if that is okay.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; he knows that I hold him in very high esteem. Lady Chakrabarti, the shadow Attorney General, said recently that she wanted half the prisoners in the UK prison estate to be released immediately. Is that Labour’s official party policy? My constituents would be very interested to know.

Richard Burgon: I am certainly not aware of any such policy announcement being made. [ Interruption. ] Conservative Members are making some strange gesticulations. It is not Labour policy to release half the prisoners. Why on earth would that be the case?

We need a lasting way to manage the prison population. In November 2016, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Thomas, appeared before the Justice Committee. Not surprisingly, he was questioned on the prisons crisis, and he offered a view on what could be done:

“The prison population is very, very high at the moment. Whether it will continue to rise is always difficult to tell, but there are worries that it will. I am not sure that at the end of the day we can’t dispose of more by really tough—and I do mean tough—community penalties.”

Prison has always been seen as a punishment. A person breaks the social contract that governs much of our relations with one another, and they may be imprisoned. Members from across the House rightly see prison as a fitting sanction, and it must be right that when a convicted person is a danger to the public, they are kept away from the public until such time as they no longer pose a threat. A significant minority may never be safe to release. But we must ask whether prison is the right place for some of those who offend. We should always reflect on that, because if we do not, we find ourselves whether the way in which we deal with at least some of those who break the law is working. With many offenders, it is not. Their stay in prison is too short to teach them new skills, or for them to obtain a qualification or stabilise a drug addiction.

In recent weeks I have met stakeholders who question whether it is worth sending people to prison for a few weeks or a few months, and I have met prison officers who lament that they see the same people over and over again. When stakeholders, people at the frontline and experts raise such matters, we must take them seriously. We must punish and we must deliver smart sentences as well as strict sentences, always asking ourselves what the best way is to protect the public. I firmly believe that MPs must have that urgent discussion.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): Smart and strict—what does it mean?

Richard Burgon: The number of questions being shouted out by Government Members makes me wonder whether they know what they are presiding over. There are risks with sending people to prison, particularly for the first time. [ Interruption. ] There is laughter from the Government Front Benchers, but the situation in our prison system is not a laughing matter. They should take this debate seriously.

We throw people into the prison river, and the currents sweep them towards more drugs and more crime than they experienced outside. If rehabilitation fails, it is a failure to protect society. I must ask what the Justice Secretary is doing about imprisonment for public protection sentences. She urgently needs to come up with a scheme to release those whom it is safe to release. She should consider how that can be done—perhaps by releasing those people on a licence period in proportion to their original sentence.

In November last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) published the interim findings of his review into the treatment of and outcomes for black, Asian and minority ethnic people in the criminal justice system. The stark findings of the review have implications for our prisons. For every 100 white women handed custodial sentences in the Crown court for drug offences, 227 black women were sentenced to custody. For black men, the figure was 141 compared with 100 white men. BAME men were more than 16% more likely than white men to be remanded in custody. Those figures ought to be of concern to the Justice Secretary, and she has a duty to find out why that is happening and what can be done about it. The findings are troubling in and of themselves, but such disproportionate sentencing adds to the strain on our prison system.

Rehabilitation is essential to any serious criminal justice system, but we are not yet getting it right. Most people who are in prison will one day leave prison, so if we are to protect the public and keep our communities safe, rehabilitation must be properly funded and taken seriously by politicians as an aim. It must not be treated as a soft option. Between January and December 2014, 45.5% of adults released from prison had reoffended within a year. Of those released from a sentence of less than 12 months, 60% went on to reoffend.
When the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell introduced the transforming rehabilitation programme, the probation service was reckoned to be performing well. Many stakeholders issued a warning against the breakup of the probation service but, as with many Ministry of Justice consultations at the time, the public were simply ignored and the proposals pushed through regardless. Community rehabilitation companies received negative reports last year in Derbyshire, Durham and London.

Richard Burgon: What has happened to the probation services in the area and region that my hon. Friend represents is indeed a travesty. The privatisation of the probation service has been a disaster.

Michael Gove: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Burgon: I will give way for the final time.

Richard Burgon: I certainly will do so, if the right hon. Gentleman will just bear with me. The inspectorate of probation’s report of May 2016 found that the work of the national probation service was considered better in a number of important areas. As I have said, privatisation of the probation service has failed. Of course, it is not just down to the Ministry and to probation to support people; if people are leaving prison faced with the same conditions as before they entered it, that will make any meaningful change difficult.

Support is needed: it is needed for employment and for housing. One women’s prison had inmates leaving with nowhere to live, and it was handing out tents and sleeping bags to people when they left. This cannot be a feature of a modern justice system in the fifth-richest country in the world. The Prisoners Education Trust, while welcoming the White Paper, has said that “in today’s economy, gaining meaningful employment depends on more than just the ability to read and write. If the government is serious about lowering reoffending, it needs to equip people in prison with the attitudes and aspirations.”

Mr Speaker: Order. The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), should not shout out. He should not shout out from a sedentary position, and he should not shout out while standing up. If he will forgive my saying so, to shout out while standing right next to the Speaker’s Chair is perhaps not quite the most intelligent action that he has undertaken in the course, so far, of a most auspicious career.

Richard Burgon: I certainly did not take offence when the Government Whip was shouting out, “Are there any policies?” because I did not think that that question was directed at the Opposition.

The reality is that prisons are full of people with a range of problems—those with mental health problems, those addicted to drugs and those who are homeless. It is rarely mentioned that support services focused on issues of that kind have also been victims of austerity. Drugs support has been scaled back, and prisoners are leaving prison with nowhere to sleep. There are too many people in prison with serious mental health problems.

Maria Caulfield: Will the hon. Gentleman please give way?

Richard Burgon: MPs rarely break promises. I promised not to take any more interventions, but I will break that promise and allow another one.

Maria Caulfield: I thank the hon. Gentleman for eventually giving way; I am most honoured. The Opposition motion mentions Lewes prison—it is in special measures, as was raised during Justice questions yesterday—but he fails to acknowledge the huge amount of work that is going into the prison. This is not just about prison officer numbers; there are other issues, such as the huge rise in the number of sexual offenders in Lewes prison, which has made that old Victorian prison very hard to manage. I have not heard any suggestions by the hon. Gentleman about the way forward in helping places such as Lewes to tackle those problems.

Richard Burgon: The increases in the number of prisoners convicted of historical sex offences and in the number of people in prisons obviously have an effect, but does cutting the number of prison officers by a quarter mitigate that situation or make it worse? It seems to me that the answer to that is quite simple.

Before I draw my remarks to a conclusion, I want to turn—[Interruption.] The prisons Minister has an unfortunate habit of heckling at really inappropriate points. He has demonstrated that before and he has demonstrated it again now. I want to talk about the case of Dean Saunders, who tragically committed suicide in Chelmsford prison. An inquest jury found a number of errors in his treatment. Although prison staff recognised that he had mental health problems, they did not follow the procedure under which he might have been moved to hospital. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), has said that he is “seeking the details of all those cases to see whether there is a pattern”—[Official Report, 24 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 156.]

Deborah Coles of the charity Inquest, who supported the family, said that Mr Saunders “should never have been in prison in the first place. His death was entirely preventable.”
The fact is that there is evidence in abundance from the various independent monitoring board reports and inquest jury findings. The Ministry must ensure that the recommendations of such bodies are acted on.

In conclusion, we need to be tough on crime, wherever it is found, and we need to protect the public. At the same time, we need to make prisons places where effective rehabilitation is a living, breathing reality. We want people to leave prison and become productive members of society, having left crime behind. At present, when it comes to the Prison Service, as in relation to so much else, this Government are failing. They are failing prison staff, they are failing prison inmates and their families, and they are failing the public. Ultimately, the mess this Government are making of our prison system means they are failing society. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. To move the amendment, I call the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice.

1.25 pm

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Elizabeth Truss): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add: “welcomes the Government’s comprehensive proposals for major reform of the prison system set out in the White Paper; further welcomes plans for an extra 2,500 prison officers, to professionalise the prison service further and to attract new talent by recruiting prison officer apprentices, graduates and former armed service personnel; notes new security measures being introduced to tackle the illegal use of drones, phones and drugs which are undermining the stability of the prison system; welcomes the commitment to give governors in all prisons more powers and more responsibility to deliver reform whilst holding them to account for the progress prisoners make; and welcomes the Government’s proposals to set out for the first time the purpose of prisons in statute.”

Since becoming Justice Secretary, I have been clear that the violence in our prisons is too high. We have very worrying levels of self-harm and of deaths in custody. Tomorrow, we will see further statistics on violence for the period from July to September 2016. The last set of statistics reaffirmed why we need to take immediate action. I have been clear that these problems have been years in the making, and will not be fixed in weeks or months. In fact, in a piece he wrote this morning, the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) acknowledged that there is no “magic fix” for these issues. We certainly did not hear any magic fixes in his speech today.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): There may be no magic fixes, but does my right hon. Friend agree with the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) that this Government should take responsibility? They should indeed take responsibility for banning novel psychoactive substances at the request of prison officers, and they should take responsibility for a plan to increase the number of prison officers—she has outlined that plan—again at the request of prison officers.

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I am absolutely determined to turn around our prisons. Unless our prisons are places of safety, they cannot be purposeful places where offenders can reform. That is why we have taken immediate action, as my hon. Friend says, to stabilise security in our prisons and to tackle the scourge of drugs, drones and phones. It is why we have secured additional funding of £100 million annually to recruit an extra 2,500 prison officers to strengthen our frontline and invest in wider justice reforms.

Toby Perkins: It is good news that there is some additional money and that some more prison officers are coming into the service, but the Secretary of State is right to say that the scale of violence in our prisons is terrible. She and the Government must take responsibility for the lower number of prison officers that we now have. Will she tell the House how many prison officers are currently off work sick as a result of assaults received at work?

Elizabeth Truss: I have been clear that we need extra staff on the frontline. A number of issues have resulted in the situation that we now face, including the rise in the numbers of psychoactive substances, drones and phones. I have been clear that we need to address the issue of staffing, and we are determined to do so. We monitor the level of sickness in our prisons specifically to address that issue.

Mr Jackson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only concrete analysis given by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman in his 30-minute speech was that there is a demonstrable link between staffing and violence. That has been controverted by evidence given to the Justice Committee by Dr David Scott of the Open University, who rejected such a link. There are other much more complex societal factors in the prison population and across the estate.

Elizabeth Truss: There are a number of factors, and psychoactive drugs are one. We need the proper level of staffing, which we are putting into prisons, to ensure that prison officers can supervise and challenge offenders properly. That is important not just for safety, but for reforming offenders.

The “Prison Safety and Reform” White Paper, which was published last November, detailed the biggest overhaul of our prisons in a generation to deal with the issues we are discussing. It is right that prisons punish people who commit serious crime by depriving them of their most fundamental right, liberty, but they need to be places of discipline, hard work and self-improvement. That is the only way we will cut reoffending and reduce crime in our communities.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I am really grateful to the Lord Chancellor for giving way. I want to help her on the staffing point. The benchmarking by the Ministry of Justice indicates that 89 prisons are under the staffing levels that her Ministry thinks is right for them. When the 2,500 prison officers are recruited, how many of those prisons will still be under her own benchmarking staffing levels?

Elizabeth Truss: I will address how we will recruit the additional staff later in my comments, but all of those prisons will not just be brought up to the benchmark level; we are increasing staff levels beyond that. We have
to recruit the additional staff to bring prisons up to benchmark and then further additional staff. That is all within our plan to recruit 4,000 officers this year.

Elizabeth Truss: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) and then make a bit more progress with my speech.

Maria Caulfield: HMP Lewes is mentioned in the Opposition motion, but I have not heard that the shadow Secretary of State has visited it, unlike the prisons Minister. The shadow Secretary of State dismissed the effect of having a high number of sexual offenders in the prison, but that affects the retention of prison staff. To dismiss it out of hand shows a lack of experience and knowledge about what is happening in our prisons.

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come on to the prison population later in my speech and address the specific issue of sex offenders.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Elizabeth Truss: Very quickly.

Mr Speaker: There was no danger of the Secretary of State not hearing the right hon. Gentleman. I rather assumed that she would give way, because Chelmsford prison has been referred to.

Sir Simon Burns: The extra prison officers my right hon. Friend proposes to recruit are welcome, but I want to correct the hon. Member for Leeds East. In fact, 80% of our staff have been with us for longer than five years, so the idea that we do not have a strong depth of prison officers is wrong. However, we do need to ensure that they have career and promotion opportunities. That is why we are looking to expand the senior grades in the service and to promote our existing staff. We want to give them a career ladder so that they have opportunities to train on the job and get the additional skills they need.

We are giving prison governors the opportunity to recruit locally for the first time. We have launched that in 30 of our most hard-to-recruit prisons. That means that the governor can build much more of a relationship with the local community, get people involved, show people what life is really like inside prison and encourage people to work there. The local recruitment and job fairs have been really successful.

Of course this is challenging. Recruiting 4,000 people in one year is challenging, but I think we can do it. We have the opportunity to do it, we are enthusiastic about it and we have the budget to do it for the first time in a number of years.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The opportunity for the governor to do more proactive recruitment has been welcomed in Bedford. In the amendment, she talks about decentralising authority to prison governors to enable them to make their own decisions. Does she find it interesting that that idea has been missed completely by the Labour party?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why we need to give prison governors power over what happens in their own prison. They should decide what regimes to operate and what staffing structures to have. They should be able to motivate and recruit their own team. They should also have more say over how lives are turned around. For example, we are giving them the power over their own education providers. We will hold prison governors to account for how people are improving in English and maths; how successful they are at getting offenders off drugs, which we know can lead to rehabilitation; and how successful they are at getting people into work when they leave prison, which will encourage them to work with local employers and set up apprenticeships. However, we need to give governors the levers and the responsibility that will enable them to do those things. We are also working on leadership training so that governors have the skills and capabilities to take on those extra responsibilities.

That is the only way we will turn lives around. Whatever I and my civil servants do in the Ministry of Justice, we are not the people on the ground in the wings who are talking to prisoners day in, day out. It is those people who will turn lives around. That is why we need motivated staff and governors who are empowered to do that job. That is what our reforms will achieve.
Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I think the whole House will sympathise with and support the right hon. Lady’s comments on the morale of prison officers. When the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) and I were prison officers together in Dartmoor prison, it was evident to us that prison officers felt that they were out of sight and out of mind. They felt that nobody had any interest in their work until something went catastrophically wrong. Does she agree that it would be an excellent idea for right hon. and hon. Members not just to contact the Prison Officers Association, but occasionally to visit prisons to show that we do care and that they are not out of sight nor out of mind?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. I am delighted to hear that he is a former prison officer. Perhaps he could be a shining beacon of the scheme to bring former prison officers into service.

Stephen Pound: I am so reluctant to disabuse and disappoint the right hon. Lady, but the hon. Member for Aldershot and I were only temporarily in Dartmoor as part of a television programme called “At the Sharp End”.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I thank Mr Mackay.

Elizabeth Truss: In any case, we are setting up a parliamentary scheme so that we can work more closely with prison officers and give them the kudos they deserve, because they do an incredibly important job, often behind walls. As part of the reform programme, I want to see prisons reaching out more into the local community and working with local employers. As the shadow Secretary of State said, ultimately, the vast majority of people in prison will one day be on the outside and be part of the local community, so we need to work on that.

While we are putting in place the long and medium-term measures to get additional staff in to reform our prisons, we are taking immediate action to improve security and stability across the estate. That includes extra CCTV, the deployment of national resources and regular taskforce meetings chaired by the prisons Minister. He holds regular meetings with the Prison Service to monitor prisons for risk factors, and that allows us to react quickly to emerging problems and provide immediate support to governors, on anything from transferring difficult prisoners to speeding up the repair of damaged facilities.

Hon. Friends have talked about psychoactive substances, which have been a game changer in the prisons system, as the prisons and probation ombudsman has acknowledged. In September, we rolled out to all prisons new mandatory drug tests for psychoactive drugs, and we have increased the number of search dogs and trained them to detect drugs such as Spice and Mamba. We are also working with mobile phone operators on new solutions, being trialled in three prisons, to combat illicit phones, and we have specific powers to block phones too.

Philip Davies: I am disappointed that my right hon. Friend has not mentioned the impact on the behaviour of prisoners of automatic release halfway through sentence.

If someone is sent to prison for six years but knows that by law they will be released after three, irrespective of how badly they behave in prison, surely their behaviour in prison will be worse than if they know they might have to do the full term if they do not behave. Is she not going to address that issue?

Elizabeth Truss: Clearly, if people do not behave, they will receive additional days. That is an important part of the levers that governors have in reforming offenders.

I was talking about security issues. We are also working to deal with drones, rolling out body-worn cameras across the estate and dealing with organised crime gangs through a new national intelligence unit.

Hon. Members have also talked about mental health. We are investing in specialist mental health training for prison officers to help to reduce the worrying levels of self-harm and suicide in our prisons. The early days in custody are particularly critical to mental health and keeping people safe.

Dr Blackman-Woods: As the Secretary of State will know, many women in prison have severe mental health problems, having been subjected to much abuse in their lives. Why is there so little about women in the White Paper? What is she doing to implement the recommendations of the Corston report?

Elizabeth Truss: We are working on a strategy for women offenders that includes looking after women on community sentences as well as custodial sentences. I want more early intervention to deal with issues that lead to reoffending, such as mental health and drugs issues, and we will be announcing further plans in the summer.

We are investing in an additional 2,500 staff across the prisons estate, but we are also changing the way we deploy those staff to ensure more opportunities to engage with offenders, both to challenge them and to help them reform.

Keith Vaz: May I put to the Lord Chancellor the question I put to the shadow Lord Chancellor about foreign national offenders? She will know that an easy way to reduce the number of people in our prisons is to follow through on the excellent work of her distinguished predecessors, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who are both in the House today, in signing these agreements to send people back to their countries of origin. Why has progress been so slow?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments, and I am pleased to say that a record number of foreign national offenders were deported in the last year. We are making progress, therefore, but there is more work to do. My hon. Friend the prisons Minister is leading a cross-Government taskforce on this issue.

I return now to our work in recruiting 2,500 new prison officers and changing the role of prison officers. By recruiting these new staff, we want every prison officer to have a caseload of no more than six offenders whom they can challenge and support. Our staffing
model aims to ensure that we have enough prison officers to do that. One-to-one support from a dedicated officer is at the heart of how we change our reoffending rates and keep our prisons and prison officers safe.

The hon. Member for Leeds East talked about the prison population, although I was none the wiser about Labour’s policy after he had spoken. The prison population has been stable since 2010, having risen by 25,000 under Labour. As was mentioned earlier, fewer people are in prison for shorter sentences—9,000 fewer shorter sentences are given out every year—but more people are in prison for crimes such as sex offences. Not only are we prosecuting more sexual offenders, but sentences for sexual offences have increased considerably, which is absolutely right and reflects the serious damage those individuals do to their victims.

Maria Caulfield: It is much more difficult for prison officers to look after sex offenders than an average prison inmate—they often need to be segregated, but old Victorian prisons do not easily enable that—and that only adds to the pressure on officers.

Elizabeth Truss: We are doing important work on how better to deal with sex offenders and how to ensure they are on treatment programmes that will stop them committing such crimes in the future.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The one policy that the Labour spokesman touched on was the future of the remaining IPP prisoners, of whom 4,000 remain in prison, years after the sentence was abolished and beyond their recommended term. Some are very dangerous and cannot be released, but is my right hon. Friend looking at how to make it easier for parole boards to reduce delays and alter the burden of proof and so release all those for whom there is no evidence that they would pose a serious risk to the public if released?

Elizabeth Truss: The Opposition talked about IPP prisoners. Of course, it was the Labour party that introduced that sentence, and my right hon. and learned Friend who abolished it, so well done to him. There is a legacy here, since some of them are still in prison, but I have established an IPP unit within the Department to deal with the backlog and ensure that we address the issues those individuals have so that they can be released safely into society. We must always heed public protection, however, and as he acknowledged, some are not suitable for release for precisely that reason.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Local police have raised with me the impact, particularly in Hedge End, of psychoactive drug abuse before people enter prison. The types of prisoners being managed are of a different ilk, and the type of addiction is unknown and difficult to quantify. How difficult is it on the ground for our prison officers?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right; this is a very serious issue, both in society and in prison. We are looking at additional training for prison officers and have introduced tests to help to get prisoners off these substances, as well as prisoner education programmes. These drugs do have a serious and severe effect. On her point about the community, I want our community sentences to address mental health and drugs issues before people commit crimes that result in custodial sentences. Too many people enter prison having previously been at high risk of committing such a crime because of such issues. We need to intervene earlier, which I think is an effective way of reducing the circulation through our prisons, rather than having an arbitrary number that we release. What we need to do is deal with these issues before they reach a level where a custodial sentence is required. That is our approach, and I shall say more about it in due course.

From April, prison governors will be given new freedoms to drive forward the reforms and cut free from Whitehall micro-management. Governors will have control over budgets, education and staffing structures, and they will be able to set their own prison regime. At the moment, we have a plethora of prison rules, including on how big prisoners’ bath mats can be. Surely that is not the way to treat people who we want to be leaders of some of our great institutions.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I want to say how much I welcome the passage in the White Paper that gives to prison governors the very freedoms that my right hon. Friend has mentioned, particularly in respect of work and the commercial relationships that governors will be able to form with companies and businesses to get proper work into prisons. Will she say something about One3One Solutions?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend must have read my mind, because we were talking about One3One Solutions only this morning, and I know that he was involved in establishing that organisation. Employers are vital to our reforms, and what I want to happen on the inside has to be jobs and training that lead to work on the outside. We need to start from what jobs are available on the outside and bring those employers into prison. We are looking at how to develop that. First, governors will have a strong incentive, because there will be a measurement of how many prisoners secure jobs on the outside, as well as of how many go into apprenticeships on the outside. I want to see offenders starting apprenticeships on the inside that they can then complete on the outside, so that there is a seamless transition into work.

We already have some fantastic employers working with us—Greggs, for example, and Timpson whom I met this morning—but we need more of them to participate. Former offenders can be very effective employees, and we need to get that message across more widely. There would be a huge economic benefit if, once people leave prison, rather than go on to benefits they go into employment instead. That will also reduce reoffending. We shall launch our employment strategy in the summer. I will go into more detail subsequently and look forward to discussing it further with my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt).

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the probation service. Just as we are measuring outcomes for prison services, such as employment, housing and education, we want to see similar measures for the probation services. We need to make sure that when people are in the community, they are being encouraged to get involved in activities and to get off drugs, so that
they are less likely to reoffend. We shall say more about probation in April, when we announce our changes to the probation service.

It is difficult, of course, for reform to take place in dilapidated buildings or in old and overcrowded prisons. That is why we are modernising the prison estate to create 10,000 prison places where reform can flourish. This is a £1.3 billion investment programme that will reduce overcrowding and replace outdated prisons with modern facilities. As part of that, we shall open HMP Berwyn in Wrexham next month, which will create over 2,000 modern places. We have already made announcements about new prisons in Glen Parva and Wellingborough, and we shall make further announcements about new prison capacity in due course.

I am pleased to tell hon. Members that the prison and courts reform Bill will be introduced shortly. It will set out in legislation for the first time that reform of offenders as well as punishment is a key purpose of prisons. One of the issues we faced as a society was that we did not have such a definition of prisons. At the moment, legislation says that as Secretary of State I am responsible for housing prisoners. Well, I consider myself responsible for much more than housing prisoners. I consider myself responsible for making sure that we use time productively while people are in prison to turn their lives around so that they become productive members of society. That is going to be embedded in legislation, and it will be accompanied by further measures, including new standards, league tables and governor empowerment.

We will also strengthen the powers of Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons to intervene in failing prisons, and we will put the prison and probation ombudsman on a statutory footing to investigate deaths in custody. Hon. Members have referred to some of the very tragic deaths in custody, and the prison and probation ombudsman performs a vital role here.

The whole House will acknowledge that there is too much violence and self-harm in our prisons. It is also right to say that we have decade-long problems with reoffending. Almost half of prisoners reoffend within a year, at a cost of £15 billion to our society and at huge cost to the victims who suffer from those crimes. That is why this Government’s prison reform agenda is such a priority, and it is why we have secured extra funding and are taking immediate steps to address violence and safety in our prisons. This will be the largest reform of our prisons in a generation. These issues will not be solved in weeks or months, but I am confident that, over time, we will transform our prisons, reduce reoffending and get prisoners into jobs and away from a life of crime.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I hope to be able to get everybody in on the basis of a seven-minute limit.

1.56 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I have three prison establishments in Don Valley: HMP Hatfield, which is an open establishment; HMP Moorland, which is a category C secure prison with 340 sex offenders, 260 foreign prisoners from 40 nationalities and 480 other cat C prisoners; and HMP Lindholme, which has 1,000 prisoners in a cat C secure prison. In Doncaster itself and the Doncaster Central constituency, there is another prison, which is a private establishment. I have visited these prisons over many years, and the relationship has been good, with the community assured that whatever is happening in the prisons it is not having an adverse effect on them, although we have seen a rise in the number of people absconding from the open establishment.

I know that this is a very difficult area. One of the things of which I was most proud when I was a Minister in the Home Office was the introduction of drug testing on arrest for acquisitive crime, so that the drug problem that was leading people to steal could be identified, and people could be put into treatment even before they ended up in court. I believe we should do everything we can to address the causes of crime, as well as being “tough” when people break the law.

The Government have owned up to the problem. It has been acknowledged in the White Paper that the levels of assault on staff are the highest on record and rising. Comparing the year to June 2016 with the same period in 2012 shows that total assaults in prisons are up by 64%; assaults on staff are up 99%; incidents of self-harm are up 57%; and deaths in custody are up 75%. So prisons are less safe for staff, but they are also less safe for prisoners. As the Lord Chancellor wrote in November, “almost half of prisoners commit another crime within a year of release”.

So the system is failing to rehabilitate and, as such, is failing to protect the public from further crime. As she also wrote in November in the Daily Mail,

“What is clear is that the system is not working.”

I am afraid that what is also clear is that on the coalition Government’s watch and on this Government’s watch, the Government are failing, too. They are failing in their duty to care for prison officers and staff; failing in their duty of care for prisoners who are more likely to be assaulted, to injure themselves or take their own life; failing in their duty of care to the public, as they are failing to reduce recidivism; and failing the taxpayer. In the Justice Secretary’s own words today, the Government have admitted that the cost of reoffending is £15 billion.

If we look at violence in prisons, we find that the latest safety in custody statistics show for the year up to September 2016: 324 deaths in prison; 107 self-inflicted deaths; a doubling of self-inflicted deaths among women prisoners—from a low base, but importantly up from four to eight; and over 36,000 cases of self-harm, which is a staggering 426 incidents of self-harm for every 1,000 prisoners. The figures also show 10,544 prisoners self-harming and 2,583 hospital attendances, with injuries serious enough to require hospital treatment, with the added pressure that places on staff who have to escort them, leaving others to deal with situations in prisons that have seen reductions in staffing.

In the year to June 2016, there were 23,775 assaults, an increase of 34%—that is 278 assaults for every 1,000 prisoners—and 3,134 serious assaults, an increase of 32%. This is not a happy situation, as we know from the trade unions working in the sector, whether we are talking about the Prison Officers Association, Community or, for that matter, Unite. A constituent of mine works in a prison providing training to rehabilitate prisoners
and help them to find jobs when they leave. Little is said about the prison employees who, if staffing levels are not sufficient, could also be on the receiving end of assaults.

I was disappointed that the Secretary of State did not meet members of Community, which represents most of the staff in private prisons, to discuss its charter for safe operating standards. Like the POA and others involved, Community has come up with some very constructive practical suggestions, but it worries me that, according to the union’s research findings, it is common for one officer to be on a wing containing at least 60 inmates. I should be interested to hear from the Minister how the Government will ensure that lone working ends as part of their attempts to find better ways of making prison work.

There is much in the White Paper that needs to be discussed. It refers to improved training for staff, the piloting of body-worn video cameras, and cognitive skills programmes for prisoners so that they respond to problems without using violence. I approve of all that. The White Paper also recommends that governors should have more freedoms. I can tell the Secretary of State that in one of the prisons in my constituency, the turnover of governors over the last decade has been enormous. We need governors who can stay put and bring about any changes that they want to introduce.

I am sure the Secretary of State agrees that staffing is still key to improvements in our prisons. Prisons need stable staffing so that people can work with prisoners, but also with each other, to the best possible effect. The Secretary of State has promised 2,500 more staff, but that will not return staff numbers to their 2010 level. During Justice questions yesterday, the Government claimed that the 2,500 figure meant 2,500 extra staff members, but in answer to questions in the Justice Committee on 29 November 2016, the Under-Secretary of State said that it meant recruiting 8,000 staff in the next two years—1,000 per quarter. That is two to three times the rate of recruitment achieved in recent years, and it looks to me like a tall order.

The number of operational staff at HMP Lindholme, in my constituency, fell from 352 in March 2010 to 296. That is a loss of one in seven staff in three years. In HMP Moorland, the number fell from 386 to 354, which is a 9% drop in three years. Between 2015 and 2016, 300 to 800 prison officers were recruited in each quarter, but even that has failed to stem the shortfall. Moreover, we are dealing with an ageing prison population. It is important to look at new ideas for the support and rehabilitation of prisoners, but without the right staff numbers I think that that will be a tall task, if not impossible to achieve.

2.3 pm

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). She is a highly effective advocate for the causes in which she believes, and she was an outstanding Minister. I hope that when the Labour party comes to its senses, she will be restored to the Front-Bench position that she deserves.

Congratulations are also in order to the shadow Justice Secretary, the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon). It is important for us to have an opportunity to reflect on what is happening in our prisons. The hon. Gentleman has devoted his life to justice, as a distinguished trade union lawyer, and I am grateful to him for securing the debate. It was a pity, however, that while he understandably drew attention to concerns about what is happening on our prison estate, he did not put forward a single positive alternative proposition. The contrast between his speech and that of my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary was striking.

My right hon. Friend has been in office for less than 12 months, but during that time she has unveiled and advanced a series of reforms that I believe have the potential to transform our justice system more powerfully, for the good, than those of any of her predecessors for a generation. The fact that she dealt so skilfully with interventions, and also outlined—not just in policy detail, but with authority and humanity—what needs to be done, underlines how fortunate we are to have a genuine, passionate and humane reformer in such an important role.

It is right to pay tribute to those who work in our prisons, and I expect that nearly every speaker in the debate will do so. I always remember a visit that I made to HMP Manchester, formerly Strangeways prison, during which I talked to a prison officer who was working with the most refractory and difficult prisoners. I asked him why he had chosen deliberately to work with some of the offenders whose cases were the most complex and whose behaviour was the most threatening. He explained that he had been brought up in a part of Manchester that was afflicted by crime, with unique challenges, and that one of the things that he wanted to do was put something back by working with offenders to ensure that their lives were changed and that, as a result, people who had been nothing but trouble—people who had been liabilities to society, people who had brought misery and pain into the lives of others, people who were wasting their own lives—could be turned into assets, and we as a society could ensure that whatever talents they had, long buried in many cases, could at last be put to the service of the community.

I remember being inspired by the fact that this young man from a working-class background had decided that the greatest service he could give to the community that had raised him was to try to turn around the lives of others, and it is that spirit that animates nearly everyone who works in our prison system. Despite the occasional frustrations that I experienced in dealing with members of the Prison Officers Association when I was Justice Secretary, I was never for a moment anything other than grateful for their service, their commitment and their dedication. That is why I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend for the steps that she has taken to enhance the way in which the professionals who work in our prisons can do the right thing—not just the reform governors who are changing the way in which prisons work by exercising a greater degree of control and autonomy over the individual prisons that are their responsibility, but those who work on the front line in our wings, particularly, but not only, in our reform prisons, and who are being empowered to play a much more positive role in encouraging and securing rehabilitation.
I pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend for an initiative that she has unveiled, Unlocked for graduates. As she pointed out, more than 350 undergraduates from some of our very best universities have now applied explicitly to work in prisons. Just as Teach First played a part in transforming the reputation of teaching, so this initiative is helping to recruit more people to our prisons. Alongside the work of Unlocked, the implementation of Sally Coates’s review of prison education is ensuring that those who are in custody finally receive a higher quality of education and the chance to transform their lives for the better. Moreover, the work of Charlie Taylor in reviewing youth justice is being followed up and implemented by my right hon. Friend. In so doing, they are making sure that those whose contact with the criminal justice system occurs relatively early in their lives, and who would otherwise be set on a course of criminality, are diverted from crime and assured of a productive future at the earliest possible stage.

I think we can all draw an important lesson from the experience of the youth justice system over recent years. It is the case that youth crime has fallen dramatically in the last few years, and that at the same time the number of individuals in custody has fallen as well. It is not the case that in order to be tough on crime, we need to maintain the same number of individuals in custody as the number we currently have. There are smarter alternatives to incarceration that we need to contemplate. Let me be clear, however: there will always be some criminals for whom custody is the only appropriate answer; given the seriousness of their crimes and their capacity to reoffend. Sometimes society will be so outraged by particular crimes that incarceration is the only answer.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): As my right hon. Friend may know, I represent an inner-city constituency. A couple of years ago, on a visit to a Salvation Army centre, I came across someone who had been in prison, had become institutionalised by the experience, and therefore wanted to go back fairly soon afterwards.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Some individuals become institutionalised by prison life, and many individuals, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, are in prison as a result of problems they acquired—mental health problems, substance abuse, or related issues—which mean that their behaviour is such that, for their own health and for society’s safety, they need for a time to be separated from society. But they should not be in prison; they should be receiving appropriate mental health care, because the custody and incarceration environment they face will only harm them and will do nothing either to heal them or to make sure they become positive and contributing members of society.

One thing I would like to see—I know my right hon. Friend is looking closely at this—is the possibility of building on the experience of problem-solving courts, where those charged with sentencing offenders have the option, of course, of custody, but can also say to the offender that, if they commit to undertake either an appropriate course of mental health care or to deal with their drug or alcohol addiction or to change their behaviour in a meaningful way, they have the opportunity to serve their sentence out of custody.

I also think that release on temporary licence is the right way to go. There should be the opportunity for people who have shown genuine redemption and a desire to commit to society to be released early under strict terms, so that they can reacquaint themselves with the world of work and learning. I know of one prisoner, C. J. Burge, who has been serving her sentence, after one horrendous mistake, in a women’s prison in Surrey, and who, as a result of the sensitive use of release on temporary licence has not only been able to act as a mentor to young offenders, to steer them away from a life of crime, but is now pursuing training to become a barrister in order to ensure that a life that she herself was responsible for harming can now be turned to good. I think all of us in this House can embrace that example and that path, and for that reason I support the amendment.

2.11 pm

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). He, like me, is one of a number of exes in the Chamber who have had responsibility for the prison service; we know how difficult it is to deal with these issues in the post of Secretary of State or prisons Minister.

The right hon. Gentleman made extremely important points about who we imprison, how we use imprisonment and how we use alternative sentences. Those points should be listened to. However, even he will recognise that there are many challenges in the current system. Judging from the current Secretary of State’s contribution, she knows that as well, as does the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), in the absence of our Chair, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill). I want to set out some of the challenges as we on the Justice Committee see them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) told us some of the statistics, and the situation is extremely challenging. We have had six major incidents. We have also had an escape—such occurrences have been unusual over the past 13 to 14 years. Sadly, we have the very high level of 107 self-inflicted deaths, which is an increase of 13% over the previous year, and I expect that number to rise still further in the figures that will be announced tomorrow.

Stephen Pound: I do not want to interrupt my right hon. Friend’s flow, but he will be aware, as we all are, that on 16 December last year, Jenny Swift tragically killed herself in HMP Doncaster. The position of transgender prisoners is one that has agonising implications, and we simply have to recognise that. Does he agree that we need to do more for transgender prisoners in view of the horrendous record of self-harm and suicide that has afflicted them?

Mr Hanson: I agree. I think the first question at yesterday’s Justice questions was about that very issue and the Secretary of State indicated that it is a priority for the Government. We do have a number of vulnerable people in prison, and the situation regarding those
self-inflicted deaths, as well as the homicides that have occurred, is extremely difficult. As we have heard, there has been a 26% increase in reported incidents of self-harm and we have a massive 35% increase in hospital attendances. We also, sadly, have a massive 34% increase in the number of assaults on prison officers. There are also increases in attacks with bladed weapons, spitting and the use of blunt instruments, which means that the situation is very challenging.

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has to some extent made a U-turn on the staffing cuts put in place by her predecessors. She will know that it is a real challenge to achieve an increase of 4,000 posts over the next two years to get a net increase of 2,500 officers. I know that the Committee welcomes that on the whole, but we have seen a 26% cut in staffing numbers since 2010, so we will not be anywhere near getting back to the number of prisoner officers who were in post in May 2010. The Secretary of State needs to look at how we will achieve that.

That is not the only concern we have today, however, and, in the absence of the Chair, I want to highlight some of the things that we in the Justice Committee are currently considering. I hope that the prisons Minister will respond to these key issues. As a Labour MP, I would like to be in a position to be able to implement policies now, but Labour Members will not be able to do that for some years, so we need to offer strong scrutiny to what the Government are doing. That is the key thing for the Justice Committee in the next few weeks and months.

We have now established a prisons sub-committee to look at a range of issues to do with governor empowerment and the challenges faced by the Minister. I am pleased to share a role on that sub-committee with the hon. Member for Banbury. However, we are still a little short of some of the detail about the Government’s programme. It would be helpful for the Minister and the Government, not only in the winding-up speech but in the forthcoming debates, to look at putting the meat on the current extent of their activities so that we can judge what will be taking place in whatever time they have left in office.

We can talk about what the Opposition’s alternative policy would be, but the election could be almost three years away, and the Government have a key role to play before then. We have heard today that governor empowerment will take place in April—just over two months’ time. One third of prison governors will be given greater power and autonomy, but I am genuinely not yet clear about how that will work in practice, what the benchmarks will be, how Ministers will monitor those governors, what the outcomes will be for those governors, and what freedoms they will have to make a difference. I am not sure that the speed of bringing in those changes has yet been thought through by the Government. As the Minister will know, six reform prisons were piloted only in the last six months, and we do not yet know the outcomes of those reforms. It is incumbent on the Minister to indicate the current outcomes for those six reform prisons.

I am not clear about the accountability either. I used to have the prisons Minister’s job, so I know that when something goes wrong in a prison, it will end up on the prisons Minister’s desk, and almost certainly on the front of the Daily Mail or The Sun. I am not clear about how accountability will work in relation to prison governors, so I would like some clarity today from the Minister about what a decision in a prison 200 miles from his office in the Ministry of Justice will mean for accountability when it ultimately lands on his desk.

I want some clarity today about what the commissioning process will be for prison governors. Do they have the skills and training to be able to commission services for employment, health or procurement? Those things have previously been done centrally. I am not sure whether all that local commissioning will mean that we lose some of the Ministry’s economies of scale.

In a fractured, localised system, what is the role of the MOJ when setting out directions? I am not sure how governors will recruit local prison officers. I would welcome some clarification, on behalf of our Committee, as to whether terms and conditions of service, training and delivery will be devolved. Those issues go to the heart of the Government amendment, and to the heart of the work of the sub-committee, which will be looking at them on a cross-party basis in the near future.

I am not sure whether there is discretion. When we heard evidence from Peter Dawson of the Prison Reform Trust last week, he said that this would “unleash competition between governors, prisons and probation and between prison, probation and the police. It is a competitive environment. There are pros and cons to that, but it is likely to drive up cost overall.”

We need some real vision and clarity from Ministers, not on the direction of travel—we know what that is—but on what the bones of that travel will be.

It is also important that we have an indication of what the performance measurements and league tables will look like. Ultimately, as the Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East have said, we are caring for people through the gate. Most prisoners will leave prison and return to society, and our duty as the state is to ensure that they return in a way that does not lead them to reoffend, and that they contribute positively to society. We need more facts and more direction from the Government.

2.20 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), another member of the club of exes. When I held the responsibilities that are now held by the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Sam Gyimah), the right hon. Gentleman knew perfectly well which bits of the system were difficult to change, and I remember being regularly twitted by him about the impossibility of being able to transfer the necessary number of foreign national offenders out of the system. His regular interrogation on how we were doing on the timetables showed his expertise and understanding of the system. I am delighted with the work that he is doing on the Justice Committee and with his contribution to this debate. I hope that my reflections on the system, as another of the exes, will also make a positive contribution today.

I am delighted that my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey, is now the prisons Minister. In my experience, he has been open to talking to people
with experience of the system, to getting ideas and to getting well across his brief. He is to be congratulated on that. He is lucky enough to be serving under the present Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, who has the qualities that my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) had. My right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath and the current Lord Chancellor put policy back into the place where it had been left by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), under whom I had the honour to serve. The hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) said that the change of policy between 2012 and the arrival of my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath as Lord Chancellor had created significant difficulties for the prison service. I know that the policy during that period will have found some favour with my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), but we are now dealing with the consequences.

The Prison Officers Association is not innocent in this matter. The priority for my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) was to deliver the savings targets that the Ministry of Justice had to meet, and they were significant. He was presented with a deal by the Prison Officers Association: if he ended the competition programme for the potential privatisation of prisons—a programme started by the Labour party—and the wings were left in the control of the public sector, the POA would agree to the establishment changes in the public sector bid to try to hold on to the management of Birmingham prison. Those involved savage cuts to the establishment. Indeed, the winning bid for HMP Birmingham by G4S involved about 150 more staff than the public sector bid.

The second round of cuts, which were put into the service after 2012-13 and implemented during the course of 2013-14, involved severe establishment reductions in the prison service, all in the public sector. My hon. Friend the Minister is now having to wrestle with the consequences of that. The Government have now woken up to those consequences and are putting 2,500 prison officers back into the establishment. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) had to deal with the consequences of the previous policy when he was prisons Minister, and immensely difficult it was, too.

The message that I want to give to my hon. Friend the Minister involves the possible role of the private sector, and I want to try to win this argument across the House. The problem under my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell was the row with Serco and G4S over the management of the tagging contracts. Whatever the rights and wrongs of that, it resulted in those companies—the biggest suppliers of private sector services in the custodial system—not being considered for contracts. That meant that we lost a serious amount of competition; indeed, the whole competition programme was stopped.

The right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) referred to Doncaster prison, which is run by Serco. When I went to see it as prisons Minister, it was a quite outstanding prison. Serco had engaged with the Department, and its contract to manage the prison incentivised it to deliver the necessary rehabilitation. There is no right or wrong answer on public or private sector involvement, but the big advantage of private sector prisons is that they are cheaper to run and cost the service less. The companies also invest heavily in leadership in those prisons. In my experience, the most innovative practices and regimes, particularly around rehabilitation and the management of offenders, were in the private sector. I know that the reforms in the White Paper will try to give some of those freedoms to the governors of public sector prisons, and I wish my hon. Friend the Minister all power to his elbow in achieving that.

There are two ways in which to get resources into the custodial estate, and that process has to be done in partnership with the private sector. First, we need to change and improve the estate, which means continuing the process of selling off the old prisons—they are expensive to run and often occupy expensive real estate—and building new ones. Those new prisons should be built and operated by the private sector. We can take the savings there. If the money is not available in the public sector budget just now, at least the private sector will give us the ability to deal with the funding over a prolonged period.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): What about Oakwood?

Crispin Blunt: The former shadow spokeswoman asks about Oakwood prison. The cost of a place there was £13,000 a year, compared with an average cost of £22,000 per place in a more expensive prison.

2.27 pm

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), and I thank him for the interest he showed in the Durham prisons while he was prisons Minister. However, I profoundly disagree with his view that the privatisation of prisons is the answer to the problems that they are facing.

Like my right hon. Friend, the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), I have three prisons in my constituency: Durham prison, a community prison with about 1,000 prisoners; Frankland prison, a high security prison with more than 800 prisoners; and, more unusually, a women’s prison. There are not many of those in the country. I also have a youth offender institution. I am therefore in a pretty good position to have direct, first-hand knowledge of what is happening across all aspects of the prison estate, and the picture is not a good one.

Prison budgets have been reducing since 2010; they have been cut by almost a quarter since that time. Up to last year, savings of up to £900 million were made, with another £91 million of savings being requested from prisons this year. At the same time, the prison population has not really fallen, and most of the cuts have been to prison staff numbers. There has been a reduction of more than 6,000 since 2010. This has had an enormous impact on the ability of our prisons to run effectively.

As we have heard this afternoon, welcome though it is that the Government are recruiting another 2,500 prison officers, it does not make up for the shortfall or the cuts since 2010. Of course, the Government will have to recruit many, many more than 2,500 to get back to the number of prison staff that we need.

What has been the impact on our prisons? Deaths in custody are up by 14%, self-harm is up by 21% and
assaults are up by 13%, with assaults on staff up by 20% and serious assaults on staff up by 42%. I do not know about the prisons Minister, but that is not a record that I would want to stand up and defend. In such circumstances I would want to come to the House to say, “We recognise that there are real problems in our prisons, and these are the measures that we shall take as a matter of urgency to get our prisons back on track.”

A White Paper does not really cut it, so one of the things I want to hear from the prisons Minister in his winding-up speech is what he will do as a matter of urgency to tackle some of the problems facing our prisons. As I have only a minute for each of them, I will quickly run through what I think he needs to do.

Far too many women are inappropriately sent to prison, such as Low Newton women’s prison in my constituency. Some 52% of women in our prisons have children, and lots of those children end up going into care when their mother is inappropriately put in prison, often for quite short periods. I would like to see a clear Government strategy to deal with women prisoners and direct them to other forms of custody. I look forward to hearing the plan for women offenders that the prisons Minister and the Justice Secretary said they would come forward with later this year, particularly as it relates to cutting the prison estate so that more women are given sentences in the community or other types of custody, rather than being sent to prison.

At Durham, a community prison, the rate of recidivism is really high. Measures are needed to cut recidivism and, in particular, to continue investing in education, skills and work experience. We know from the monitoring reports and the inspections that not enough attention is paid to education and skills, and it is really difficult to maintain high levels of education when numbers are being cut. That is an area that the Government need to address.

In some respects, Frankland prison presents the biggest challenge to the Government. Its prisoners have very complex needs, and we know from the monitoring reports that it is crucial that the Government continue to resource, for example, the centre that aims to turn around violent behaviour in the prison population.

All those specialist services are at risk if prisons are not properly staffed and resourced. I want to hear what the Minister will do quickly to resource our prisons more effectively and to ensure that recidivism is reduced and that alternatives to prison and custody are adequately resourced for men and for women.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Before I bring in Gordon Henderson, I advise people that the time limit is going down to six minutes. We may have to review it again later.

2.33 pm

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): Thank you for sharing that good news, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It can be five minutes if you want some even better news.
18,000 band 3 to 5 officers in post. At the same time, of course, there were 80,000 prisoners, so what are the implications for those 18,000 band 3 to 5 prison officers?

First, we have to take into account the fact that at any one time about 20% of those officers are off work for one reason or another, such as sickness, court duties or holidays, which leaves a total of 14,400 officers. But, of course, those officers work only 37 hours a week, yet prisoners are incarcerated 24/7, which is 168 hours a week, so it takes 4.5 officers to provide continuous cover over a whole week. That means that at any one time there are just 3,200 band 3 to 5 officers on frontline duty in prisons in England and Wales. Each officer on duty has to look after 25 prisoners.

Finally, I will quickly address the Opposition motion. There is much in the motion with which I cannot disagree, not least because the facts it sets out are incontrovertible. Indeed, if the motion had finished on the word “overcrowded”, I would have been happy to support it. However, I am not happy with the remaining lines of the motion. Calling on the Government to “reduce overcrowding and improve safety while still ensuring that those people who should be in prison are in prison” is both illogical and nonsense. I will not be voting against the Labour motion, but I cannot support it.

2.39 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is a pleasure to follow such an informed and powerful speech by the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson). I should declare that I am co-chair of the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group and the family court unions parliamentary group.

The Ministry of Justice cites three key objectives that underpin the operation of the Prison Service: to hold prisoners securely, to reduce the risk of prisoners reoffending and to provide “safe and well-ordered establishments in which we treat prisoners humanely, decently and lawfully.”

Wales has four jails, housing 3,436 inmates—4% of the total prisoner population in the joint legal jurisdiction of England and Wales. On Monday, I visited HMP Berwyn, the brand-new prison in north Wales, which is due to open next month. With places for 2,106 men, this so-called super-prison will increase Wales’s capacity for housing prisoners by over 50%.

Plaid Cymru continues to have several concerns about the prison, especially the massive strain it will place on North Wales police, which is expected to face extra staffing costs of £147,000 a year as a direct result. At a time when the already underfunded police force is stretched, with limited resources and tight budgets, I must question why it is acceptable to expect a local force to foot the bill for a UK Government project. That super-prison is designed first and foremost to meet the needs of north-west England, not those of north Wales, yet the Government insist that North Wales police is responsible for covering the cost of policing that facility.

My reservations about this Government's prisons policy should not be mistaken for any kind of criticism of the dedicated staff who work in the criminal justice system. I thank operational supervisor Peter Buffel, who was an excellent guide and advocate for the ethos of HMP Berwyn. I was struck by a strong sense that the staff—both experienced prison personnel and new recruits—were looking forward to contributing to a worthwhile social facility. Two prison officers were forthcoming in explaining that they had moved from posts at other prisons specifically because of the quality of the new-build estate at HMP Berwyn and the prison's innovative, exciting offender management objectives. Those reasons are important. I am sure that we will be following the prison’s progress closely.

However, I ask the Minister once again to ensure that we have the correct staff in terms not only of experience and skill, but of language, because HMP Berwyn is in close proximity to some of the most Welsh-speaking regions in Wales. I want to give the Minister the opportunity to assure the House that appropriate provisions, including the hiring of Welsh-speaking staff, will be made to enable the prison to operate effectively bilingually. Will the Minister confirm that NOMS will work with HMP Berwyn to draw up an institution-specific Welsh language plan?

While Wales has the ability to set much of its own health and social policy, the criminal justice system is still dictated by Westminster. There are many instances where Wales is truly to help people reintegrate into society and to prevent reoffending, those powers must be devolved to the Welsh Assembly. I have a request: this Government are supposedly committed to decentralisation and if the Minister and the Secretary of State are committed to reducing reoffending, will they once again consider the devolution of the criminal justice system? At the very least, will the Minister respond to the Silk Commission’s request that a formal mechanism be established for Welsh Ministers to contribute to policy development on adult offender management, and that a feasibility study of the devolution of the prison and probation services is undertaken?

2.43 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I want to confine my remarks to the subject of fixed-term recalls, which I wish were much more widely understood by the public and in this House. They represent one of the biggest outrages of our prison system, and yet hardly anyone knows anything about them. Most people believe that if someone is let out of prison early—whether halfway through their sentence, a quarter of the way through the sentence on a home detention curfew, or at some other point before they actually should be let out—and they reoffend or breach their licence conditions, they should at least go back to prison to serve the rest of their original sentence. Unfortunately, that is often not the case. In reality, the overwhelming majority of the public believe that offenders should serve the whole of the sentence that they were given by the courts in the first place. In a survey carried out by Lord Ashcroft, 82% of those asked thought that prisoners should serve the full prison sentence handed down by the court. That, for many, is not rocket science; it is just common sense.

Fixed-term recalls were introduced to reduce the pressure on prison places in 2008, and many people do not know about what is going on. A fixed-term recall is when the offender breaches their licence or reoffends and is returned to prison not for the rest of their prison term—not even for most of it—but for a mere 28 days. When fixed-term recalls were introduced, they excluded certain offenders. However, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)
was Lord Chancellor, he relaxed the rules by way of a change to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 in a bid to reduce the prison population still further. As of 3 December 2012, fixed-term recalls were made available to previously denied prisoners: offenders serving a sentence for certain violent or sexual offences, those subject to a home detention curfew and, most shockingly, those who had previously been given a fixed-term recall for breaching their licence in the same sentence. Now, I do not think that many people out in the country know that, but I certainly know that many people will not like it.

Fixed-term recalls do not happen just occasionally. They were given to 42% of all offenders who were recalled in both 2013 and 2014 and to 28% in 2015. That is an awful lot of people going back to prison for only 28 days instead of the rest of their sentence. Those 28-day recalls relate to sentences of one year or more, so we are talking about the most serious of offenders. Recalls of 14 days apply to shorter sentences, but they are a much more recent concept.

The more I investigated 28-day fixed-term recalls, and as more figures have been released, more disturbing things have become clear. In 2014, 7,486 prisoners were recalled for just 28 days. Of those, 3,166 had been charged with a further offence. That means that 3,166 people were charged with a further offence when they should have been in prison in the first place and then escaped serving the rest of their original sentence despite committing this further offence. The vast majority had 15 or more previous convictions. Burglary is the most common original offence for which a fixed-term recall is given for a breach or a further offence. Over half of all those given this pathetic slap on the wrist were people who had committed a very serious crime. They were also given to people convicted of manslaughter, attempted homicide, wounding, rape and robbery.

Perhaps the icing on the cake in this whole sorry state of affairs is that, in 2015, 816 offenders were allowed more than one fixed-term recall on the same original sentence for another breach or offence. In just three years, 3,327 of the most serious offenders in our prisons were released from prison, breached their licence, were returned to prison for 28 days, released again, were returned to prison for just 28 days for a further breach of licence and then released again. That is a complete failure of policy and is completely indefensible. I raised fixed-term recalls in Justice questions yesterday, and the Minister’s reply about risk was very interesting, but this is a sad joke. As far as I am concerned, these people should not have been released early in the first place but, having been released, there should be no other option but for them to be returned to prison for breaching their licence, especially for reoffending, for the remainder of their original sentence at the very least.

Finally, the weak response to reoffending is becoming so well-known in the criminal community that some people are taking the chance of getting recalled knowing that the punishment is pathetic. It is like a 28-day, all-inclusive mini-break. Worse still, some prisoners who have been released deliberately try to get themselves back into prison to give themselves enough time to see how their criminal operation in prison is carrying on while they are out, knowing that they will only be there for 28 days. That has been confirmed in research by Manchester Metropolitan University, which stated that prisoners had reported being able to earn £3,000 in just 28 days by bringing in drugs. One prisoner said that “everyone keeps going and coming back on these recalls with more drugs.”

This is an absolute farce. The criminals are laughing all the way to the bank while nothing is being done to stop this nonsense. When will the Minister get a grip and end this fraud on the public?

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The time limit is now five minutes.

2.49 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow a fellow member of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). He has raised the issue of fixed-term recalls before, and I am sure that by the time the Minister responds to the debate, he will have got a grip on the matter and announced some changes that will satisfy the hon. Gentleman. If he does not, I am sure it will be raised again, not only in the Justice Committee but in the House.

In the short time available, I shall raise just one issue—foreign national prisoners. I agree wholeheartedly with what has been said by other right hon. and hon. Members about the crisis in our prisons. If we are thinking about having a club of ex-Ministers, I should say that I used to be a Minister in the Lord Chancellor’s Department, but at that time, responsibility for prisons lay with the Home Office, so I take no responsibility for what happened in the past. Perhaps a seminar of ex-prisons Ministers, chaired by the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), the author of that definitive book on prisons, could meet to come up with the solutions that all Members would like to see adopted to bring the crisis to an end.

To return to foreign national prisoners, I am delighted that the prisons Minister is chairing the taskforce, about which we want to hear more. It remains a mystery to me why 12% of our country’s prison population happens to be foreign national prisoners. Half that 12%—more than 4,000 prisoners—are from EU countries. Bearing in mind the fact that we will continue to be a member of the EU for the next two years, it is extraordinary that we have not been able to send back more foreign national prisoners from our prisons. After all, what is the point of undertaking negotiations and signing transfer agreements with EU colleagues if they are unable to take back their own citizens? It must be a priority for the Government to ensure that, in the two years available before Brexit, citizens from countries such as Poland and Romania, which are top of the list in terms of numbers, should be returned to their countries.

I was surprised to hear in the Select Committee the Minister’s chief officer, Michael Spurr, tell the House that more prisoners would have been sent back to Poland under the agreement had it not been for a mistake. I think he said that 130 should have been sent back but had not been. As the Minister and the House know, the derogation for Poland ended on 31 December, so when the Minister responds I hope he will tell us that
the matter is being looked at very carefully and that prisoners are being transferred. I am glad that a record number were removed last year, but the headline figure was so low that practically any additional figure becomes a record. We need to do much better than we are doing at the moment.

We have heard recently that, under the agreement with Albania, only 17 Albanian prisoners have been transferred from our prisons. It is not that we are against foreign national prisoners, we are just in favour of their being able to serve their sentences in their countries of origin. If that happens, it will reduce the prison population by 10,000 and save the taxpayer £169 million, so I very much hope that the Minister will give us some new information that will encourage the House to believe that this issue is being taken very seriously.

2.53 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I declare an interest as a trustee of the Butler Trust, an organisation that seeks to improve the skills of prison officers throughout the country and share best practice. I have the pleasure to serve alongside P. J. McParlin, a very distinguished former chairman of the Prison Officers Association with whom I am proud to be a fellow trustee.

I am pleased that the Ministry of Justice has managed to secure the funding to recruit an extra 2,500 prison officers. I pay tribute to the work that prison officers do day in, day out. They are an outstanding group of public servants whose work is unfortunately not as well known and well appreciated as it should be. The moves towards more autonomous prisons with greater community links will help local communities to appreciate more fully the sterling work that prison officers do day in, day out.

On safety, I want us to ensure that prison officers are always supported as well as possible by good local police co-operation, so that when there are assaults on prison officers, the information can be passed on and the matter dealt with effectively. In my time as prisons Minister, I found that the co-operation between local police forces and prisons varied throughout the country. It needs to be uniformly good to provide the support that our prison officers deserve.

I am pleased that both Opposition and Government Members have spoken about reducing the numbers of foreign national offenders, which is important not only because the British taxpayer is paying, but because if we could reduce that 9,000 prisoners in our prisons, it would give us the headroom and flexibility to do rehabilitation better throughout our prisons. Both sides of the House are keen to see that, and it is very much the focus of the “Prison Safety and Reform” White Paper, which I was delighted to see published in November.

I am pleased that the Ministry of Justice is taking forward the Farmer review on prisoners’ families. Strong families are essential to strong communities throughout the country. They are engines of social mobility and matter very much for prisoners for lots of practical reasons. We know that if a prisoner’s relationship or marriage does not fall apart, they are more likely to have somewhere to live when they come out of prison and are more likely to get into work, so I strongly welcome the MOJ’s support for the Farmer review.

The continuing emphasis on education is excellent, and there is greater focus on testing and making sure that there is improvement.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): On that point, there was an event in the House of Commons yesterday that was organised by the Cultural Learning Alliance, of which I should declare my sister is a member. The actress Fiona Shaw and artist Grayson Perry were here in Parliament to support the publication of their most recent research, which shows that young offenders who take part in arts activities are 18% less likely to reoffend. That is of huge benefit to the public purse and, of course, to the prisoners and their families. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important that we invest in arts education in prisons?

Andrew Selous: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that issue. When there is clear evidence that arts education leads to reduced reoffending, we should absolutely support it.

One phrase that I never liked to hear when I went around prisons was that prisoners were being “taken to education”. Education should run across the whole prison: on the wings, in the landings and in prisoners’ cells. We need to have a whole-prison learning environment. I commend what is happening in Wandsworth prison, where the inspirational governor, Ian Bickers, has taken 50 prisoners with level 3 qualifications—he is paying them and has given them a uniform, and they can lose their job if they do not perform well—and getting them to work alongside those doing education in the prison to spread learning throughout the prison. That is an excellent initiative.

The focus in prisons on work and training that will lead to a job on release is absolutely right. I am really pleased that prison apprenticeships, which will carry on when prisoners move into the community, have been established well. We often hear namechecked the employers who do the right thing and take on ex-offenders—that play fair by everyone to reduce reoffending and keep everyone safe—but I have to tell the House that a number of employers, including several very well known national employers, do not take on ex-offenders as a matter of policy. I am not going to name and shame them today because I am in correspondence and dialogue with them, and I hope that quiet persuasion will lead to them doing the right thing. Nevertheless, just as we namecheck those who do well, I put those who do not do the right thing on notice that there will come a time when we will call them out and urge them to do better.

I was pleased to hear from the Secretary of State that in April she will be saying more about probation. We need high standards for probation. I pay tribute to our probation officers, as they are yet another very dedicated group of public servants. They need to work hand in glove with prison officers. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), will make sure that that does happen. In particular, I want to see probation officers making sure that the emphasis on education and employment that is taking place in prison carries on during the probationary period—for example, that the focus on work continues and that the ex-offender is attending the local college. That will take us forward and is extremely important.

Several hon. Members rose—
Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I give a warning that I mean to drop the time limit to four minutes after the next speaker. I call Toby Perkins.

3 pm
Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Like many Members today, I wish to pay tribute to the people who work in the Prison Service. They take on an incredibly difficult task and we are very grateful to them. What they do was brought home to me when I took up what my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) said, in advance of it being made a challenge, about visiting a prison. I visited Nottingham prison, and I encourage others to do the same. Any MP who is voting in this debate but who has not been around a prison are doing so from a position of ignorance.

There was much in the Secretary of State’s rhetoric that I support. We all agree with much of what she said about the issues and challenges facing the Prison Service, but her vision of what is going on and the policies of this Government bear little relationship to prison officers’ actual experience.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) criticised the motion. Although we recognise that, of course, there are many more aspects to prison than those contained in the motion, it seems to me that there is little to disagree with in it.

Four of my friends were recently employed at Moorland prison in Doncaster. Two have been recently retired on medical grounds and one is off sick at the moment. This debate rightly refers to the overall reduction in prison officers, but what is not so much focused on is the deliberate strategy of replacing experienced prison officers with cheap replacements and people right at the start of their career. That is an extremely dangerous policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) spoke about private prisons, but such practice is also happening in the Government estate.

One of my friends who worked at Moorland recently left the service. He was assaulted three times in a six-month period—once very seriously indeed. On the first occasion, he was encouraged to phone the staff welfare hotline. The third time he phoned it, he was told that he had used the hotline too many times and, although he had been seriously assaulted, he was not allowed to take time to get any support.

Another friend in the service needs knee surgery, but he has had to cancel the operation because he believes that if he takes time off to get his knee repaired he will be sacked on capability grounds. He specifically asked me why experienced prison officers should feel too intimidated to get the medical treatment they need.

Another friend who worked in the service for 25 years left last year. He said that when he started at Moorland there were 12 prison officers to a landing containing 90 prisoners; now, just three prison officers are there. He said that three prison officers are adequate when things are quiet and everything is going okay, but it leaves them with little capacity to engage with prisoners and carry out rehabilitation work, as they want. When a prisoner takes a phone call at 7.55 am, telling him that his wife has left him or that his children have been taken away by social services, he needs support. Prison officers have to step in and do an incredibly important job. When those resources are not there—whether it be for a moment of crisis in a prisoner’s life, to prevent fights, or simply to support prisoners and advise them on what courses to take on their path to rehabilitation—a vital chance is lost to help a prisoner back on to the right path.

Prison officers no longer feel that their role, which is incredibly important in our society, is as fulfilling as it once was, and that should concern us all. When prisoners start to think that no one is interested in them, we see the violent episodes that have taken place recently. Not enough is being done to prevent reoffending.

Experienced prison officers are crucial to the development of new staff. Managers in prisons now are much less experienced than once they were. What chance do the new £19,000 prison apprentices have if they are put into overcrowded prisons with disillusioned and inexperienced prison officers and if the mentoring that would once have been available for new staff is no longer there? Are we just setting them up to fail?

I support the motion in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), but I go further and say that, unless the Government recognise why the riots are happening, stop their deliberate attempt to chuck experienced officers out of the system to save money, and implement their strategy to retain experienced staff and see them as central to the success of the recruitment of the new generation of prison officers, not only will the problems continue to escalate but our prisons and our society will pay a very heavy price for that failure in years to come.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call—Andrew Selous.

3.5 pm
Andrew Selous: I am very glad that my hon. Friend mentioned volunteers. Does he agree that we should salute the work of the volunteers who go into our prisons across the country to work alongside prison officers?
Simon Hoare: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend if for no other reason bar the fact that it says to those prisoners that society has not forgotten them and has not dismissed them out of hand, and that it still sees them as, potentially, a productive part of the community when they come back.

There are two things that I wish to talk about today and to which I hope the Minister will pay attention. The first is in very specific relation to Guys Marsh prison, which the Ministry of Justice team will know was in the media relatively recently and has had problems. I will, if I may, make a brief comment about the robustness of Carillion as the contractor. Contracts have two sides to that particular coin. The first is clearly on the company that is contracted to deliver the service to actually deliver that service. The other side of the coin is for the person who lets the contract to monitor it properly and to enforce what is required from it. I remain to be convinced that Carillion—certainly as far as it has performed in relation to Guys Marsh—is up to the job and that NOMS as the monitor of the contract has actually done the job it is required to do.

I do not take a “private sector good, public sector bad” view, or vice versa, but sometimes I do think that some of these companies that are contracted to do this very important work need to raise their game. I have spoken to the Minister about that, and I know that he and the Lord Chancellor are receptive to the case.

Yesterday, I was called at Justice questions to talk about recruitment—an issue that has dominated the debate today. In response to my question, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice replied that

“Guys Marsh has been made a priority prison, which means that the governor is getting extra resource, in addition to our national campaign effort, to recruit the staff he needs.”—[Official Report, 24 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 147.]

Of itself, that is excellent news. I thank the Minister for it. I welcome it, as does the governor, Paul Millett. As I pressed in my question—I make no apologies for pressing again today—having a prison in a rural area presents recruitment problems. The cost of our housing is high. Public transport is scarce. Our unemployment rate, luckily, is very low. We only have about 300 people on jobseeker’s allowance in North Dorset. In that recruitment drive, may I urge Ministers to ensure that there is flexibility and scope for innovation? That might be providing help for a new prison officer to buy a vehicle or motorbike so that they can get to and from the prison. It might be help with relocation or housing costs—some form of grant to help to pay a deposit, or a loan. Terms and conditions should be looked at. I appreciate that this is a sensitive matter, but I hope that the POA would support something such as that if the end game were to deliver more prison officers to rural prisons, thus making the regime and atmosphere much safer for staff.

I encourage the Minister to work far more closely with the Ministry of Defence. Blandford Camp is a few miles from the prison, and there are a number of military institutions in Wiltshire, which seems to be a fertile recruiting ground for new prison officers as we meet the challenge of staffing.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Peter Heaton-Harris.
there is a technical solution. We can ask mobile operators to take responsibility and make sure that there are intentional blackspots to stop mobile phones getting into prisons.

I support the Government amendment. I praise the work that is being done, and I welcome the White Paper.

3.14 pm

[Peter Heaton-Jones]

3.18 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate. When I was first elected as a Member of Parliament, I remember being taken to a police station and seeing a room with 18 faces on the wall. The police officer said that when a large number of those people were on remand or in prison, crime went down, but that the opposite happened when they were not. I served as a magistrate in Westminster for six years. Although we had very strict guidelines, and we obviously listened carefully to the excellent probation officer before giving sentence, I was always aware that we would not know the outcome of the judgment that we were making.

A few years ago I had the opportunity to visit the Amber Foundation, which is a very worthwhile charity in Exeter—it has a number of sites—that works with ex-offenders to give them a pathway back to full citizenship. I want to use the time available to talk about the importance of education. Education and rehabilitation have to be the Department’s major focus, because unless we get this right, we will be in the awful cycle of putting people away and then releasing them, only to have them go back in again, which has a very poor impact on crime levels and on those individuals for the rest of their lives.

I hope that the Government will continue their ambition to give prison governors real autonomy so that programmes that are put in place will work for their institutions and can command authority to drive real change. We also need to be realistic about the complexity of reforming prison education. What incentives is the Minister considering to ensure that prisoners will choose to take part in educational and vocational programmes? I am pleased to hear about apprenticeships, but given that so many prisoners have learning difficulties and no formal education, will he allow them to have increased pay, time out of their cell or even early release in exceptional cases? We must contemplate radical policy options if we are to see a step change in this area.

What is the Department’s view of the balance between providing holistic education that is focused on developing potential, including in the arts as well as in basic literacy and numeracy, and vocational programmes that are focused on local labour market outcomes after prison? Will the Minister give local governors sufficient autonomy on that issue? We need to bear in mind that a very high proportion of prisoners have special educational needs and therefore need individual attention, which is expensive. What plans do the Government have to help with the recruitment of those with the specialist skills to work in what is a very challenging sector? I welcome the announcement on investment and increased resources, but let us be under no illusions about the complexity of the challenge. I hope that the Minister will give some detail when he responds to the debate.

I congratulate the Government on getting to grips with many of these issues and the original thinking that I am hearing from the Dispatch Box.
3.22 pm

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen). With the House’s permission, I will be very parochial and focus on Bedford prison, given that it is mentioned in the motion. I commend the Minister, because on the afternoon and evening of 6 November, following the disturbances in the prison, he managed, notwithstanding his responsibilities to recover the situation, to keep me fully informed throughout. As my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) said, that is a hallmark of this particular Minister, and I am very grateful to him. Since the disturbances, the prison has been recovered and rebuilt. As I have been nice to the Minister, I would ask him to meet me to discuss the possibility of a very small investment that has been pending for Bedford prison, which could make a substantial difference.

I want to talk about accountability. One of the issues leading up to the problems at Bedford prison was that 72 recommendations for change and improvement had been made by the inspectorate, but only 12 had been enacted two years later. I have every confidence that the governor, who has recently returned to her position, will find remedies to those problems. However, as governors are given more accountability, how does the Minister think that they themselves will be held to account? Bedford prison has an excellent independent monitoring board. What will be the role of IMBs across the country with regard to accountability?

Prison officers have been mentioned frequently with regard both to numbers and to pay. Having spoken to a number of members of staff at Bedford prison anonymously after the disturbances, it is clear to me that two other issues ought to be addressed. First, this is not just about pay; it is also about the prestige of the profession. Many Members have paid strong compliments to the profession today. Too often prison officers are seen as the “nearly force”—they are not quite held in the same regard as the police. There are a number of things that the Minister could do on prestige as well as pay that could make a difference.

Prison officers also talked to me about the importance of experience. There has been a downgrading of the age range at which people can be brought into the prison officer corps, but that does have a knock-on effect for confidence and teamwork when people are put in very difficult situations.

Finally, given that last year was the 150th anniversary of the Howard League—it is named after a former high sheriff, John Howard—may I reinforce the comments that have been made about the attention that needs to be paid to suicides in prison? I will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that. At its 150th anniversary, I said that the Howard League was the essential irritant to Governments on prison reform.

Having listened to the Opposition today, I have to say that, unfortunately, the Labour party has absolutely no positive suggestions. I expect the Minister to do much better in his contribution.

3.25 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I start by paying tribute to all prison officers in this country, who do a fantastic, difficult and often dangerous job, and particularly to those at HMP Lewes in my constituency, which has seen disturbances in recent months and was put into special measures just before Christmas. I am not sure whether the shadow Minister has visited Lewes prison—that I know that the prisons Minister has—but I encourage him to do so if he has not. Having visited the prison on a number of occasions, I know that one cannot fail to be moved by the dedication of the prison officers who work there so tirelessly.

I am disappointed by the Opposition’s motion—I note that no more Opposition Members wish to speak—because it fails to demonstrate any understanding of the issues facing prison officers day in, day out. This is not just about staffing levels. In Lewes prison, for example, there have been a number of vacancies for some time, but the prison has not been able to fill them. I take on board the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) because it is hard to fill such vacancies in a rural constituency in the south-east of England. I welcome the Secretary of State’s moves towards local recruitment, whereby a governor can manage people leaving and have replacements ready at hand, as well as managing the skills mix and experience of their prison officers to make the transition much easier.

Lewes prison is difficult to manage because its old buildings make it difficult to see what is going on, particularly with reduced staff numbers. It is also a depressing prison inside—there is hardly any lighting—which makes it a tough place not only for inmates, but for the prison officers who work there day in, day out. The inmates are changing. While there are the usual faces who keep coming through the revolving door, there are also now sexual offenders. That type of prisoner was never there 10 or 15 years ago, so that has increased pressure on the prison officers and prisoners.

In the minute and a half remaining, I want to support what my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) said about the Opposition. Labour Members have not even touched on what motivates people to commit crime, and therefore enter prison, in the first place. We know that a quarter of prisoners have been in care at some point in their lives, that 59% of those entering prison are reoffenders who have been in prison before, and that about three quarters of prisoners have problems reading or writing.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Maria Caulfield: I will not because there is so little time.

We absolutely have to deal with the way in which people enter prisons. I have talked to young people in Newhaven Foyer in my constituency, many of whom have come from the care sector. Many of them deliberately committed crime to get into prison, because they were not confident about getting housing or care, and many of their friends are in prison already. Until we address issues relating to life chances, the same people will be going through the prison system.

I know that the Ministry of Justice is not working in isolation. It is working with the children’s Minister, with the relevant Health Minister on mental health problems, and with the Housing Minister to deal with housing problems. That is why I am so disappointed with the
Opposition motion, which fails to tackle any of the factors that contribute to prisoner numbers and shows no understanding of them at all.

3.29 pm
Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield).

Last year Anjem Choudary, an extremist preacher and vocal supporter of the death cult Daesh, was jailed for five and a half years. Like many, I was pleased that justice had been served, but I was also deeply concerned about what influence he might have over his fellow inmates while serving his sentence. The impact that radical inmates can have on other prisoners should not be underestimated. Prisons have always had gangs, and this death cult is just another gang on the prison block.

I therefore firmly welcomed the measures introduced following the Acheson review—particularly the stronger vetting of prison chaplains and frontline staff, and the removal from the general prison population into specialist units of those spreading extreme, violent and corrosive views. I ask the Minister to do all he can to ensure that, once contained in those specialist units, extremists are not able to collaborate and further propagate their dangerous ideologies. I have long asked for tighter vetting for so-called faith leaders, and for all sermons and services to be conducted in English.

We hear of a reluctance among prison staff to challenge pernicious extremist views, particularly radical Islamic beliefs. Prisons must not be allowed to exist as breeding grounds for Wahhabism or Daesh, and it is vital that we continue to push for the appropriate training of prison staff in this area. I welcome the recruitment of more prison staff, but they must be properly equipped and deployed to combat extremism. I was shocked to read that inmates in Belmarsh and other prisons were found with publications containing extremist content. Surely the Minister will agree that that is an offence under the Prevent programme.

In my constituency, I have probably the busiest custody suite in the whole country, and that is the end we have to start from.

We need to make sure that three things happen. First, people must be able to read, write and add up. I commend the Government for producing a league table of prisons where we learned how veterans are dealt with in veteran assistance in which the shadow Northern Ireland Secretary, the hon. Member for Blyth (Mr Anderson), has also been very involved. When I served on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, we went to Washington, where we learned how veterans are dealt with in veteran...
treatment courts. I urge the Government to examine at that in no uncertain terms, because it is vital that we get this right. We must also do something about mental health, where I ask the Government to look at better training for prison officers. Prison officers do a brilliantly good job. I have a lot of prison officers in my constituency who work just outside it in Dartmoor. I am really looking forward to visiting Exeter and Dartmoor prisons.

3.36 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be able to close this debate, in which Members have spoken very eloquently and knowledgeably about the issues facing our prison system. Before I go into what they have said, I want to thank our prison officers, prison governors, and all those who work in the Prison Service. They face very great challenges every day of their lives, and we owe them a lot for the work that they do for us.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who has three prisons in her constituency, talked about the work that she achieved as a former Minister in trying to reduce the amount of violence in prisons. She comprehensively set out some of the failures of this Government. I am sorry if that disappoints Conservative Members but, as I will explain, there has been a failure to tackle some of the big issues facing our prisons.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods), who also has three prisons in her constituency, said that the prisons budget had been cut by a quarter, with £900 million being taken away. That will obviously have an impact on how prisons are run and on their staff. She raised three issues that the Minister should be looking at. First, there are far too many women in prison, especially women with children, and there does not seem to be any clear strategy within the prison system to assist them or to deal with situations such as how children can visit their parents. That is reflected in the Ministry of Justice’s figures on suicides that have occurred in prison, which show that a much higher percentage of women have committed suicide and self-harm. My hon. Friend also talked about reoffending, and the education and training that would prevent it, as well as mental health issues and personality disorders. Funding for those services has been cut, and those things need to be addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) talked about the fact that many experienced staff have left the Prison Service and been replaced by inexperienced staff. It is well accepted that prison officers do far more than simply locking and unlocking the gates and taking prisoners in and out. They are often the only people prisoners will speak to. Prison officers act as mentors, advisers and family members, and they provide a sympathetic listening ear. It is not good enough to have inexperienced people taking over that work. I agree wholeheartedly with what the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) said about the tremendous work that prison officers do. As he said, their terms and conditions should be looked at properly and put on the same footing as those of people who do other difficult and sensitive jobs, such as police officers. Prison officers should be remunerated properly.

Since the Government came into power in 2010, they have made massive cuts to the number of prison officers, and that is a big reason for some of the current prison issues. It is all very well for the Government to say that they are trying to do things; that is good, but they should never have cut the number of prison officers in the first place. If they had not made that false economy, we would not be in half the mess we are in now. I try not to be party political about this, but it was the wrong decision and it would be good if the Government accepted that. There is no harm in owning up to the fact that an error was made.

One suggestion for dealing with some of the prison problems was made by the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Although I more or less agreed with him on international issues when I was a member of the Committee, I have to tell him that privatisation in prisons is not the answer. It has not been the answer for probation. The probation service used to have a four-star gold rating but it has gone downhill since the privatisation, and that has had some impact on the Prison Service.

Crispin Blunt: The Foreign Affairs Committee’s loss is the Opposition Front-Bench team’s gain. Will the hon. Lady be explicit about the potential role of the private sector under Labour policy? Labour had a commercialisation strategy, and Labour opened up the competition for Birmingham prison in the first place. Is it Labour party policy that there is no role for the private sector in the delivery of justice in our country, simply on ideological grounds?

Yasmin Qureshi: The Labour party also introduced IPP sentences, and I was not one of those who favoured that provision. I will touch on its impact on our prison system. The Secretary of State spoke about the fact that the Government are trying to deal with the issues caused by the remittances of the IPP regime. One problem is that people who have served their IPP sentence cannot get out of prison until they have done specific, designated training courses, but unfortunately there has been a lack of funding for those courses. The Government have to take responsibility for the fact that many thousands of people in that position have not been released from prison.

As I have said, this has been a very good and interesting debate. Many experienced people have spoken, including former Ministers and Secretaries of State. I think we can all agree that everyone is concerned about this issue. It is not a big vote winner or an issue that is often spoken about on the doorstep, but it is important because it shows what we stand for as a society. The one thing on which most people agree is that we have got problems, and there is a crisis in our prison system.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), a former Minister, talked about some of the proposals in the White Paper that the Government have brought forward to deal with this issue. He set out all the shortcomings and all the questions that have not been answered. The White Paper seems to suggest that each prison will be run by its governor and then every problem will somehow be resolved. However, it does not provide answers to questions such as whether governors will have complete autonomy from the centre, and whether they will have enough money to be able to
carry out everything they want to do. For example, if a prison governor thinks that 500 inmates require a two-month detoxification and rehabilitation programme, will he or she have the money to carry that out? It is all very well to say that governors can do such things, but where will the funding come from, or will they have an unlimited pot of money? How will people be recruited, and to whom will they be answerable? The White Paper raises a lot of questions that have not been answered, and it does not deal with the problems.

Yasmin Qureshi: If the hon. Lady had been in the Chamber at the beginning of the debate, she would know that that question was asked by another Member; I think it was the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). On the first point, you are the Government—[Interruption]—and it is for you to deal with the crisis of the—[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. The hon. Lady will resume her seat while the Chair is standing. May I just remind her that there is a reason why we do not address people directly in the second person? It is because things can get very heated. The hon. Lady should address her remarks through the Chair.

Yasmin Qureshi: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

They are the Government. They have been in power for the past seven years, and prisons have been under their control. It is under their watch that 6,000 staff have been cut.

Simon Hoare: I will take the hon. Lady’s lead and not be party political, but given the huge crisis that she is outlining to the House—her Front-Bench colleagues clearly share her view—will she explain why, on an Opposition day motion, Labour ran out of speakers and we did not?

Yasmin Qureshi: The hon. Gentleman is trying to deflect attention from what the Government should have been doing for the past seven years.

As I was saying, about a quarter of all prisoners are held in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions. In the past 12 months, there have been 6,000 assaults on staff and 24,000 assaults on prisoners. There were also 105 self-inflicted deaths of prisoners, which is a record increase of 13% on the previous year. The levels of poor mental health and distress among prisoners are higher than those for the general public. The number of incidents of self-harm in prisons has increased by more than 25% in 2016 compared with the previous year. When we look at all the statistics provided by the Ministry of Justice, we can see that the number of incidents of self-harm has gone up and the number of assaults has gone up, and that deaths have occurred and suicides have happened. I am afraid to say that that is the responsibility of this Government because they have been in charge of prisons for the past seven years.
The Opposition made two principal points. The first was about overcrowding. However, we still do not know whether the Opposition agree with themselves, given Lady Chakrabarti’s view that we should reduce prison numbers to the tune of 45,000. Even on the issue of prison officers, when my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) challenged the shadow Secretary of State to commit to increasing prison officer numbers by 2,500, he could not make that commitment. At the end of an Opposition day debate, I am none the wiser about Labour’s solution to a problem it calls a crisis. It called the debate but has been unable to offer a solution.

In the brief time I have to sum up, I will pick up on some of the points made in the debate. The right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) made a very good speech. On leadership, I agree that we want governors to stay put for longer. We also want to ensure that staffing is effective on the wings, and I totally agree that we do not want the 1:60 ratio she mentioned. The former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath, made a characteristically erudite and eloquent speech, and I agree on the need for smarter alternatives to incarceration. One way is to deal with problems before custody. He also mentioned problem-solving courts. That concept, which we are currently trialling, is one I am very hopeful about.

Dr Poulter: I commend the Government for taking action on some important issues. Does the Minister agree that the key to breaking the cycle of reoffending is tackling substance misuse not only in prisons but on discharge and release from prison, but that there is a problem with the fragmentation of substance misuse services in so many areas? I hope he will look at that as part of the excellent work in the White Paper.

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), also a doctor, is dealing with this matter, and we will bring forward proposals later.

The former prisons Minister, the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), whom I always enjoy listening to, given his constructive approach, made several detailed and constructive points about governor empowerment, local recruitment and performance management. The Justice Select Committee has written asking for answers to some of these questions, and I will ensure that it gets a rapid response. In addition, I will offer a meeting to sit down with him and the prisons sub-committee to discuss the details of the White Paper.

On staffing, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State talked eloquently about our plans in the White Paper.

Toby Perkins: In response to my hon. Friend, the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), the Minister was unable to accept any responsibility for what has happened. He is right that staffing is not the only problem, but it is part of the problem. We are down 6,000 prison officers. Will he replace them?

Mr Gyimah: If the hon. Gentleman has been following the debate, he will know that we are down 6,000 prison officers but that we have also closed 18 prisons. As my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) mentioned, in relation to drugs, this is a complex problem. The Government have committed to increasing the number of prison officers; today, the Opposition could not even match that. So I will take no lessons from them on what to do about staffing levels in our prisons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) talked about attacks on prison officers. I completely agree with him. Prisoners who assault staff should feel the full force of the law—indeed, independent adjudicators can already impose additional days on prisoners. We are working with the Attorney General, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure that offenders face swift justice and that we can provide better evidence to courts, and we are working with the judiciary to give them powers to impose consecutive, rather than concurrent, sentences for these crimes. It is in order to help protect prison officers that we are rolling out body-worn cameras across the estate.

The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) mentioned foreign national offenders. As he will have heard at the meeting of the Justice Committee yesterday, a record number of offenders were deported to their own countries last year, but there is still much work to do. A ministerial taskforce made up of Ministers from the MOJ, the Home Office, the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is looking at the levers in our relationships with these countries in order to deport people as quickly as possible.

In a debate called for by the Opposition, we have heard no positive alternative to the plans offered by the Government. I urge all Members to vote for a clear plan that the Government have put forward to deal with the challenging issues in our prisons that would also help us to turn people’s lives around.

Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 196, Noes 289.

Division No. 132] [4 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Caesar, Alexander
Cadbury, Ruth
Cammell, Mr Alan
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Chwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Coyle, Niall
Craig, rh Mary
Creasy, Stella
Craddock, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Danszk, Simon
David, Wayne
De Piero, Gloria
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Elford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffiths, Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howard, rh Mr George
Hugh, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Leigh, Charlie
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marr, Rob
Marsden, Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mulholland, Greg
Nandy, Lisa
Olney, Sarah
Onn, Melanie
Osowah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmine
Rayner, Angela
Reed, rh Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shannon, Jim
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheriff, Paula
 Siddiq, Tulip
Simpson, David
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Cat
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Tulley, Anna
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Watson, Mr Tom
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rhodri
Williams, Mr Mark
Wilson, Sammy
Winnick, Mr David
Woodcock, John
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Sir Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alan
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Cliffon-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jessica Morden and Jeff Smith

NOES
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyly-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evennett, rh David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, rh Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Herbert, rh Nick
The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.

That this House welcomes the Government's comprehensive proposals for major reform of the prison system set out in the White Paper; further welcomes plans for an extra 2,500 prison officers, to professionalise the prison service further and to attract new talent by recruiting prison officer apprentices, graduates and former armed service personnel; notes new security measures being introduced to tackle the illegal use of drones, phones and drugs which are undermining the stability of the prison system; welcomes the commitment to give governors in all prisons more powers and more responsibility to deliver reform whilst holding them to account for the progress prisoners make; and welcomes the Government's proposals to set out for the first time the purpose of prisons in statute.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's proposals for major reform of the prison system set out in the White Paper; further welcomes plans for an extra 2,500 prison officers, to professionalise the prison service further and to attract new talent by recruiting prison officer apprentices, graduates and former armed service personnel; notes new security measures being introduced to tackle the illegal use of drones, phones and drugs which are undermining the stability of the prison system; welcomes the commitment to give governors in all prisons more powers and more responsibility to deliver reform whilst holding them to account for the progress prisoners make; and welcomes the Government's proposals to set out for the first time the purpose of prisons in statute.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I now have to announce the result of the deferred Division on the question relating to financial services. The Ayes were 292 and the Noes were 191, so the question was agreed to.
School Funding

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I inform the House that the Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Before I call the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) to move the motion, I must point out that 36 Members wish to speak in the debate. I ask those on the Front Benches to be as concise as possible, and if Members wishing to speak in the debate make interventions on Front Benchers I am afraid that they will find that their names have mysteriously slipped down the speaking list. I am sorry to say that we are going to start with a limit of three minutes on Back-Bench speeches. If people keep their interventions to an absolute minimum, everyone might get in. Otherwise, the people at the bottom of the list will not be able to speak. With that, let’s get going!

4.16 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House regrets the impact of school funding cuts on the ability of children to reach their full potential; and calls on the Government to ensure that all schools have the funding that they need to provide an excellent education for every child.

I will try to keep interventions to a minimum, Madam Deputy Speaker; I warn hon. Members of that as I start my contribution.

We have heard much this week about respecting the mandate that the British people have given us, so today I am giving Conservative Members the chance to do that, by implementing the pledge that they gave to the country in their election manifesto. It stated:

“Under a future Conservative government, the amount of money following your child into school will be protected. There will be a real terms increase in the schools budget in the next Parliament.”

That pledge was repeated by the last Prime Minister—the one who actually fought an election—and he was very clear about what it meant. He said:

“I can tell you, with a Conservative Government the amount of money following your child into school will not be cut.”

There is one question that the Secretary of State has to answer today: will she keep her party’s promise to the British people?

The National Audit Office has revealed that, under the current spending settlement, there will be “an 8 per cent cut in pupil funding” between 2015 and 2020. That same conclusion was reached by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. That means that schools in every region, every city, every town and, yes, every constituency will lose money because of the failure of this Government to protect funding for our schools.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Rayner: I want to make some progress. Let us consider the context.

“Britain has a deep social mobility problem, and for this generation in particular, it is getting worse not better”—as a result of—

“an unfair education system, a two-tier labour market, an imbalanced economy, and an unaffordable housing market.”

That was the conclusion of the Government’s own Social Mobility Commission. And what about our education system?

“We still have too many underperforming schools and low overall levels of numeracy and literacy. England remains the only OECD country where 16 to 24-year-olds are no more literate or numerate than 55 to 64-year-olds.”

Again, that is not my conclusion, but that of the Government’s own industrial strategy Green Paper, which quite rightly makes it clear just how central education is to our economy, especially following Brexit.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is talking about the broken pledge on increasing funding for schools. Is she aware that 74 out of 77 schools—that is 96% of them—face real-terms cuts of more than £200,000 by 2019? How is that defensible? How is it evidence of a Government who care about education?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend—there is no justification for these cuts.

The Secretary of State has, of course, unveiled the proposed solution, her so-called national fair funding formula, which she presented to her Back Benchers as a kind of reverse distribution. On the Government’s own figures, they are quite literally robbing Peterborough to pay for Poole, but it will not take long for Members on both sides of the House to discover that not only is there nothing fair about the proposed funding formula but that it will not make up for overall real-terms cuts. Concerns about what that means for our constituents are shared on both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) has said that his message to the Minister for School Standards is:

“I don’t get this and I don’t think it’s particularly fair.”

I hope that we will see the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle in the Chamber this afternoon and that he will put his concerns forward. I hope he will speak.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady) has said:

“Every secondary school in Trafford will lose funding, even though it is one of the places famously underfunded for education.”

Perhaps we will hear from him, too. The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who of course co-chairs the f40 group of historically underfunded local education authorities, said just this morning:

“The bottom line is that it’s created some distorted outcomes which we think require some significant remodelling.”

No wonder he is concerned, because nearly half of the f40 group face further cuts, rather than increases, under the Minister’s national funding fiddle.

Of course there is one Government Member who seems quite happy to accept the cuts in her own constituency; the Secretary of State herself. Schools in her own constituency are set to lose some 15% of their funding per pupil. Perhaps she will be lobbying herself.
where that is the case.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): No, it is not.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): The hon. Lady is listing Members who are unhappy. I, like her, am unhappy. All the schools in Southend are receiving a cut under this funding formula, and I think it is the only local authority area outside central London where that is the case.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): No, it is not.

James Duddridge: The figures I have are from the House of Commons Library. I apologise if I have misread them, but that is my reading. Is not the point that this is a consultation? If this were a fait accompli, I would not support the Secretary of State, but this is a consultation.

Angela Rayner: I hope that the hon. Members I mentioned will make contributions today, because the motion before the House makes it clear that our schools are facing a cocktail of cuts that will see 98% of schools lose out in the funding formula. I hope that the Government think again about their proposals.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. In my constituency we are looking at cuts of £437 per pupil between 2015 and 2019. With the Government saying that they believe in and want to support social mobility, and with a third of our children across the country not achieving even five good GCSEs, does she agree that this is absolutely the wrong time to be cutting school funding for the pupils who most need it and that it is an own goal when it comes to thinking about our future shared prosperity?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I would go so far as to say that the meritocracy that the Prime Minister talks about is already in tatters.

The National Audit Office has said that the Secretary of State expects schools to make £1.7 billion of savings by “using staff more efficiently.” Can she guarantee today that those so-called efficiencies do not mean fewer staff? A £1.7 billion cut could mean up to 10,000 redundancies for teaching staff in our schools. She has not yet failed to give us figures on the impact of the planned cut, but her own analysis of the research conducted by the education unions shows that, for example, the cuts in my region—the north-west—would amount to well over £400 million, requiring the loss of more than 2,000 teachers. Given that the Government have failed to meet their own teacher recruitment targets for the past five years in a row, I urge her to think again before she tries to solve school budget crises on the back of hard-working staff.

Make no mistake, this is a crisis. Indeed, schools are already resorting to staff cuts in order to cope. A Unison staff survey conducted last year showed that, even then, more than one in 10 respondents were reporting redundancies in the past year and in the coming year. More than one in five said that their school had left vacant posts unfilled over the past year or had cut maintenance. Nearly a quarter had seen increased class sizes, and over a quarter had experienced cuts to budgets for books and resources over the past year.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I am sorry that she does not agree with fair funding. How can she possibly justify a child in the constituencies of the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Home Secretary receiving, on average, £6,229 a year and £6,680 a year respectively while a child in my West Sussex constituency, which has deprived wards, will receive less than £4,200?

Angela Rayner: The Labour party is for fair funding, but this is not fair funding; this is unfair funding for every school in our nation. The hon. Gentleman should take heed of what that might mean for his constituency. Pulling people down is not the way forward. If we want to make the best of our economy post-Brexit, we must ensure that we invest in all our schools, not take from one school, robbing one group of young people, to give to another, leading to an overall cut in distribution.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Rayner: I have given way once, so I am going to make some progress.

It was no surprise when the National Audit Office found that the number of maintained secondary schools in deficit rose from 33% to nearly 60% between 2010 and 2015. Its report refers to a sample of schools that said that typical savings came through increased class sizes, reduced teacher contact time, replacing experienced teachers with new recruits, recruiting staff on temporary contracts, encouraging staff to teach outside their specialism, and relying more on unqualified staff, none of which are measures that parents would want to see at their school. The NAO tells us that the Department’s savings estimates do not even take account of the real impact on schools. For example, the Government seem to remain committed to cutting the national education services grant, which amounts to £600 million, but they have not yet completed any assessment of how that will impact on schools across England. When will that assessment be put to the House?

Just this Monday, the Public Accounts Committee heard from headteachers who are desperate trying to keep providing an excellent education in the face of funding cuts. I hope that the Secretary of State heard the contribution of Kate Davies, headteacher of Darton College in Barnsley, for example. She said that as a result of funding cuts she had had to “reduce the curriculum offer and cut out the whole of the community team. We have reduced staffing and reduced the leadership team.”

I am sure the Secretary of State heard Tim Gartside, headteacher of Altrincham Grammar School for Boys, say only this morning that the funding cuts that his school faces are so severe that he only has three options left: reduce the curriculum, increase class sizes, or ask parents to make a cash contribution to keep the school running. What is the Secretary of State’s plan? Does she want schools to cut subjects, increase class sizes, or make parents foot the bill? Is she not worried that routinely requesting termly cash donations from parents risks discriminating against low-income families and schools in lower-income areas? We have heard similar from not only the representatives of teachers, but unions that represent teaching assistants, such as Unison and the GMB. If she thinks assistants are a soft target for cuts, she is much mistaken.

Evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation shows that teaching assistants have a particularly important impact on the literacy and numeracy of pupils on free
school meals and on those who were previously struggling—the very pupils that the Government said only earlier this week needed extra support if we are to increase skills and productivity. Teaching assistant pay has declined so far since the Government abolished the school staff negotiating body that many are now on the minimum wage. There are literally no more cuts to make to pay. Any further cuts will hit teaching staff directly.

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that the reason the debate has been oversubscribed is that many hon. Members from both sides of the House have realised that the national funding formula and the cuts faced by our schools are taking them over the edge and building a crisis in our school system.

The Conservative party’s promise was not to spend more on schools; it was to spend more on each pupil, in real terms. Yet the Government will cut per-pupil spending. Under Labour Governments, education spending increased by 5% a year. The fact of the matter is quite simple: the Secretary of State and her party entered government on a manifesto that pledged to protect per-pupil funding. That promise is being broken.

Angela Rayner: I have in my constituency a big secondary school that gets the pupil premium for 67% of its kids, and it believes that it will lose £300,000. Does my hon. Friend believe that that lives up to the Prime Minister’s rhetoric?

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I have noticed over the past two years that the Opposition seem to have an awful lot of money to spend, and the hon. Lady is obviously suggesting spending more. Does she accept the analysis performed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies of the Labour and Conservative manifestos, which effectively said that the two parties’ commitments to investment in education came to exactly the same figure?

Justine Greening: The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add: “shares the strong commitment of the Government to raising school standards and building a country that works for everyone; and welcomes proposals set out in the Government’s open schools national funding formula stage two consultation to move to a fair and consistent national funding formula for schools to ensure every child is fairly funded, wherever in England they live, to protect funding for deprived pupils and recognise the particular needs of pupils with low prior attainment.”

Members on both sides of the House can agree that we want to deliver a world-class education system that gives every young person the chance to make the most of their talents, no matter what their background or where they come from. Indeed, the true value of an excellent education is that it can open up opportunity and support young people to reach their true potential. For me, education was certainly the route to my having a much better life than my parents had.

We are keeping our promises and our record in government speaks for itself. We now see 1.8 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010. We are keeping our promise by protecting the core schools budget in real terms over this Parliament. The shadow Secretary of State talked about what parents want in schools, but what they do not want in schools is what the previous Labour Government left them with: children leaving school without the literacy, numeracy and qualifications they need; and children leaving school thinking that they had strong grades when in fact what they were seeing was grade inflation. We have steadily sought to change that and to improve our education system. Many young people now leave our education system in a much better place to achieve success in their future life.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): The right hon. Lady will be aware that the Public Accounts Committee, of which I am a member, heard from the permanent secretary, Jonathan Slater, on Monday in our session on the National Audit Office report to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) referred. That report does acknowledge what the Secretary of State says about a real-terms increase in the overall budget, but because there are more pupils than was envisaged, there will be an 8% reduction in per-pupil funding. Does she agree with the NAO report and the acknowledgment of her permanent secretary to that effect?

Justine Greening: The NAO report makes it very clear that there are cost pressures, which I shall talk about later on in my speech. It also makes it clear that there is significant scope for efficiency in our school system. Although we are raising standards in many schools—nearly nine out of 10 schools are now rated as good or outstanding—many young people are still not achieving the necessary standard in our education system.
John Redwood: I welcome my right hon. Friend’s decision on fairer funding. Does she agree that schools in areas such as mine that were at the bottom of the pile under the previous Government’s formula need quite a step up over the next few years because they were very badly done by?

Justine Greening: I do agree. We want every child to have the same chance to do as well as possible no matter where they grow up in our country or, indeed, where they start from academically. That is why we must ensure that the resources going into the system reflect our high ambitions for every child wherever they grow up, and that they are distributed to that effect. It is because of this Government’s economic policy, which has seen jobs, growth and the careful management of public finances, that we have been able to protect the core schools budget in real terms over the course of this Parliament. In fact, our core schools investment is the largest on record.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): David Cameron promised that the funding per pupil would be protected but, as we have heard, that is not happening. In my constituency, funding per pupil is being reduced further as a result of the formula. Why is David Cameron’s promise being broken?

Justine Greening: It is not. We are protecting funding per pupil as well. On apportioning funding fairly between schools, we know that it is time to look at the school funding formula to ensure that we rectify the current unfair and outdated system, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) set out. At the moment, funding is not distributed evenly across our country and does not take account of pupil needs. For example, a school in Sutton receives £75 in extra funding for each pupil with English as a second language, but in Tower Hamlets that figure is £3,548. We know that a primary school pupil who is eligible for free school meals and who has English as an additional language attracts £4,219 in East Sussex, but just down the road in Brighton and Hove, that same child would attract £5,813 for their school. We know that a secondary class of 30 children with no additional needs attracts £112,100 of funding in Staffordshire, but £122,500 of funding in Stoke-on-Trent. That is a difference of £10,400 for one class.

We know that parents and families see that unfairness playing out for their children, and it is simply untenable to say that these historical imbalances and differences in how we fund our children across the country are something that we should accept. No parent should have to put up with such disparity. I hear the shadow Secretary of State say that she does not like our proposed funding formula, but it is subject to consultation. I have actually extended the consultation period from 12 weeks, which was the longest period ever for such a consultation, to 14 weeks, because this is complicated. It is important that we have a measured, proportionate debate around the right way to proceed with the funding formula. What is absent from Opposition Members’ speeches is any suggestion of a better way of doing things. When the shadow Minister wraps up the debate, I will be interested to hear whether Labour has any alternative to the national funding formula—or any other education policy for that matter. We are right to be taking action.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Small primary schools in my constituency very much welcome the fact that sparsity has been taken into account. They think that they have a Government who understand the needs of the countryside.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The formula recognises that different schools face different costs, particularly in rural areas, so the sparsity factor recognises that rural schools often have a higher cost base. That sits alongside a lump-sum element that is built into the formula to make sure that schools have the money that they need to be able to function effectively. Colleagues in rural seats will recognise that small rural schools have gained an average of 1.3% under the formula. Primary schools in sparse communities will gain 5.3% on average.

Clive Efford: There was a manifesto commitment to increase school spending per capita, but secondary schools in Greenwich face the prospect of having to make on average £1 million savings between now and 2019, with primary schools saving more than £200,000 each. Some 74 out of 77 schools face those cuts. Is that consistent with what the Conservative party told parents in my borough before the election?

Justine Greening: We said that we would protect the core schools budget in real terms, and that is exactly what we are doing. In relation to the hon. Gentleman’s local community, the change in the funding formula partly reflects the fact that, for a long time, we have used deprivation data that are simply out of date. It is important that we use up-to-date deprivation factors. For example, in 2005, 28% of children in London were on free school meals. That percentage has now fallen to 17%. It is right that we make sure that we have consistent investment for children from deprived communities, because that is where the attainment gap has opened up. It is also important that funding is spread fairly using up-to-date information.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): When I was a schoolteacher under the Thatcher Government, I remember my school running out of paper in about February. A colleague and I had to go into the attic of the library and tear pages out of books from the 1970s so that our children could write on them. I remember wondering how we could expect children to write in those circumstances. Is the Secretary of State proud of that record, and what does she think that the scale of these cuts will do to staff morale in schools up and down the country?

Justine Greening: I was actually at school during that time period, and I felt that Oakwood comprehensive gave me a great start in life that set me up to be able, hopefully, to make a meaningful contribution to both the economy and my local community.

We are introducing the national funding formula. I accept that it is complex and challenging, and there is a reason why such a thing has not been done for a long time: it is difficult to ensure that we get it just right. That is why we are having a longer consultation. We have provided all the details so that colleagues can see how their local communities will be affected, and then respond.
Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): In my constituency, which already has one of the lowest-funded education authorities, two thirds of schools will receive a cut and a third will receive a maximum increase of 0.3%. That situation will undoubtedly lead to teacher losses and probably school closures. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to look at the situation? This might be only a consultation, but the proposal needs a radical overhaul.

Justine Greening: I recognise my hon. Friend’s concerns. I am happy to talk to him one to one about his local community, as I have done with other colleagues. We are undertaking the consultation so that we can ensure that we get the new formula right. It is important that the formula works effectively on the ground. Alongside it, we will make sure that we protect the funding for deprived communities so that we can use that mechanism to tackle the attainment gap. We have also made sure that an element of our formula follows children who start from further behind, for whatever reason. Low prior attainment is properly addressed in the formula to make sure that if a child needs additional investment to help them to catch up, wherever they are in the country, that investment is there.

The second stage of the consultation on the funding formula runs until 22 March. We want to hear from as many school governors, schools, local authorities and parents as possible. I know that colleagues on both sides of the House will also want to contribute. As I said, we have put a lot of data alongside the consultation because we want to ensure that people have the information that they need to be able to respond. The transparency that the new formula will give us also means that we will have much more informed debates in this House about how we want to fund our schools, and the relative balance we want between core funding, deprivation funding and how prior attainment funding, as well as issues such as sparsity.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I strongly support my right hon. Friend in seeking to achieve fair funding, which is absolutely the right thing to do. However, there will be little help for secondary schools in my constituency, and the primary schools will actually lose out. How can that be right, given that we have reduced, they are still comparatively high—will still receive, on average, 30% more. My hon. Friend will of course want to speak up on behalf of her community. This is about ensuring that we fund the right amount by using current data on deprivation, rather than data that are five or 10 years old.

We believe that the Department can work with schools to help them to make the best use of their resources. I want every single pound that we put into our schools system to be used efficiently to improve standards and have the maximum impact for pupils. We know that we can work with schools to ensure that they can use this record funding to make the maximum impact. Indeed, I would point to the situation in York. It has been one of the lowest-funded authorities in the country, yet 92% of its schools are good or outstanding. We therefore know that we can make progress in education while making efficiencies.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I very much support what the Secretary of State is trying to do, since Wiltshire is one of the worst-funded shires. As the National Audit Office report sets out, we believe that efficiencies can be made.

Victoria Borwick (Kensington) (Con): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way; I appreciate that this is a very busy debate. I want to speak up briefly for London. I need an assurance from her—I am sure that she has touched on this—because of the negative effect that the reform of the funding formula may have on schools in London, some of which face intolerable pressures.

Justine Greening: Under the proposed formula on which we are consulting, London schools, purely because of the underlying cost pressures of running schools in London and the deprivation levels in their areas—although they have reduced, they are still comparatively high—will still receive, on average, 30% more. My hon. Friend will of course want to speak up on behalf of her community. This is about ensuring that we fund the right amount by using current data on deprivation, rather than data that are five or 10 years old.

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Justine Greening: I will make a little more progress because I know that many Members want to have their say on behalf of their local communities.

I want to move on to the broader cost pressures that schools are facing. Many of those pressures actually come from steps that we have taken, for example by introducing the apprenticeship levy. That levy will benefit millions of young people in the coming years, but it will also benefit schools through the training and development of existing staff. We have also introduced the national living wage, which benefits low-paid workers in schools and other organisations, and that was the right thing to do.

My Department has a role to play in supporting schools across the country to drive greater efficiencies. We have analysed the cost bases of different schools that operate in similar circumstances. As the National Audit Office report sets out, we believe that efficiencies can be made.

Justine Greening: I am happy to talk to him one to one about his local community, as I have done with other colleagues. We are undertaking the consultation so that we can ensure that we get the new formula right. It is important that the formula works effectively on the ground. Alongside it, we will make sure that we protect the funding for deprived communities so that we can use that mechanism to tackle the attainment gap. We have also made sure that an element of our formula follows children who start from further behind, for whatever reason. Low prior attainment is properly addressed in the formula to make sure that if a child needs additional investment to help them to catch up, wherever they are in the country, that investment is there.

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Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I very much support what the Secretary of State is trying to do, since Wiltshire is one of the worst-funded education authorities in the country. However, will she look again at the sparsity factor, because school governors are currently crunching the figures, and some of them are saying that they worry about the viability of small schools in rural locations being undermined, which clearly will not be the intention of the Secretary of State?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, we looked at the formula to ensure that we did introduce a sparsity factor. Not all local authorities actually had a sparsity factor in their local formula, but we are now making sure that it is there for every single school. We have also introduced the lump-sum formula.

We got to the stage in developing the formula where the only way we could continue to improve it was to ask people what they thought about it, which is why the consultation is so important. It is important that we get
the formula right, but I recognise that this complicated formula has to work for schools around the country that are in very different situations, which is why the debate is so important. Following the phase 1 consultation, it is right that we steadily take the time to hold a phase 2 consultation to help us to finalise a formula that can work and have real longevity.

We will work with schools to help them to improve their efficiency. We have already published a school buying strategy that sees us launching an efficiency website. We are putting in place national deals to help to ensure that schools get the best deals on things such as utilities. We are putting in place buying and digital hubs so that strong procurement teams are close to schools to give them advice when they need it. We are also setting up school business manager networks so that we work with the people who are driving efficiencies in schools to share best practice and improve performance. Over time, I believe that we really can take some steps forward on that.

We are making sure that record funding is going into our schools, we are making sure that our curriculum is stronger than ever before, and we are actually turning out young people with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful. That is not the only part of our education policy; we are also investing in apprenticeships and radically reforming technical education. We are going to make sure that this Government end up being able to say that every young person, wherever they grow up, is able to do their best and reach their full potential. I hope that, over the course of the debate, colleagues up, is able to do their best and reach their full potential.

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Alison McGovern: My right hon. Friend is making a unique and important point about places like Slough. Does she agree that this shows that the Government are yet to properly listen?

Fiona Mactaggart: Indeed. There is a hint in the new funding formula that they might do something about this, but no clarity about what. This is absolutely urgent, because the per-pupil comparisons between different authorities are not accurate. Places like Slough and London that have historically been quite well funded and are facing the largest cuts are the places with the largest numbers of pupils who are not being paid for at all.

The Minister for School Standards knows about the massive problems we face in teacher recruitment. Over the past five months, five geography teacher posts in Slough have been advertised, with not one single applicant. The Migration Advisory Committee will not make the teaching of English, where we have a real shortage, a job that can be applied for by teachers overseas. We are in a crisis, and the Department is not responding to the real needs of the community that I have the privilege to represent. I really want answers on this now.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I am sure that, in her characterisation of different education authorities, the Secretary of State would say that Slough is unfairly generously funded, but I want to speak about the hundreds of pupils in Slough who get no funding at all for their education. You might think, “How can that be?” but this is a very serious issue, which is not properly addressed by the Secretary of State’s proposed fair funding formula.

There is swift growth in areas such as Slough. For years, we have been in the top 10 authorities for growth in pupil numbers, and we do not get paid until 18 months later for extra children who arrive after the October census date. Locally, that is dealt with by taking a top slice of the dedicated schools grant of £1 million or £1.5 million to fund bulge classes in existing schools.

Obviously, other authorities face churn and growth in pupil numbers, but in most places the number of additional pupils is not particularly significant, and new arrivals after October tend to be balanced by departures. Also, most of the extra children are born in families who are already there, so they apply at the usual time for schools.

That does not happen in Slough. When I asked schools about the numbers, the results were stark. One primary school had 13 children leave, but it had 23 new starters: one was completely new to English, others had English as a second language, and two more from overseas start next week. One secondary school estimates that the pupil formula for the 13 extra pupils who arrived after the census date in 2015-16 would have been worth £49,937; in the current year, the figure is £39,595. Those figures have gone down partly because the school has been subject to the minimum income formula, which I call the maximum cut formula, because that is the case for the secondary schools in Slough.

A primary school that opened two extra classes in November 2015 to accommodate children new to the town now has 63 pupils above its standard number. The bulge classes are funded by the top-slicing of the dedicated schools grant, but that money only lasts for a year, and the extra pupils will not be funded by the DfE until next year, so this year two whole classes are being educated in one primary school with no capitation funding. We are not talking about children who are easy to teach, and there are the children who arrive from—

Alison McGovern: The very fact that
third area is recalibrating the 3% floor, which could give authorities that have had historical problems with underfunding some way out of that.

I know those three ideas are complicated in the context of these reforms, but we need to demonstrate that we really are committed to providing fair funding. If we think carefully about the impact of the various measures I have outlined, in conjunction with the wider question of the objectives of the new funding system, we may well deliver for our children exactly what we want.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Neil Carmichael: No, I am not going to give way, because too many people wish to contribute.

In an ideal world, we would want to spend more on education. When the Government continue to grow the economy, as I am sure they will, with or without Brexit, that will be achieved. But we have to be realistic about the size of the cake and make sure that everybody has an appropriate slice.

4.59 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The Department has produced a school-by-school analysis of the impact of the proposed funding formula. For schools in Liverpool, the results are worrying: 80% are forecast to lose funding, and we are set to lose around £1.3 million from the schools block in the first year, 2018-19. When the formula is fully implemented, unless it changes, that will increase to slightly more than £3 million. I know that consultation is still under way, so it is very important that schools in my constituency know what is happening as soon as possible so that they can plan their budgets.

I welcome the fact that the Liverpool settlement will mean more money for high-needs funding. There is, however, concern from the council and schools that that high-needs funding will not be available in time to alleviate the cuts in the schools block. What timescale do the Government envisage for full implementation of the new formula, particularly the high-needs funding element?

As we know, early years education is vital to pupils’ life chances. I have two nursery schools in my constituency, Ellergreen and East Prescott Road, both of which have been rated outstanding by Ofsted. Both are very concerned about the Government’s plans for nursery school funding. I seek assurances from the Minister that long-term funding for our nursery schools will be secure, so that they can continue their excellent work of providing quality early years education.

When I saw the motion for this debate, I wrote to the heads of schools in my constituency, asking them for their concerns. Blackmoor Park Infant School in West Derby told me about its need for repairs. It is using four mobile classrooms, which are three years beyond their shelf life. The headteacher told me that the school does not have enough money to replace them, because of the financial pressures that it faces.
Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Twigg: No, I am running out of time.

I urge the Minister to listen to the concerns of schools in Liverpool and elsewhere, so that school budgets are protected. It is vital that schools have the money they need to deliver the quality education that children and young people deserve.

5.5 pm

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Last week, I was fortunate enough to secure a debate in Westminster Hall on the funding for schools in Devon, and it was well supported by my colleagues from across the county. In that debate, several of us—including my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), who cannot be in his place this afternoon—made it clear that unless there were some changes, we would find it extremely difficult to support the Government.

It was therefore with some interest that I was made aware of this debate, and I thought it would be an occasion—in my case, a very rare one—when I would not be able to support the Government. However, I have studied the motion and the amendment carefully, and having heard the opening remarks of the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), I have to say that the Whips can relax, because I am now more convinced than ever that I will be able to support the Government amendment.

I know that the hon. Lady was not in this place during Labour’s rule, but I would say gently to her that had she not been asleep under a tree like Ferdinand the Bull, she might have noticed that during the period from 1997 to 2010 a Labour Government exacerbated the educational funding gap between rural and urban schools. During Labour’s rule, but I would say gently to her that had she not been asleep under a tree like Ferdinand the Bull, she might have noticed that during the period from 1997 to 2010 a Labour Government exacerbated the educational funding gap between rural and urban areas. In that debate, several of us—including my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), who cannot be in his place this afternoon—made it clear that unless there were some changes, we would find it extremely difficult to support the Government.

5.8 pm

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): After seven years of Lib Dem and Tory Government cuts to my community, the Government have failed to meet their deficit reduction target and they are back doing all that they know how to do, which is to make further cuts, this time targeting children in my constituency. I do not believe children should suffer for the Government’s failure. Southwark schools perform above the national average, but they face specific challenges, including increasing class sizes as a result of our growing population. I was therefore surprised to find my borough targeted with £5 million in cuts by this Government.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend accept that that will add to the recruitment crisis within the teaching body?

Neil Coyle: Absolutely, especially in London.

My constituency is even more badly affected than the borough of Southwark. On the Department’s statistics, my schools will lose £1,050 per child per year. They are the worst affected schools anywhere in the country, but the Government have claimed that this is fair. There are 35 schools in my constituency, of which the ones losing out are Alfred Salter, Globe Academy, Walworth Academy, Bacon’s College, Boucher, Charlotte Sharman, City of London Academy, Cobourg, Compass, Crampton, English Martyrs, Friars, Harris Academy, Notre Dame, Peter Hills, Redriff, Riverside, Robert Browning, all three St Joseph’s, Snowfields, Southwark Park, St George’s, St John’s Catholic, St Jude’s, St Michael’s, St John’s Walworth, St Paul’s, St Saviour’s and St Olave’s, Cathedral, Surrey Square, Tower Bridge, Townsend and Victory. If anyone was keeping a tally, they will know that that was a list of 35 schools. Every single school in my constituency will lose out, and not one school will benefit, under the Government’s proposals.

Stephen Timms: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the proposal of the Chair of the Education Committee to remove the 3% protection were implemented, the position for schools in his constituency and many others would be a great deal worse?

Neil Coyle: I completely agree.

The cuts proposed by the Government have led parents to get in touch with me to say, “What is it about Southwark children this Government do not like?” Why is my constituency being targeted for cuts? These cuts will impede the progress that schools have made, prevent them from managing the challenges they face and damage the prospects of the children and families I serve, but whom this Government are failing.

Of course, the Department’s figures do not include costs that schools cannot ignore: pension contributions, the apprenticeship levy and higher national insurance contributions. The National Audit Office figures suggest that the borough of Southwark will lose £12.5 million by 2018-19 and that schools in my constituency alone will lose £6.9 million.
[Neil Coyle]

If Ministers push forward with these plans, they will fail schools, fail teachers and fail families and children, and the Secretary of State will undermine parents’ aspirations for their children, undermine future opportunities for Southwark children and undermine the prospects for this country overall. The Government must rethink this blatant attack on opportunity and stand by their manifesto commitment.

5.11 pm

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I welcome the consultation and the review because my constituency will see an increase of 2.6% or £1.3 million. Forty two of my 54 schools will see an increase, which is 77% of them. Some of the increases are significant. New York Primary School will see an increase of 11.4%. North Cockerington Church of England Primary School will see an increase of 10.2%. The theme that runs through the increases is that these schools were historically underfunded by the Labour Government. This Government recognise the challenges that rurality and sparsity present for local schools.

Rebecca Pow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Victoria Atkins: I will not, thank you.

Louth and Horncastle is an extremely rural constituency, with less than one person per hectare. Some of the wards on the coast are among the 3% most deprived communities in the country. They deserve a better funding deal and that is what the Government are trying to achieve. This is not about the Tory shires as some, whereas in Lincolnshire the figure is £4,379 per student, and the Secretary of State will undermine parents’ aspirations for their children, undermine future opportunities for Southwark children and undermine the prospects for this country overall. The Government must rethink this blatant attack on opportunity and stand by their manifesto commitment.

I will make one final point because I am conscious of time. I also apologise to colleagues from whom I have not accepted interventions. May I thank the teachers, the governors and the staff of my 54 local schools? I look forward to meeting all of them before the general election. That is my promise and I will try to keep it. I love it when they come to the House of Commons because, if nothing else, bringing our schools into this place to show them how democracy works is how we get young people interested in our democracy.

5.14 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Schools already face real-terms cuts to their budgets, and now, for every single one of the 26 schools in my constituency, the new national funding formula represents a further blow of the axe. For every pupil in the city of Nottingham, funding is being cut by an average of £650, while more affluent areas are expected to gain. This is not just bad for children in Nottingham; it is bad for our country and our society. According to Ofsted’s latest annual report, there are now twice as many inadequate secondary schools in the midlands and the north as in the south and the east. Sir Michael Wilshaw has rightly warned: “Regions that are already less prosperous...are in danger of adding a learning deficit to their economic one.”

I support the principle of fair funding, but that cannot be at the expense of children in cities such as Nottingham, where there are high levels of need and poverty and where we already face the challenge of closing the gap in educational outcomes between children from poorer homes and those in wealthier ones.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Will the hon. Lady confirm that Nottingham schools have failed for decades under Labour-run councils?

Lilian Greenwood: Secondary schools in my constituency are not the responsibility of Nottingham City Council; they are academies, and sadly some of them are still not improving. We already face intense funding pressures. The Institute for Fiscal Studies tells us that all schools face an 8% real-terms cut to their budgets as a result of higher national insurance contributions, increases in employer pension contributions and unfunded national pay rises. The National Audit Office has provided evidence of growing financial pressures, particularly in secondary schools: 59% of maintained schools and 61% of academies were in deficit last year.

The NAO also concluded that the Department’s approach meant that schools “could make spending choices that put educational outcomes at risk.”

Local headteachers have told me what that will mean: fewer teachers, less pastoral support, bigger classes, more contact time for teachers, less choice at key stages 4 and 5. The added enrichment—the breakfast clubs, the school trips, the reading sessions for parents, the extracurricular sports, culture and arts activities—will be the first to go, yet these are the very things that can make all the difference to children growing up in poverty.

Rebecca Pow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lilian Greenwood: I am afraid not.
I know that Nottingham has schools that need to do better, but it is some of these very schools that are losing out under the Government’s new national funding formula. Learning is not a matter of chance. The quality of school leadership and teaching is critical, yet there is a national headteacher shortage and a teacher recruitment crisis. As the Social Market Foundation found, schools in deprived areas are more likely to have fewer experienced teachers, teachers without formal teaching qualifications or degrees in relevant subjects—\[\text{Interruption.} \] I cannot hear what the Secretary of State is chuntering about—and a higher teacher turnover than schools elsewhere.

These latest funding changes will make school improvement harder not easier. The Secretary of State and Minister say they want more good and outstanding schools. It is a noble ambition. It is what I want for every child in my constituency, and I am proud of the work that Nottingham’s educational improvement board is doing to try to make it a reality, but creating more good schools requires more than ambition; actions speak louder than words, and right now actions must mean adequate funding.

5.18 pm  
**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a great pleasure to have caught your eye so early in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to speak in favour of the amendment and against the motion.

The motion is wrong in fact—this is a novel point, so it is great to make it now—because it refers to “school funding cuts”. That is wrong as a matter of fact. This year alone, the Government are spending more than £40 billion on schools up and down this land, which is more than any other Government. There was a time when Labour was in favour of fairer funding. As recently as March 2010, the then Labour Government were looking at a national funding formula, but as ever it has taken a Conservative Government to grasp the nettle.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that when Labour tried to introduce the funding formula, most of the per capita spending, which was £4,000, came from private finance initiatives?

**Michael Tomlinson**: I am very grateful for that. I agree entirely with my hon. 
Friend is saying. Similarly, in Wiltshire, we have seen a 2.6% increase, but the two grammar schools are the two worst affected in the country, while Deane by 4.5%. This will make it fair, when historically things have been grossly unfair.

**Michael Tomlinson**: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, who is right to highlight the unfairness. If there were a rhyme or reason or an explanation, and if it had been done on the basis of an index of deprivation, I could support it, but it is not. It is based on historical anomalies. That is why I wholeheartedly support the principle of fairer funding.

I want to make two points about the detail of the fairer funding. First, the schools that are right down at the bottom, in local authorities such as Poole and Dorset, should not, I suggest, see any reduction in funding. When I respond to the consultation, which I very much look forward to doing, I will make that point to the Minister.

My second point relates to grammar schools. I warmly welcome what the Government are doing in their move towards grammar schools, giving our parents a greater choice. We know that this is popular and that parents want to make the choice that is best for them and their children. I welcome the Government’s direction of travel, but it does seem odd that 103 out of 163 grammar schools appear to be losing out under this formula.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I echo all that my hon. Friend is saying. Similarly, in Wiltshire, we have seen a 2.6% increase, but the two grammar schools are the two out of the 10 schools in the constituency that are suffering, so this needs some further examination.

**Michael Tomlinson**: I am grateful for that. I see the Minister for School Standards in his place and I know that he is listening carefully. I suggest that a delegation of Members of Parliament should go to see him—I know that, of all things, that will gladden his heart. He has been very receptive in the past, so I hope that he will be again in the future. That is why I support not only the principle of fairer funding, but the fact that we have a chance at the second stage of the consultation running all the way up to 22 March. I see the Minister nodding, so I shall take it as an open invitation to come and knock on his door, with a delegation from the cathedral city of Salisbury and from Mid Dorset and North Poole. I greatly look forward to that meeting. The principle is right; let us now get the detail right.

5.23 pm  
**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I make no apology for talking about schools in my constituency, which is the eighth worst affected in the country, while the neighbouring constituency, Chelsea and Fulham, which makes up the rest of the borough, is the seventh worst affected. All 48 schools will lose significant sums, and the borough loses £2.8 million. According to the excellent work done by the National Union of Teachers and the other teaching unions, that represents £796 per pupil per year, or 15%.
When I look at where the money is going from, I find it particularly objectionable. Wormholt Park is the highest-losing primary school with £65,000 gone; while Burlington Danes Academy is the highest-losing secondary school. Both are excellent schools with excellent staff, but they are in two of the most deprived wards not just in my constituency and London but in the country: College Park and Old Oak, and Wormholt and White City. What do we expect? What sort of message does this send out to the pupils, parents and teachers of those schools, who are working hard to try to ensure that the excellent standard of education continues against the odds?

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Westminster’s is a mixed story, but a number of schools, including those that are among the 3% most deprived in the country, stand to lose substantially. Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the fact that the Government are finding resources for a number of free schools that have been unable to fill places? When the Government talk about efficiency, could they not question the efficiency of that?

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend is right. It constitutes a triumph of ideology over practicality.

Let me quote what has been said by two of the people in my borough who know what they are talking about. The head of the borough’s schools forum, who is also the principal of one of our excellent local secondary schools, has said:

“If schools’ budgets are cut, at a time when costs are increasingly significantly, it can only have a negative effect on the education that we are able to deliver.

We will not be able to employ the number of high quality teachers and leaders that we need to be able to maintain standards.”

The council cabinet member responsible for these matters has said:

“It’s clear that the government is trying to redistribute a pot of funding that is just too small. Cutting funding hardest in London, rather than giving all schools the money they need for teachers, buildings and equipment, is divisive and just plain wrong.”

That is absolutely right. According to the National Audit Office, there are extra cost pressures amounting to £2 billion across the country, but London is far and away the worst affected region. It contains eight of the 10 biggest losers in the country, which are in most boroughs and most constituencies—although not in every one: I know that the constituency of the Minister for London is the 12th biggest gainer. I find that particularly objectionable because London is a success story, and the triumphalism that we have seen on the Conservative Benches extremely objectionable.

Early one morning last year, my neighbour knocked on my door. When I said, “I have got to go to work”—if you call this work—she said, “This is more important. Will you come round to my children’s school? We are having a meeting about the funding formula.” So I went to the Good Shepherd primary school, which is in the street next to the one in which I live, and listened to parents and teachers who were both very well informed and very concerned. The same is true of schools throughout my constituency. Real people are having to address real problems, and I am afraid that the Secretary of State’s contribution today showed an extraordinary degree of complacency. She knows the problems in our schools, because she is a good constituency Member, and she must address them. This cannot be a levelling down. It cannot be robbing Peter to pay Paul. We must be fair to everyone.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Education has the power to change lives. As the motion recognises, it helps children to fulfil their potential. Like many Members of Parliament, I have campaigned to ensure that my constituency gets its share of funding through a new, fairer funding formula, because it has been historically underfunded. I want to see a formula with a significant element allocated to core funding, to ensure that every school has the funds it needs. Funding for good education is not only important, but necessary.

I want to focus, for a moment, on the implicit suggestion in the motion that it is the Government’s funding decisions that are inhibiting children from reaching their full potential. Funding on its own is insufficient to ensure excellence. Let me give two examples. The first relates to early years. In its 2016 report, Ofsted emphasised the success of our early years education. When it came to recommendations, it said not that more money was needed but that parents needed to take up the education opportunities that were already being offered. It reported that 113,000 children who would have benefited from early years were simply not taking up Government-funded places.

Rebecca Pow: My hon. Friend is making a very valid point about early years. Does she agree that this is not just about a new fairer funding formula? This Government are putting much money into education, particularly for the new 30 hours of free childcare. Neroche pre-school in my constituency is having a brand-new building built on the back of that money and it is only too grateful to the Government.

Lucy Frazer: My hon. Friend makes an important point: it is not just about fairer funding. I am very pleased that my area of East Cambridgeshire was one of the 12 opportunity areas announced last week to get significantly more money—£72 million in total. So this is not just about fairer funding money coming in.
I mentioned that there were two examples, and I want to move on to the second. On secondary education, in the same report Ofsted mentioned that secondary schools in the north and midlands were weaker than those in other areas of the country. It remarked that “lower performance across these regions cannot be fully accounted for by poverty or by differences in school funding.”

The Ofsted report also stated that leaders and teachers had not set sufficiently high expectations for the behaviour of their pupils, which leads me on to my key point. To raise standards and to allow children to achieve their aspirations, we need to do so much more than provide adequate funding. We need to champion teaching as a vocation. We need to inspire more outstanding teachers to teach. We need to give teachers the respect and autonomy they deserve. We need to support our students in the classroom to enable them to deal with life’s challenges, from helping them with mental health issues to building up their resilience and aspiration. We need to work with industry to identify local skills shortages and to raise standards in our technical education. These go hand in hand with funding, and all these measures have been championed by this Government, whether in the industrial strategy Green Paper announced this week, the Prime Minister’s statement on mental health earlier this month, or the “Educational excellence everywhere” White Paper last year.

Education is a building-block for the future. Good funding is essential, but we need to work together across all Departments to ensure that our children fulfil their potential.

5.32 pm

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): As a former teacher, experienced school governor and parent, I fully understand the value of providing every child with an excellent education. Education changes lives, it empowers individuals, it increases social mobility, and it is the single biggest driver of economic success for a nation. It is right that we pursue high standards and seek to provide the very best education for all the children of this country.

This Government are going about things in the wrong way, however. The new national funding formula will see 98% of schools worse off and demonstrates more than anything else could that the Government are not serious about raising educational standards or about social mobility. My constituency of Burnley, which continues to have some of the highest levels of social deprivation and is in the top five most deprived areas in the whole of Lancashire, will lose £477 for every secondary pupil and £339 for every primary pupil. In the past, the Secretary of State has said that no school would lose more than 1.5% of funding per year under the new formula. How can she square that with projections that my schools will lose 8% on average by 2019?

Even before these cuts, we are already seeing increased class sizes, subjects being dropped from the curriculum, pupils with special educational needs and disabilities losing vital support, and teacher vacancies. I ask the Secretary of State how she believes cutting funding for schools in Burnley will help a whole generation of young people to succeed.

There is nothing fair about funding that is not sufficient. How can it be fair to take educational funding from schools that are already stretched to breaking point—schools that already go the extra mile to give every child the best possible start in life?

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): The hon. Lady said that 98% of schools will lose, but I understand from the figures that I have that 70% of the hon. Lady’s schools will gain from this new funding formula. Would she like to comment on that?

**Julie Cooper**: I hope that the hon. Gentleman’s figures are correct, but I fear that they are not. My information suggests that they are not. The research that I have done shows that that is not the case.

My schools are already working flat out to ensure that children coping with social and economic deprivation can overcome disadvantage and fulfil their potential, yet those schools are having the rug pulled from under them. Robbing Peter to pay Paul—or robbing Peterborough to help Poole—is not going to help. In my constituency, there has been a concerted effort by the key stakeholders, the schools, the council and businesses to work together to grow the local economy. That has not been easy, but we are making good progress. We are focusing our energies on raising skill levels, confidence and aspiration, among young people. Considerable effort has been expended on this, and these funding cuts feel like a kick in the teeth.

Education is the key not just to better life chances for individuals but to our economic success. Ensuring adequate funding is crucial so that every child, wherever they live and whatever their background, can fulfil their potential. As a nation, we know that every citizen matters in the widest possible sense, not least to our economy. Investing in education is an investment in the economy, and failing to do that is short-sighted in the extreme. A Government who talk of increased social mobility and growing a strong economy need to understand that investment in education is absolutely fundamental to those aims.

5.36 pm

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper).

The Secretary of State and her team are to be congratulated. To many Conservative Members, and probably to some Opposition Members, this problem seems almost too large and intractable to wrestle with. However, we are in a consultation process. Of course there will be one or two anomalies and a few little creases will have to be ironed out. There will be unforeseen circumstances that need to be attended to. The scary thing is that those Opposition Members who have spoken so far have been either unable or unwilling to see the inherent unfairness of a system that they not only promoted but fed, either because it was to their advantage to do so or because they had no interest in rural areas.

The Government have been trying to counterbalance the differentials in funding for 2016-17, but when House of Commons Library research shows that Manchester has a per-pupil figure of £4,619 and Doncaster has a figure of £3,281, but the figure for Dorset is £4,240, we know that something has gone wrong. This tells us quite clearly that it is thought that taxpayers in Dorset and their children’s needs are less important than taxpayers...
and their children in other areas. There was nothing fair in the funding formula that Labour bequeathed to us. We could have had a knee-jerk reaction, which really would have put the cat among the pigeons, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her predecessor have adopted an incremental approach to try to address and arrest the problem, and they are to be congratulated on that.

I concur with many of the comments made by my hon. Friend, the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), among others. When we go into our village primary schools, we see the enthusiasm of the teachers, parents, governors and staff in general. We see their enthusiasm for education, but we know that they have been trying to do their work with one hand tied behind their back because they have been penalised for living and working in a rural area.

**Ms Buck:** There is great passion among the teachers in schools such as the Westminster Academy, which has one of the highest proportions of children on free school dinners anywhere in Britain, but that school stands to lose at least £250,000. How is that fair?

**Simon Hoare:** I took over from the hon. Lady as chairman of the governors of Wilberforce primary school many years ago, so I am familiar with the problems facing schools in her constituency, as well as those elsewhere. Perhaps I need to make the point to Opposition Members quite baldly that just because schools have done very well under an unfair system start to see some rebalancing while the cake is being re-divided, that is not necessarily an argument for saying that there should be no change for those schools that have disproportionately enjoyed funding while those in rural areas have not.

**Rebecca Pow:** Does my hon. Friend agree that many of our rural schools in Somerset and Dorset have been doing so well with the funding they have had? This extra funding might enable them to put in place some of the things that they have not been able to have because there simply has not been enough money to go around.

**Simon Hoare:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Back in the summer, I convened a roundtable of all the headteachers and chairs of governors at my schools. They said that the key thing was the recruitment and retention of teachers, and that the heart of the problem was the inequality in funding and the lack of a formula that recognises rural sparsity and the additional costs that such schools face.

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Simon Hoare:** I will not. I declare an interest, because I have three young daughters at a village primary school in my constituency and—here is the plug—my wonderful wife is the chairman of its parents, teachers and friends association. The hard-working farmer Spencer Mogridge gets up at 3 o’clock or 4 o’clock in the morning to look after his livestock, but he still goes to the PTFA meeting at 7 o’clock in the evening to organise the school fun run—[**HON. MEMBERS:** “Were you on the fun run?”] I was not on the fun run. I think the words “fun” and “run” should never be used in the same sentence; it is an oxymoron.

I see such keenness at all levels of the rural educational establishment. That is why people want a fairer funding model that addresses the imbalance, recognises needs, and ensures that the lifeblood of many of our rural communities, which I believe our rural schools are, can continue long into the future.

5.41 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): In recent weeks, the Government have revealed their reforms to the national funding formula. The reforms paint a bleak future for the schools of Bradford, promising stagnant funding allocations that fail to meet increasing pupil demand. The city has faced, and continues to face, difficult times, but it is trying its best to improve standards. This perfect storm of funding cuts will damage Bradford’s education system and harm the life chances of our children.

What I fear most is that the reforms mark a determined and intentional culture of underinvestment by this Government in our school system. What do the national funding formula reforms mean for Bradford? Overall, 89% of Bradford’s primary schools, secondary schools and academies face cuts to their budgets, with funding for early-years provision set to be cut by £2.4 million, which is more than 6%.

Difficult funding decisions are already being taken in Bradford. In recent weeks, the Bradford schools forum took the difficult decision to divert millions of pounds from the budgets of mainstream schools to help to fund additional school places for pupils with special educational needs. Every child, whether they are learning in a mainstream school or a special school, deserves an excellent education.

Against that woeful financial backdrop, it is not only day-to-day teaching budgets that are becoming ever more constrained. Investing in new provision is becoming less and less viable for our schools system. In recent months, the Prime Minister has said that she wants parity for mental health provision in this country. That must be as true for our young people as it is for the rest of the population. Many believe that mental health provision for our children and young people is in need of urgent improvement.

In response to my recent parliamentary question, the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families said: “Schools are able to decide on, and make assessments of, the support they provide for their pupils, based on their individual needs.” At a time when our schools’ budgets are facing real-terms funding cuts, it is unlikely that they will be able to find extra funding for new provision, even if they believe that additional support would benefit their pupils.

If the Prime Minister is truly committed to parity of care between physical and mental illness, her Government must seriously consider making additional ring-fenced funding available to schools. If, as a country, we are genuinely committed to driving improvements in educational attainment, tackling inequality and supporting our children with decent mental health provision, fair and decent funding is nothing short of vital.
5.44 pm

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): I am lucky to represent a constituency in one of the best—if not the best—boroughs in the country for school results and Ofsted ratings. Having visited every school in my constituency at least once, I can safely say that that is due to the exceptional teaching and school leadership on offer. My comments are informed by the many meetings I have had with headteachers from across the constituency, including in a delegation that I brought to see the schools Minister last year.

Overall funding is now at its highest level, but there is additional demand. When we discuss how public spending should be divided, I will make no apology for asking for more money for schools, but that must be set against the demands made by Government and Opposition Members for more funding for everything from the NHS to national infrastructure—the money has to be divided up somehow. That brings me on to the national funding formula.

The existing formula was plainly unfair, and a cross-party group of MPs said that it had to be made fairer. Under the existing formula, Kingston has the third worst-funded schools in London. Pupils in Kingston get £2,406 less than pupils in Tower Hamlets, which is in the same city, just 14 miles away. How can that be fair? I campaigned for a fairer funding formula along with parents in my constituency. I am pleased that we have seen a marginal increase in our funding and that, importantly, mobility is being taken into account.

Lilian Greenwood: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the social circumstances in the area of London that he represents are quite different from those in Tower Hamlets? Schools in places that are affected by high levels of deprivation require more funding per pupil.

James Berry: I ask the hon. Lady to come and repeat that in the poorer parts of my constituency, where some people are just as deprived as those in Tower Hamlets. In addition, a high proportion of children receive the pupil premium. I do not disagree that deprivation should be one of the most important factors or that schools in boroughs such as Kingston will always get less because deprivation is a key factor, but that level of disparity is simply not fair. There will be winners and losers whenever a funding formula is reorganised unless there is a massive increase in funding to level things up rather than down, but no party committed to such funding in its manifesto.

Stephen Timms: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Berry: No, I will not.

Headteachers make the legitimate point that the increased costs of the national living wage, and national insurance and pension contributions, are putting pressure on their budgets. The situation is the same in other areas of the public sector, but we should not forget that point in this debate.

Finally, high-needs funding, not the national funding formula, is the biggest issue in my constituency. Such funding has resulted in an overspend on the dedicated schools grant of some £5 million, which will have to be found from school budgets as a whole. The council and free school providers have put in two applications for new special schools in the borough—one in Kingston and one in Richmond—which will reduce pressure in the medium term, but there is no clear answer to where that £5 million will come from in the short term, apart from every single child’s school funding. I am pleased that the Minister was able to meet the council leader and me a few weeks ago to discuss that.

All the points that I have made must be taken into account in addition to the funding formula. I am pleased that Kingston schools will receive a small increase. We could have been bolder and made bigger reductions elsewhere to make the situation even fairer to pupils in my constituency, but there must be fairness across the board, as my constituents recognise. I will be submitting a response to phase 2 of the consultation, just as I did previously, and it will be informed by my constituency’s headteachers—the best headteachers in the land.

5.48 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): This week, the Public Accounts Committee reviewed the National Audit Office report on the financial sustainability of school funding, and the most helpful thing I can do now is to give the Chamber some flavour of how that went. Present were officials from the DFE, including the permanent secretary, Jonathan Slater, but the session with them was preceded by a panel made up of headteachers and Russell Hobby of the National Association of Head Teachers. Understandably, they spoke of the current severe financial pressures, the effects of tight funding, and the strategies they have to deal with that, which will be familiar to those who have listened to the debate so far—things such as reducing the curriculum; increasing class sizes; phasing out support for special needs and mental health; cutting extracurricular activities, professional development and school trips; and increasing teacher contact time.

Unsurprisingly, the officials from the Department did not altogether recognise that picture. Interestingly, though, Government Members should be aware that they did not dispute any of the financial facts. There was no disagreement whatever that schools have to save £3 billion in the current spending round, which represents an 8% cut by 2020, or that this is the toughest challenge since the 1990s, when the previous Conservative Government were in power. The Department simply did not dispute the financial facts that more schools are in debt and that debts are growing bigger; nor could it, because it had agreed the report with the NAO.

The Department’s argument was not about the financial facts themselves, but about the effects of those facts. It suggested that if every school procured efficiently, particularly on things such as heating and insurance, used its available balances and managed its payroll effectively, disaster could be averted. The Department stands ready, as does the Secretary of State, with the advice, tools, tutorials and data to help schools to do that. It thinks that disaster can be averted—that it is, in the words of the permanent secretary, “doable”.

My view is that there are good reasons for scepticism. The DFE exercise, such as it is, has largely been a desk exercise. The Department knows little about the individual circumstances of schools, and how could it? There are just too many for central Government to gauge and understand. It is a fact that not every school can actually
reduce its payroll costs—not if it is endowed with experienced and established staff, and not if it needs to take up the slack caused by the reduction, or abolition, of the educational support grant. The latter is particularly true for small schools. Not every school can reduce its procurement costs—not if it is in an old, leaky building, has already reduced them, or is tied into long-term contracts. What is doable in theory is simply not doable in practice.

The most chilling passage in the NAO report is at paragraph 2.6. I do not have time to enlarge on it, but I advise Members to read it very carefully.

5.52 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I rise to speak about school funding. Many people in this place will not be aware that I was very involved in school funding and in trying to get a fair formula for schools many years ago, when I was the chairman of the Grant Maintained Schools Advisory Committee, which is now called FASNA—Freedom and Autonomy for Schools National Association. Work has been going on for 25 years to get a fair formula.

The civil service always says there will be winners and losers; of course there are winners and losers—there are now. In Derby City, the highest-funded school gets paid £5,564 per pupil, while the lowest-funded gets only £4,739. The gap is around £800 per pupil. If a school has 1,300 or 1,500 pupils and that £800 is multiplied up, it makes an enormous difference to the quality of education that can be provided. We know that some schools need more funding than others, and we recognise that they do not all want to lose £800—some of them need that extra funding—but those at the bottom of the list are consistently at the bottom of the list.

I am delighted that the Government have decided that we are going to have the school funding formula, because it is about time. We have wanted it for more than 25 years, so I am delighted that the Government are tackling it and are going to consult on it and get it right.

Amanda Solloway: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) for giving way. Does she agree that the formula is a good news story for Derby City, because we need extra support and could gain 8.4%?

Pauline Latham: Yes, the new formula could make a huge difference to Derby schools. It is important that the extra support is given to the right schools, and that those schools that have been underfunded for so many years get a fair crack of the whip. We must not allow Derby City Council to skew it in any way, shape or form so that the same old schools get extra money and those that have been deprived do not.

There are issues with schools at the moment, and I know that many are looking forward to the national funding formula. Schools have fixed costs. Their costs are the same whether they are in an inner city or a leafy suburb, so why are they paid different amounts of money? The biggest problem at the moment—certainly this applies to one school in my constituency—is that the apprenticeship levy is hitting now, but there is no more money for it. We must look at how we can help fund it, because it is within the overall budget. Schools have no choice over it, but it is a very good thing.

Schools are also having to drop participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, because they cannot afford to run it any more. The scheme is really important for Derby schools. There are amazing opportunities for young people. If we lose those extracurricular activities, we are not giving pupils the all-round education that they should have. I hope that the Minister will look at that.

When schools are full, they maximise the amount of money that they can have. What I do not want to see this year is schools having to increase class sizes and reduce teaching time. I would like us to look at that again. The national funding formula cannot come soon enough for the schools that have been looking forward to it for years.

5.55 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Every child in this country, and every disabled child in this country, deserves a decent education. The principle that no child should be worse off as a result of these funding reforms should run through this consultation. Where a child was born should not dictate their life chances, yet that is the case for too many children in our country, and too many children in Wakefield, where 25% of them are growing up in poverty. I was proud to be a member of the last Labour Government, who lifted nearly a million children out of poverty, and I am so disappointed by what this Government have done, overseeing the closure of 800 Sure Start centres and changing the goalposts on measuring child poverty.

Wakefield schools have taken a very deep hit from these proposals.

Lucy Frazer: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mary Creagh: No, I am not giving way.

Fair funding should mean a levelling up, not a levelling down. Every school in my constituency will see their funding cut under the Secretary of State’s proposals. The manifesto promise to protect education spending has been broken, as we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). The Government have not provided for funding per pupil to increase in line with inflation; have not accounted for the increase in pupils attending schools; and have not considered the costs of higher national insurance and pension contributions, which now have to be absorbed by the school budgets. When the efficiency savings are factored into the funding formula, funding in Wakefield per pupil will fall from £4,725 this year to £4,211 in 2019-20—a real-terms cut of 11%.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mary Creagh: I will not give way.

Nine maintained schools across Wakefield district are projected to be in deficit by 31 March, which means increased class sizes, subjects dropped from the curriculum, pupils with special educational needs and disabilities losing vital support, and teacher vacancies left unfilled.
There will also be a very worrying impact on special educational needs. At the moment, there is some flexibility to move money around and to move it into the high needs block. Under the new formula, there will be disruption and uncertainty around special needs funding for cities such as Wakefield. The funds are simply not enough for children in our city who need that extra support.

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Lady said at the outset that it was important for all children to get the same opportunities. She also mentioned that class sizes would go up. Does she think it is fair that, for the children in my constituency, class sizes in every single secondary school are over 30, and that those schools have been historically underfunded for years and years and years?

Mary Creagh: The hon. Lady reinforces my point, which is that the Government must take into account rising pupil numbers. This formula and the efficiency savings fail to do that, so she needs to have a word with her Secretary of State about them.

We cannot have a situation in which there is just not enough money to go around to educate all children well. In Wakefield, we will see 1,000 more pupils start school in September and yet no money has been allocated for that increase, which means that the schools and the pupils will miss out. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that schools in England face the steepest cuts to funding since the 1970s.

Despite those circumstances, headteachers such as Martin Fenton at Greenhill Primary, Rob Marsh at Cathedral Academy, and Georgina Haley at Netherton Junior and Infant School are doing excellent work in my constituency to improve the life chances of children in Wakefield. I urge the Secretary of State to drop her Secretary of State about them.

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Wilshaw, referred to the school in a speech he made in November 2016 about schools that have made remarkable transformations, stating:

“At Ellesmere Port Catholic High School, only a third of pupils achieved 5 good GCSEs. Now almost three-quarters do.”

Those improvements should be applauded, so I was deeply concerned to learn that the school is projecting funding deficits for the next few years, which will threaten the improvements it has made. It tells me that early indications show a £44,000 annual reduction from 2018-19, on top of the deficit already forecast. That will make the approved deficit reduction plan completely unachievable unless cuts to staffing are made. The headteacher told me,

“we are already stretched to the limit and it is a very bleak outlook knowing that we will have to make further reductions...the Government must invest in schools for the sake of our children and future.”

Whitby High School told me that it could face a funding reduction of £111,000. By 2020, the School Cuts campaign estimates that it could be facing a 10% real-terms budget cut, equivalent to a staffing reduction of 17 if savings are not found elsewhere. Governors of Little Sutton Church of England Primary School told me that they are very concerned about the school’s future sustainability following the new funding arrangements. Cambridge Road Primary School has told me that since 2013 it has already experienced a real-terms reduction in income of 4.4%, or £65,000; and that, combined with wage increases and inflation, the real-terms reduction has been in excess of £100,000.

**Michelle Donelan:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Justin Madders:** I am sorry, but I do not have time.

St Mary of the Angels Catholic Primary School has estimated that by 2019 its budget will be down by £90,138, which could clearly lead to a loss of staff if savings are not found elsewhere.

This is a terrible situation for local schools. As one headteacher said to me,

“it does appear that the ‘fairer’ funding model being discussed is far from fair.”

I could not have put it better myself.

**6.6 pm**

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): When I met headteachers in my constituency campaigning for fairer funding in the county of Nottinghamshire, my right hon. and learned Friend, as a former Education Secretary, said no Education Secretary would ever take on.

The funding formula was manifestly unfair, as many hon. Members have said. On behalf of schools across the county of Nottinghamshire, which was one of the f40 counties, I am delighted to welcome an increase of 0.8%—admittedly small, but an increase none the less.

I also think that it is incredibly important to take on difficult issues and not to kick these cans down the road, as happens time and again in politics, for example with tax credits. It is immensely difficult to take money away from people, even if the reasons for providing the money have been proven to be wrong and the formulae are outdated—the opposition to that is considerable. This is an example of the Government taking on a difficult issue, rather than kicking it further down the road.

This formula also sends out a signal that there is poverty in rural areas, and no county exemplifies that better than Nottinghamshire. I may be privileged to represent the more affluent rural parts of the county, but at least half of it is made up of ex-coalfield communities, such as Ollerton, Ashfield and Mansfield, with deep-rooted social problems, left to fester by the Labour party. This formula will not benefit my constituency; it will benefit those deprived parts of Nottinghamshire. I am proud of that, even if it is a difficult conversation to have with most of my headteachers.

My last point—given that so little time is available—is that there are parts of this country that have been well funded but produced appalling results, and nowhere exemplifies that better than the city of Nottingham. We have heard today from representatives, colleagues and friends who represent the city that their funding has fallen. I feel sympathy for that, but those relatively well funded schools have let down generations of students, with an appalling local authority and poor-quality leadership. As well as increasing funding for my schools in Nottinghamshire, I look to the Secretary of State to find a strategy to address the intergenerational failure in places such as Nottingham, which desperately needs it.

**6.9 pm**

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): In my first week as an MP, I received a letter from the headteacher of the school my two children attend—the local school in the constituency I represent. The school highlighted some of the very real issues that it and other schools in my constituency will face in the next few years. When I got to the end of the letter, I realised that I had received it not because I was the newly elected MP but because I was a parent, and every parent at my children’s school had received the same letter. I thought to myself, “This is surely unprecedented. This is surely an indication of the deep anxiety felt by the headteachers of my children’s school and the other schools in my constituency, in both Kingston and Richmond, about the future of their funding.” I therefore spoke to the headteacher of my children’s school about the issue.

The Secretary of State refers to using staff more efficiently. In my children’s school, that means cutting teaching assistants, which means that the biggest impact will be felt by those pupils who need the most help—those with special educational needs or additional language needs. These cuts, therefore, will increase the gaps in attainment between those at the top and those at the bottom, and they will limit opportunities for those who already have the least opportunities.

I attended a meeting of headteachers in the Kingston borough with the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), and one of the things that was
highlighted—it seemed extraordinary to me, but it was confirmed to me by the headteacher of my local school—is that schools have to pay an apprenticeship levy and that is adding to their costs. It is extraordinary that schools have to find money from their budgets—to take money that would otherwise be used for teaching staff and resources—to pay a penalty for not providing training. I find that an absolutely extraordinary anomaly, and I hope the Secretary of State will look into it as a matter of urgency, because it seems an unnecessary burden for schools in my constituency and elsewhere.

I understand the motivation to ensure that the distribution of funding is evened out across the country, and I understand that that will be seen as fairer for some people, but I urge the Secretary of State to achieve that by looking for ways to increase funding to schools that are already disadvantaged, not by taking it from schools that have traditionally received more, because that will cause a great deal of hardship for schools not just in my constituency but elsewhere.

6.12 pm

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Of course I commend the Government’s determination to build a new schools’ funding formula, but I am pleased it is still at the consultation stage.

Representing South Cambridgeshire—a constituency in a county that, until 2015, was the lowest funded in the country and had been for decades—I understand only too well how underfunded schools have struggled. The proposed new formula, though it has laudable intentions to focus on deprivation and poor educational attainment, does not yet recognise three additional critical factors. First and foremost, consideration must be given when a school has been seriously underfunded for decades. My schools have been mending and making do for years—I do not exaggerate when I describe broken window panes and holes in roofs. For us, teaching assistants are a luxury, and the purchasing of text books and even basic equipment is the ask of local businesses and the community. It is not a question of cutting teaching assistants—filling even core teacher vacancies is often not possible.

The Government showed an appreciation of that when they provided a small but welcome interim funding boost last year and this year, but I am afraid that the reality is that the money has been completely absorbed in pension and national insurance increases. Furthermore, under the current funding proposals, not only will this interim funding not be maintained as a starting baseline, but 27 of my schools would be even worse off, with a real-terms cut of about 4%. Every one of my rural primary schools with fewer than 150 pupils would lose money, and Members have spoken today about sparsity. So I urge the Secretary of State to recognise that the new formula, though built on many sensible principles, cannot simply be superimposed on a landscape of significant historical under-investment—not if we expect those schools to survive, let alone to halt and close the widening free school meals attainment gap.

I now turn to the additional financial pressures experienced by areas of high growth, which we have also heard about today. In the next four years, we will have opened 24 new schools in Cambridgeshire since 2012 just to cope with basic need. It is not right that we subsidise that in the early years with money from existing schools. For example, a typical secondary school would contribute £41,000 out of its annual budget towards it. I recognise that the consultation is open-ended about growth and how we should deal with it, but we clearly need to find a way of fixing this, perhaps through a separate fund to help these schools in the early years.

Finally, I ask that we look at the cost of living. In Cambridgeshire, particularly South Cambs and the city, house prices are about 16 times the average wage, so we need to think about how we can help with teacher recruitment, because people’s budgets simply do not go that far.

Having spoken to the Secretary of State, I believe that there is genuinely a sincere desire to offer up this proposed model for road testing, and that is what we are doing today—we are kicking the tyres.

6.15 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Unsurprisingly, I am here to speak for the children of Oldham, who, under these proposals, will be significantly affected by money being taken away from their much-needed education. I should declare an interest: I have two young boys, one at secondary school and one at primary school, both of whom will see cuts—

Michelle Donelan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jim McMahon: I am going to carry on for a time because I am conscious that other people want to speak.

Both of them will see real-terms cuts to their education provision, as will another 60,000 young people in the town. Every single one of Oldham’s 99 schools will see a cut, with the average being 9%. We are meant to be an opportunity area. According to the Government, the roads are paved with educational opportunity gold. They say that they have recognised that there are issues and are determined to turn things around, so we should welcome the investment of £16 million. Unfortunately, they then come and take £17 million away. So let them tell me, and tell the young people, parents and teachers in Oldham, where the new money is. How can we turn around educational attainment when the problem is so deep-rooted and the situation is so unequal—when education has not been valued in previous years and we are desperate to realise the opportunities that these young people deserve for the future? Let the Government tell Oldham how it has a positive future when the rungs are being taken from under it.

We have seen money being taken away from early years. We have seen nearly £1 million taken away from a sixth-form college. We have seen £3.5 million taken away from Oldham College. Time and again, money is being taken away. I do not resent for one second any other Member of this House saying that their area needs more money to provide a decent standard of education. If they represent a Tory shire, then that is fantastic—they can make that case and I will support them in doing so, but not at the cost of children, and their families, who have been let down for generations, and who need this chance more than most.

The world is more complex than it has ever been. The skills that people need will be more complex than ever before, but people are being set up to fail under this
model. I make this plea: next time the Secretary of State visits Oldham and my constituency, instead of just giving a courtesy notice, why not attend a roundtable with the headteachers and the governors to really listen and understand the impact of these cuts? If the Government really do care, let us have fewer words, more action, and more investment.

6.18 pm

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** Solihull is mentioned in many surveys as being one of the best places to live not just in the west midlands but in the UK as a whole and that is due in no small part to its schools. My schools have put in a Herculean effort for years. They do more with less. They have embraced change and gained the benefits from so doing, despite having been one of the losers in the fairer funding formula for many years. I welcome the Government’s commitment to making the necessary changes. Although this is a consultation at the moment, I hope that they will take on the comments that many hon. Members are making so that we can get this right and set for the future.

In my constituency, although secondary schools gain, and I am very grateful for that, some primary schools do not, with some losing up to 2.5%. In addition, the unequal treatment of Solihull schools compared with those of neighbouring Birmingham has not yet been fixed, with those in the city still enjoying a substantial per-pupil advantage, currently standing at £1,300 per year.

To put that into a real-world context, schools in Birmingham can use the extra cash to offer more competitive salaries and attract newly qualified teachers, especially in subjects such as mathematics and science, and that hurts schools in neighbouring communities that do not have the money to spare. Schools in Birmingham also have more funds to set aside for facilities, extracurricular activities, school trips and all the other things that allow schools to provide a rich and well-rounded education.

In a compact, urban region such as the west midlands, even small inequalities of that sort can have serious consequences for those who are left out, and the inequalities are more visible than they might be elsewhere. Local headteachers tell me that parents regularly ask them why pupils in Birmingham schools are taken on exciting school trips, but their own children are not. Such unfairness is made all the worse by the fact that so many Birmingham children are educated in Solihull. I believe that up to 40% of the children in some of our local schools come from outside the borough, but those pupils do not bring their funding advantages with them.

I am pleased that the need for fairer funding in our schools is widely recognised, and that the Government are grasping the nettle. The proposals are an important first step, and now we have our consultation, but we must go further to end the unequal treatment of communities such as Solihull.

6.21 pm

**Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab):** Teachers in the borough of Hounslow have achieved amazing results over the last 10 or more years. Almost all our schools are good or outstanding, and value-added is positive in every school. That is in a borough where all schools and all classrooms contain children with additional needs of some kind—children who arrive not speaking English, children with disabilities and special educational needs, children who are homeless and keep having to move on or who are sofa surfing with their parents, and children with many other needs. Most of our schools suffer from severe aircraft noise from planes approaching Heathrow.

The overall savings proposed by the Department for Education for schools in my constituency by 2018-19—a combination of the national funding formula and the wider cost pressures that they face now—amount to £5.1 million. That is a 6.2% cut. The existing cost pressures include, as other Members have mentioned, inflation, the apprenticeship levy, pension and national insurance costs, the requirement for independent careers advice, and more children with special needs in our mainstream schools.

As in the Secretary of State’s constituency, the cost pressures that my heads face will mean, on the whole, fewer teachers and support staff, plus other cuts. We have established that each of our secondary schools will have to lose between nine and 18 teachers, and primary schools will have to have up to 11 fewer teachers. Fewer subjects will be taught at key stages 4 and 5, there will be fewer external visits and fewer specialists will come in to teach and enthuse children about future jobs and careers, staying safe or other specialist issues that we want our children to learn about and get their heads around. There will be less specialist and individual support for children who have additional needs, who do not speak English, who are very gifted or who have mental health problems and need counselling. Agency costs for supply teachers, as our headteachers face the recruitment and retention crisis that is affecting all subject areas, will add to the salary bill.

In classrooms where there are children who need additional attention, teachers and children will feel the impact of the cuts every day. More classes will be taught with only one adult—the class teacher—in the room. The lack of additional support is a cost for every child in the classroom, both those who have additional needs and those who do not. The cuts will mean that less is spent on repairing buildings, improving outdoor space or buying the equipment and materials that the curriculum requires.

6.24 pm

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con):** For reasons that will become evident to the House, I am particularly grateful to have caught your eye in this debate. Mr Speaker, I commend the Secretary of State for tackling this issue, because it is quite clear from the debate that, in a modification of the Lincoln dictum, on this issue one can only please some of the people some of the time. Inevitably, when there is no more cash around, there will be winners and losers. Unfortunately, my constituency is one of the big losers.

I campaigned with the f40 group for over 10 years, and the absolute sun up on the horizon was the national funding formula, but now that the consultation on the formula has arrived I find that my schools will actually get less money. In Gloucestershire, we will get a 0.8% cash-terms increase this year, and in the Cotswolds, there will
be a 0.3% cash-terms increase. Two thirds of my schools will get a cut, and a third of them will get a very small increase.

In Gloucestershire, schools were already very efficient. They had amalgamated a lot of back-office functions and had formed partnerships. The secondary schools had done everything they could to become academies, being among the earliest in the country to do so. Gloucestershire is therefore a very efficient county, but we now find that our schools will get cash-terms cuts. That is on top of the Government having imposed limits on above inflation increases in relation to funding teachers, the national minimum wage, pensions, national insurance and procurement. A cash-terms cut for over half my schools means a real squeeze on education in Gloucestershire.

I should pay tribute to the parents and governors of my schools, because the vast majority go well beyond the extra mile to give my children the very best education. As a result, on very meagre funding, we get reasonable results in Gloucestershire. However, the figures I have given from the consultation will put Gloucestershire down from 108th to 116th in the f40 league. That is simply unacceptable because it means that some teacher posts will definitely be lost, and it is likely that some of my smaller schools will close.

Heidi Allen: Will my hon. Friend do what I am doing, which is to encourage all my governors, teachers and parents to feed into the consultation? I suspect there are some anomalies because it is the same in my area, in that we expected more and it has not been delivered.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I do urge all people to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) is sitting beside me, and I am sure that all Gloucestershire’s MPs will feed into the consultation. I am also sure that many of my aggrieved headteachers, parents and governors will do so.

It is inevitable that some of my secondary schools, which face some of the largest cuts, will have to reduce the breadth of the curriculum they currently offer. That would be unfair because every child in the country should have roughly the same breadth of curriculum in their schools. I accept that that is often difficult in smaller secondary schools, but it will be very hard for children and their parents to bear if their A-level choices are no longer available as a result of Government cuts.

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I simply say to my hon. Friend the Minister that I know this is a consultation, but I am looking for some very radical changes. The weighting for deprivation and other measures in the consultation is too high, and the basic pupil funding should never in any circumstances be cut.

6.28 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I pay tribute to the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), who made a brilliant speech. She demonstrated, as has the fact that a large number of Members wanted to speak in this debate, that education truly matters in our country.

I will make a few brief points. The first is that the narrative of this discussion is completely wrong. It is a typical Tory divide-and-rule strategy. I do not believe that schools that might gain from a change in the funding formula want to do so at the expense of other children, teachers and schools. For example, I know that the folks who are set to gain from the changes in Knowsley, just across the River Mersey from where I live, do not want to do so at the expense of children and schools in Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral. We should not be dividing people, but bringing them together.

Schools in Wirral are set to lose hundreds of pounds per pupil. That plays into another classic Tory narrative, which is that people do not need money to get anywhere in life or to help in education. The hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) said that money is not sufficient to drive achievement. In fact, money may not be a sufficient condition, but it is a necessary one, as all the evidence shows. I am next to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who led the London Challenge. I know he would say that it was reform and improvement, alongside decent funding, that resulted in those achievements under the last Labour Government that we are all proud of.

Stephen Timms: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming one element of the funding formula, which is the inclusion for the first time of a mobility factor to reflect the additional costs of high pupil turnover? However, does she agree that it ought to be larger than the 0.1% of the total that is being allocated on that basis at the moment?

Alison McGovern: I have never disagreed with my right hon. Friend yet and I do not now.

As a Member of Parliament, I am afraid of very little, but I still get nervous when I have to go and see local headteachers. I want to give the final words of my speech over to those headteachers. To begin with, Mark Whitehill, who is head of Gayton Primary School in Faversham, spoke this simple truth:

“If Education really is a priority, we need the staff to help us deliver it!”

Another brilliant head in my area, Catherine Kelly, agrees with that. She said that her job is about life chances, but colleagues whom she respects as fantastic educationists are talking about leaving the profession because, as heads, they are not focusing on the right things as they are having to balance the books and make ends meet. She said that they are “invariably being set up to fail”.

She is frugal and knows that if the school is overstaffed, it is a waste of the students’ resources, so she would never make that happen. She says she is afraid that the Government “clearly doesn’t understand education”, which I believe is true.

The last word goes to David Hazeldine, a great head from Wirral, who says:

“The fundamental issue is that there is not enough money in the system. Teacher recruitment shortages and massive underfunding are placing children’s education and well-being at risk.”

He says that that is “creating a perfect storm”.

Those three heads have put it better than I ever could. I ask the Secretary of State to learn the lessons of schools in her own constituency and recognise that although money is not all that schools need, they cannot do without it if they want to give kids a chance.
Mr Speaker: There are five remaining would-be contributors and the Front-Bench speeches to wind up the debate should start at or extremely close to 6.40. Two minutes each will suffice and colleagues can help each other.

6.32 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Many parents are attracted to my constituency by the excellence of its schools. I look forward to visiting Oakfield Primary Academy and Brownsover Community School this Friday. We have a broad range of schools, including a bilateral school that provides co-educational grammar school places, which is incredibly popular and oversubscribed.

Under the consultation, Warwickshire will remain one of the counties with the lowest funding at £4,293 per pupil. That is among the lowest figures we have heard today. It is a credit to the heads and staff of the many schools in my constituency that they achieve such excellence with that sum. There will be a 1.1% increase, which is very welcome. That will affect 29 schools in my constituency, most of which are rural primaries. Nine schools will receive the same or rather less. In many cases, those are the excellent secondaries to which I have just referred, one of which will lose £90,000 a year. Of course, many of those schools have sixth forms and so face a particular challenge because there are smaller classes and they want to offer specialist subjects—often the very A-levels that lead to the qualifications that our country so badly needs.

Since coming to office, the Government have been steadfast in their commitment to ensuring that all children, irrespective of their background and where they live, get a world-class education. This consultation levels the system out. It will be a fairer system. The shadow Secretary of State spoke about cuts. There are no cuts.

The Secretary of State has made it very clear that the overall budget will remain the same. This is about ensuring that we allocate the funds within our system fairly and that there is a level playing field for pupils across our country.

6.34 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): In the two minutes I have to speak, I would like to welcome the Government’s commitment and commend the Secretary of State for tackling this difficult issue. The hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) spoke about fairness. Children in the area represented by the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) currently receive £178 more per pupil than my children in Suffolk. After the change, her area will receive £219 more per pupil. I would like the consultation to iron out these anomalies. We in Suffolk are grateful for the uplift, but I, like many others, have campaigned for fairer funding—my children deserve to be treated equally.

I appreciate that it is too complex to make the change in one go, because that would mean walloping some schools harder than others, so we need to have a gentle trajectory. That said, we must not stand back and fail to grasp the nettle. For too long, our children, particularly in rural areas—we have heard from Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Essex—have been underfunded. We have had to play second fiddle to large metropolitan areas. Children in those areas do not deserve better life chances; they deserve the same life chances as others. I have areas of deprivation in my constituency and children who could do with more money spent on their education. This is the right way to continue.

This morning, I held a roundtable of businesses and educationists from across the region. They are talking about skills. Please let us concentrate on early years. That is a bit difficult in Suffolk, because we are losing more than we currently spend on it, but we provide outstanding education. Please can we also look at rural England? Hon. Members should not assume that we have everything. When we consult—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

6.36 pm

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I will be brief, pithy and to the point, if possible.

I am a school governor of St Andrew’s primary school, which is in a very deprived community. I have to tell the Secretary of State and the Minister that there is an 11 to 12-year difference in life expectancy between the north-east of my constituency and the south-west, around Devonport, so I understand some of the issues of deprivation. Moreover, in the 1980s, I was the agent to the Education Minister who introduced the local management of schools, the national curriculum and other such things.

I am grateful to the Government for taking a fresh look at the funding formula. My constituency has done quite well—we have an increase of about 4% for schools, which is incredibly good news. The one concern is what happens to the grammar schools. I am incredibly grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Schools Standards for agreeing to meet my grammar schools to talk about how they could improve their position.

My constituency has a very good education offer. We have not only three grammar schools, but a university technical college and a creative arts school. I am grateful to the coalition Government and this Government for delivering on that. Without further ado, I conclude by saying: carry on going, and please do not let anyone down.

6.38 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I was proud to stand on an election platform representing a Government who had delivered 1.4 million good and outstanding school places over the preceding five years. That was delivered in the most challenging financial circumstances is to the Government’s credit and that of schoolteachers across the country.

I am conscious that the Government are spending a record amount—£40 billion—on our schools, thereby protecting the schools budget. However, I also recognise that the Government’s laudable policies to invest in our workers and give them a pay rise are eating into a schools budget that is largely spent on employees. I had hoped that the school funding formula would address some of the shortfalls in my constituency, but although my constituency overall gets a 1.5% increase, with 16 schools getting an increase, unfortunately 23 will see their funding drop, which causes me concern. I hope that the consultation will iron out some of those anomalies.
I recognise that it is the Opposition’s job to oppose. It is fine to be long on talk and to say the right things, but it is appalling that Opposition Members have delivered no ideas or policies to make things better during this debate. On that note, I suggest three things that would help but not affect our wish to eradicate the deficit. First, schools and education have to be the No. 1 priority for increasing productivity. We have set up a £23 billion productivity fund, so is there a way to tap into it to help our schools? Secondly, is there a way of finding room for schools not to be included within the apprenticeship levy? Thirdly, given that our schools are looking after mental health, can we find a way to get some of the funding for that through their doors?

6.40 pm

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I shall be brief. I fully support funding every school in the same way, creating a level playing field for pupils across the country. In 2010, the Labour Government tried to implement a funding formula. At that time, it was £4,000, and most of it went on private finance initiative schemes, which was why it was never put forward. At a time when more than £40 billion is going into education—the highest amount spent in our history—we should be positive, rather than looking at the policy negatively. We should not have a system in which schools in some areas get less money per pupil, as that makes it harder for them to attract teachers and to put in place the support that students need. For too long, and for no real reason, the disparity of funding throughout the country has been ignored. I was proud to stand on a manifesto that pledged to change that.

I have looked at schoolcuts.org, which is run by the NUT and Association of Teachers and Lecturers unions. Quite frankly, it is irresponsible. Some of the figures on the site have been quoted in the Chamber today, but they have been plucked out of thin air. They are worked out by dividing the money for an area by the maximum money to be claimed per school—it never is—without taking the number of pupils into account. The website published information about areas and schools before the Department even announced any figures. It must have had luminaries and soothsayers like Nostradamus working for it. I am fed up of the unions politicking my children and constituency. There are heads in my area who are uniting the kids to make them strike and stay off school. Surprise, surprise—their schools did the worst in the area, and therefore lowered my area’s results in the national SATs, which is unforgivable.

To wrap up, I think that this is a very good move. I hope that the Government will implement the formula sooner rather than later to give all our children a fair fighting chance.

6.42 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): For the first time in a generation, schools will face spending cuts to their budgets—[Interruption] Right out of the gate, the Secretary of State is chuntering. In her authority area, that equates to a 15% cut, with £13 million coming out of her schools’ budgets by 2020. I look forward to campaigning in her constituency on this issue.

The Department expects schools to find £3 billion of savings in this Parliament to counteract cumulative cost pressures, including pay rises, the introduction of the national living wage, higher employer national insurance contributions, contributions to the teachers’ pension scheme and the apprenticeship levy, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) and Labour Members said. The hon. Gentleman is happy with the national funding formula, but I have to point out that his schools will receive an overall cut of 12% in this Parliament. We are talking about an 8% real-terms reduction in funding per pupil in this Parliament.

The Department regularly compiles a list of future policy changes that will affect schools, but it has no plans to assess the financial implications for schools of these changes. We have no assurances that the policy is affordable within current spending plans without adversely affecting educational outcomes. The Government are leaving schools and multi-academy trusts to manage the consequences individually. The Department has clearly not communicated to schools the scale and pace of the savings that will be needed to meet the expected cost pressures.

The proportion of maintained secondary schools spending more than their income increased last year from 33% to 59%—[Interruption. No matter what the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) says, this Government have racked up a £1.7 trillion debt on their watch and now want to pass on part of that debt to our school system. The Department expects much of the savings to come from procurement and the introduction of shared services. Changing procurement and shared services requires strong leadership, clear plans for achieving savings, effective risk management and support from stakeholders. That leadership is clearly lacking among the Government Members. The Minister himself has said that he is confident that pages of guidance on the Department’s website will provide enough support for schools—but it will not.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mike Kane: I have literally seconds left.

As the National Audit Office has suggested, school leaders who do not have support are likely to make decisions that make the teacher retention crisis worse. The NAO went on to say that the Government’s current “approach to managing the risks to schools’ financial sustainability cannot be judged to be effective or providing value for money”.

It is important to recognise the impact that the required efficiency savings will have on staff. We expect already unsustainable workload pressures to increase as staff efficiencies eventually start to bite. Moreover, the size of the savings that schools will have to find will lead to worse educational outcomes, and the biggest impact will be felt by those in the most deprived areas and those with special needs.

We know that staff costs represent any school’s largest expenditure—74% of schools’ budgets are spent on staff—so it is not hard to see that to save money over the next few years, schools will inevitably end up cutting back on staff. That will have a knock-on effect on workload, morale, class sizes and the breadth of the curriculum that schools can offer. All this is happening at a time when we are expecting a 3% increase in the number of children entering school.
A bad situation is compounded by the national funding formula. Some Conservative Members, who really missed the point, had been expecting “jam tomorrow” from the formula, which was a manifesto commitment, but now they are waking up to the reality that the schools in their constituency will not benefit from its introduction. Hardly any area is left unscathed. In their excellent speeches, the hon. Members for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) and for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) said that the funding formula was not the point; the point was the cuts and pressures faced by schools.

I ask the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire to speak to her hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), who completely missed the point. The House will have been astonished by the slap in the face for northern teachers, who are apparently not ambitious enough for their pupils, and that is from a Government who introduced the Weller report on raising standards.

Lucy Frazer: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my speech carefully, he would have understood that I was quoting the 2016 Ofsted report. Those were not my words; they were the words of Ofsted.

Mike Kane: It was a slap in the face, and the hon. and learned Lady’s authority in Cambridgeshire will face a 4% cut on top of all the other pressures that are going on.

The Tories are failing our children. They are overseeing the first real-terms cut in the schools budget for over two decades—indeed, since the 1970s, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh). By their own preferred measure on standards, we have declined in the world PISA—programme for international student assessment—rankings.

In a moment the Minister will stand up and either talk about synthetic phonics, or say that 1.8 million children are in better schools. That, of course, is because Labour identified those schools in 2010 and Ofsted came back to reassess them, and because there are now more children in the system—the primary system. This dire situation for our schools will only continue to get worse as a result of the Government’s cuts and their new funding formula.

6.48 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb): Of course, the PISA students who were tested in 2015 spent their primary school years being educated under a Labour Government, not under the reforms implemented by this Government.

This has been an important debate, featuring excellent contributions from Members in all parts of the House, at a time when the Government are consulting on the details and weightings of the factors that will make up the new national funding formula.

The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) launched our debate today with her joke about robbing Peterborough to pay Poole. Alas, her facts are as weak as her joke, because Peterborough will see a rise of 2.7% under the formula, an increase of £3.7 million, and Poole will also see a rise of some 1.1% under the formula. What we have learnt from Labour today is that it does not support the principle of equal funding on the basis of the same need, and half of Labour Members will see a net gain in funding as a result of the new formula, including the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), where funding will increase by £1.7 million, with an extra £1.2 million for schools in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne. I will not give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) asked us to look again at the deprivation block. The proportion of the formula that we have applied for deprivation reflects what local authorities are already doing across the country at the moment. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) asked about high-needs funding; Liverpool is due to gain 14.4% in high-needs funding under the formula, with increases of 3% per year in 2018-19 and again in 2019-20.

My hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) was right to say that the new national funding formula is resulting in the cake being cut a little more fairly. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) was right to point out the flaw in Labour’s motion. The Government are not cutting school spending; it is at an all-time high.

I welcome the constructive and supportive speeches from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), and my hon. Friends the Members for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham), for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), for Newark (Robert Jenrick), for Solihull (Julian Knight), for Rugby (Mark Pawsley), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colville), for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) and for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris).

In our manifesto, we promised to remedy the unfair and anachronistic funding system that no longer reflects the genuine needs of pupils and schools. It had become atrophied on the basis of factors as they stood in 2005, rather than the make-up of the student population today: an outdated system, fixed in amber where a pupil in Brighton and Hove secured £1,600 more than a pupil in East Sussex, with countless other examples of unfairness up and down the country.

On top of this, there is a factor for deprivation, ensuring that schools are able to close the educational attainment gap between those from wealthier and poorer backgrounds. There is also a factor for low prior attainment, ensuring that schools are able to help children who start school educationally behind their peers. There is a factor for sparsity, addressing cost pressures unique to rural schools. There is a mobility factor for schools that routinely take pupils part way through the year. There is a lump sum to help address the fixed costs that disproportionately affect small schools. And there is a
factor that takes into account higher employment costs in London and some other areas.

These are the right factors, as responses to the first stage of the consultation confirmed. They are the right factors because they will help drive our education reforms to the school curriculum, which are already resulting in higher academic standards and raised expectations. They will further drive our determination that all children, regardless of background or ability, will be well on their way to becoming fluent readers by the age of six, which 81% of six-year-olds are now, compared with just 58% five years ago. They are the factors that will help further drive the introduction of new, more academically demanding, knowledge-based GCSEs, putting our public exams and qualifications on a par with the best in the world.

As part of our consultation, we wanted to be transparent about the effects of the new formula on every school and every local authority on the basis of this year's figures, and 54% of schools will gain under the new formula. But with any new formula there will be winners and losers. Even within local authority areas that gain overall, some schools with few of the factors that drive the additional funding will see small losses in income. That is the nature of any new formula, built on whatever basis or weightings—unless, of course, the new formula maintains the status quo.

Accepting that a new formula, by definition, produces winners and losers, accepting that we will ensure that the losing schools lose no more than 1.5% per pupil in any year and no more than 3% in total, accepting that the gaining schools will see their gains expedited by up to 3% in 2018-19 and by up to 2.5% in 2019-20, and accepting in principle that the factors of deprivation and low prior attainment are right, what is left is the question whether the weightings are right. These weightings are crafted to drive social mobility. They are calculated to help children who are falling behind at school, and they are motivated by our desire to do more for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The national funding formula is not about the overall level of school funding or the cost pressures that schools are facing over the three years from 2016-17 to 2019-20. The formula is about creating a nationally delivered and fair school funding system. We wanted to grasp the nettle—a nettle that previous Governments have assiduously avoided—and introduce a new national funding formula, ending the postcode lottery and ensuring that over time we have a much fairer funding system.

Despite all the pressures to tackle the budget deficit that we inherited from the last Labour Government—an essential task if we are to continue to deliver the strong economic growth, the high levels of employment and the employment opportunities for young people that we want—we have managed to protect core school spending. With them the additional needs funding. We will look at this, and at all the other concerns that right hon. and hon. Members have raised.

This Government are taking the bold decision, and the right decision. We are acting to right the wrongs of a seemingly arbitrary and deeply unfair funding system. Over the past seven years, while fixing the economy, the Government have transformed the education system. We have ended grade inflation, breathing confidence back into our public exams. Effective teaching methods such as Asian-style maths mastery and systematic synthetic phonics are revolutionising the way in which primary pupils are being taught.

More pupils are being taught the core academic subjects that facilitate study at this country’s world-leading universities. Some 1.8 million more pupils are now in schools judged by Ofsted to be “good” or “outstanding”. The attainment gap between disadvantaged 16-year-olds and their better-off peers has closed by 7%. That is a record to be proud of.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): You can’t take it. You can’t stand the truth.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Mr Gove, I think you need to calm a little. A little peppermint tea might help.

The House divided: Ayes 178, Noes 285.

Division No. 133

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Alin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Baron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomefield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Keeley, Barbara
Kane, Mike
Jones, Susan Elan
Jones, Helen
Jarvis, Dan
Hussain, Imran
Johnson, rh Mr Alan
Johnson, rh Alan
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kinahan, Danny
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Levis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Ian C.
Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Mahnotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Mr John
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mearns, Ian
Milliband, rh Edward
Mulholland, Greg
Nandy, Lisa
Olney, Sarah
O’Neill, Charlie
Onn, Melanie
Onurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, rh Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Robinson, rh Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Sheerman, rh Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiqi, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slagger, Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Cat
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Speller, rh Mr John
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, rh Mr Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomason, Nick
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turley, Anna
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valentine
Watson, Mr Tom
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Mr Mark
Winnick, Mr David
Woodcock, John
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeff Smith and Jessica Morden

NOES
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Dovey-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evennett, rh David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garner, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Glen, John
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, rh Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halden, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
That the death of James Gilbey in a hit and run on a pelican crossing is appalling; further that the driver who killed James was racing another car at speeds in excess of 90mph in a 40mph residential zone; further that the impact ( adjudged to be 80mph ) was such that James landed 70m down the road and was killed instantly; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; 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further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon;}
Rifleman Lee Bagley: MOD Duty of Care

Motion made, and question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Guy Opperman.)

7.15 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I have secured this debate following the experience of one of my constituent’s, former rifleman Lee Bagley, of No. 5 Platoon, B Company of the 2nd Battalion the Rifles. Former rifleman Lee Bagley had his right leg amputated below the knee in September 2012 following an incident that took place on the night of 24-25 February 2010. His experience during the 31 months between the date of incident and the amputation highlights issues of duty of care, which he and I believe need to be examined, and lessons that need to be learned to ensure that no serviceman has to go through the experience that he has had to endure.

Rifleman Lee Bagley returned from a tour of Afghanistan towards the end of 2009 and subsequently underwent further training in Northern Ireland. On 24 February 2010, the platoon was accommodated by the infantry school at Brecon to rendezvous with platoon commanders before flying to Belize at 5pm on 25 February 2010 to undergo jungle training.

On the afternoon of 24 February, the commander ordered the platoon to attend a night out in Brecon town as a reward for having completed an intensive training package in preparation for the forthcoming exercise and to benefit from some team bonding, particularly for those new members of the platoon who had just completed a strenuous tour in Afghanistan.

On the morning of 25 February, at approximately 2am, the platoon was leaving a bar and getting into taxis to head back to Dering Lines, the local barracks, when one of the platoon members was seriously assaulted by 10 to 12 civilian personnel. Along with fellow members of the platoon, Lee Bagley rushed to the aid of his colleague and was also assaulted. A number of the attackers jumped on Lee’s leg. The original victim of the assault went immediately to accident and emergency, but Lee returned to his camp. He did not receive any immediate medical treatment and it was only later that day that he started to complain about the pain and swelling in his leg to his platoon commander who took him to accident and emergency en route to visiting his colleague who was already in hospital.

The platoon subsequently flew out without Lee. Lee was then flown to Ballykinler barracks in Northern Ireland for 24 hours, because his sick-at-home grading in that appointment. That raises a significant issue. Lee Bagley’s injuries required the appointment of a PRO, but that did not happen.

On 27 October 2010, Lee Bagley was sent home on sick leave for the next five months. He was, in his words, “sofa surfing with his mom or partner's family at their homes” in the Black country. During that time he had great difficulty accessing information on his future treatment. Some of his telephone calls to his unit in Northern Ireland went unanswered, and when he did get through he was told that he would be informed in due course. After three months, he was asked to return to Northern Ireland for 24 hours, because his sick-at-home grading was due to expire. He then returned home.

When Lee Bagley eventually obtained an appointment for 4 February 2011 at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court in Surrey, he did not receive the correspondence, so he missed it. He eventually had a revised appointment on 25 February. From 27 October 2010 to 25 February 2011, he was at home waiting for that appointment. That raises a significant issue. Lee Bagley had complex injuries that were not obviously responding to treatment. Why was he sent home without access to specialist support for that length of time? Every day in the national health service, we hear tales of people who are unable to leave hospital because of inadequate intermediary care, but here we have an example of a soldier who was sent home without a fixed abode and with no access to the specialist support that his condition warranted.

That appears to be in complete contravention of the advice given in the Army General Administrative Instruction volume 3, chapter 99, Command And Care Of Wounded Injured And Sick Personnel, section 99.111a, which states: “Soldier at Home or Resident Address. The first recovery visit must be completed by the end of Day 7. No more than 14 days may elapse between subsequent visits.”

Again, this clearly did not take place.

The Army website outlines what needs to be done for soldiers with long-term injuries:

“Soldiers who are likely to need more than 56 days to recover will be graded as Temporarily Non-Effective (TNE). At this point units can also apply for the soldier to be transferred to a Personnel
Recovery Unit (PRU), where the soldier can receive dedicated recovery support rather than remaining on their home unit’s strength.”

Surely he should have been classed as TNE by 27 October and an application should have been made for transfer to a PRU. That did not happen until 14 November 2011, the following year, when he was assigned to the PRU at 143 Brigade in Telford.

Lee Bagley eventually had his amputation on 28 September 2012, nearly a year later. He subsequently had one month at Tidworth House, and then further admissions at Headley Court. He was discharged from the Army in 2014 after a year of complex trauma admissions and prosthetic care. I must make it clear that his criticisms of his treatment do not extend to the period after 14 November 2011, when he was allocated to the PRU, and his subsequent discharge; he has nothing but praise for the exercise of the duty of care that he received once he had been admitted to the PRU. However, he does feel—this seems to be backed up by the evidence—that for six months he was a forgotten man.

This is someone who was injured coming to the rescue of a comrade who had been severely assaulted. If it had happened in theatre, he would have been praised and possibly given a formal commendation. Instead, he went back to his barracks and received no attention at all, until it became obvious that he needed to go to hospital. Subsequently, it took almost a year, both in hospital in Northern Ireland and then at home on sick leave, before he was admitted to Headley Court in Surrey. It was then another six months before he was admitted to the personnel recovery unit.

It seems unbelievable that there was such a delay for injuries that were serious enough ultimately to justify amputation. Whether the delays in admission to the PRU contributed to the amputation is a matter of clinical judgment. Even if it did not, any soldier going through that experience is entitled to believe that the Army would exercise its duty of care with the utmost professionalism and diligence, and that everything possible would be done to prevent the loss of his limb. Lee Bagley’s experience from 27 October 2010 to 14 November 2011 has left him with severe doubts that that is so.

Lee Bagley is entitled to know: why he was not appointed a personnel recovery officer earlier in his treatment programme; why he was sent home without any support; why he found it so difficult to obtain information while at home; why he did not receive the dedicated personnel support that he was entitled to; and why it took so long for the duty of care to be transferred to the PRU. He deserves answers to those questions.

I am sure that everyone recognises that our young people who join the armed services, exposing themselves to danger in order to protect us, deserve and have the right to expect the best possible medical care, whether in theatre or in other circumstances.

Every soldier injured, whether in battle or on other duties, should be able to have confidence that the medical response will be exercised with the utmost professionalism and diligence, and that everything possible will be done to secure recovery. That is why I have secured an Adjournment debate. Our soldiers have the right to expect the best possible care in any circumstance. I do not want the experience Lee Bagley has endured to be repeated for anyone else.

The Army has a huge volume of regulations covering the processes designed to deliver the best possible medical support, but somehow, despite all the regulations and guidance, Lee Bagley failed to get the support he needed. He and I hope that raising these issues on the Floor of the House will ensure that, in future, these regulations are implemented in a way that can be recognised by the patient and that secures the confidence of the public.

7.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): It is a pleasure to respond, and I start, of course, by congratulating the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) on obtaining this debate about his constituent, ex-Rifleman Lee Bagley, and the Ministry of Defence’s duty of care following an injury he sustained during a night out in Breen on 24 February 2010. Perhaps I may also take this opportunity to remind the House of my interest as a member of the Army Reserve.

I should like to begin by offering my personal sympathies to Mr Bagley. The injury he suffered has had a profound and life-changing impact on him. I can only begin to imagine the pain and anguish he has been through.

Let me turn to the specific points raised. The hon. Gentleman will recall our correspondence back in 2015, when he wrote to me about this case. In particular, his constituent raised similar concerns to those that have been raised today, and I advised at the time that, should Mr Bagley feel there were failings in the way his unit treated him, he should consider raising them through a formal service complaint. I advised that although such a complaint would be outside the usually permitted time limit of three months, Mr Bagley was able to make representations about why his complaint was not submitted within the time limit. My officials advise that Mr Bagley has so far not submitted a service complaint—something he is still within his rights to do. I take this opportunity to encourage Mr Bagley to submit a complaint, and I would certainly be pleased if it were admitted, because it would be appropriate to address this issue through the independent service complaints ombudsman.

I am sure the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that, given that the events in this sequence occurred up to seven years ago, and given the time available to prepare for this debate, it is difficult to piece together without an investigation—something that could be done by the service complaints ombudsman—the detail of every decision and action that was or was not taken by Mr Bagley’s unit. There are a number of factors that make things difficult, not least the changeover of unit staff since 2010. I am not, therefore, in a position to determine during this debate, at relatively short notice, whether the care provided to Mr Bagley by his unit was sufficient or to address the specific questions the hon. Gentleman raised at the end of his speech.

The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that 2009 and 2010 were particularly tough years in the Afghanistan conflict, and Mr Bagley’s unit, the 2nd Battalion the Rifles, was at the heart of the action. Very sadly, this meant it suffered a significant number of fatalities and casualties during that period. I am not trying to make excuses, but those are the facts as they stand.

What is clear, however, is that the Army has in place specific guidelines, as outlined by the hon. Gentleman, regarding the command and care of wounded, injured
and sick personnel. These are set out in Army General Administrative Instruction, volume 3, chapter 99. AGAI 99 has been updated a number of times since 2010, but a brief outline of the timelines within which wounded, injured and sick personnel can expect to be looked after is as follows. Service personnel should be recorded on the wounded, injured and sick management information system on day 14 of their sickness, and a unit recovery officer assigned. On day 21 of sickness, the first visit of the unit recovery officer should have been completed. Personnel should have regular recovery visits thereafter, with no more than 14 days between visits, and a unit care review meeting every 28 days to review the case. If the individual remains sick at the 56-day point, they should be graded as temporarily non-effective. Clearly and unequivocally, it is unacceptable if this policy is not properly followed. If an individual feels that their chain of command is not complying with it, they should raise a complaint.

Mr Bagley was injured at a time when the MOD had acknowledged that it could and should do even more to help not only our wounded, injured and sick personnel, who deserve nothing but the best care, but to ensure that those who were caring for and administering them were appropriately resourced. That is why in 2010 we began developing the defence recovery capability—an MOD-led initiative delivered in partnership with Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion, alongside other service charities and agencies. The defence recovery capability ensures that wounded, injured and sick armed forces personnel have access to the key services and resources they need to help them either return to duty or make a smooth transition into civilian life.

It is only right and proper that where personnel are injured while carrying out their duties, or develop an illness that can be linked to their service in the armed forces, they are properly compensated. Such circumstances are covered by the armed forces compensation scheme, which provides compensation for any injury, illness or death caused by service on or after 6 April 2005. The war pension scheme compensates for incidents up to this date. The rules of the scheme are not prescriptive in terms of when awards can be made—they allow for a variety of circumstances—but the key is whether the injury or illness has been caused by service. Personnel do of course have a right of appeal if their claim under the scheme is turned down or they are unhappy with the level of award made.

Despite the concerns raised by the hon. Gentleman, I understand that Mr Bagley’s injury was sustained during a night out—in other words, he was off duty. There is no evidence that he was compelled by the service to go out for the evening in question. As a consequence, his claim under the armed forces compensation scheme was rejected, and this decision was subsequently upheld by the first-tier tribunal.

I should stress at this point that when a member of the armed forces has to be medically discharged, as in Lee Bagley’s case, the armed forces compensation scheme is not the only means by which they can receive financial assistance from the Ministry of Defence. Personnel can also receive an ill-health pension under the armed forces pension scheme, irrespective of whether their injury or illness that led to them being medically discharged was attributable to their service. I can confirm that Mr Bagley is in receipt of such a pension.

Mr Bailey: It is perfectly true that, parallel to this issue, ex-Rifleman Lee Bagley has been pursuing compensation, but I deliberately focused my comments on the duty of care rather than the legalistic process that surrounds the compensation issue, and that is what I really want brought out today.

Mark Lancaster: That is a perfectly reasonable intervention. I hope that I have already explained to the hon. Gentleman how, since 2010, quite a lot has been done through the development of the pathways that we have discussed. The great joy of these debates is that they are an opportunity for the House to discuss, using individual cases, the fact that we do have a duty of care and how the system can be improved.

It would be wrong of me to close without stating that the Ministry of Defence ensures that armed forces personnel can serve safe in the knowledge that when they leave active service they will be well supported to translate their acquired skills, experience and qualifications into the second career they aspire to. Personnel who are medically discharged are entitled to the highest level of resettlement provision through the Career Transition Partnership’s core resettlement programme. The MOD also offers specialised support for wounded, injured and sick personnel, and those with the most complex barriers to employment, to ensure that they receive the most appropriate support within their recovery pathway.

I can confirm that Mr Bagley made full use of the Career Transition Partnership, and that the assistance it provided helped him to secure employment immediately after leaving the British Army. That said, I know that no level of practical help or compensation could ever make up for the distress and turmoil that he has suffered as a result of his injuries. I should like to close by reiterating my sincere sympathy for him.

Question put and agreed to.

7.39 pm

House adjourned.
Deferred Division

FINANCIAL SERVICES

That the draft Bank of England and Financial Services (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2017, which were laid before this House on 2 December 2016, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 191.

Division No. 131]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afireyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Anskis, Caroline
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriet
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berr, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Sir Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Mr Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Sir Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brooke, Sir Peter
Brooke, Sir Peter
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Sir Nicholas
Burns, Sir Peter
Burrowes, Mr David
Cairns, Sir Alistair
Cairns, Sir Alistair
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Carkeh, pyloros
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chishi, Sir Heman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleaver, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Therese
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crouch, Thelay
Danczuz, Simon
Davies, Chris
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hemman, Lady
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollower, MMr Philip
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howlett, Ben
Hudson, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, rh Sir Bernard
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Mr Julian
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Loughton, Tim
Macikinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Morrer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw Matt
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Miller, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Moris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Pate, rh Prti
Paton, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Philip, Chris
Pickle, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prettis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quine, Will
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Sandbach, Antoinette
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Alok
Shehbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturde, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swaine, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tomlinson, Justin
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
De Piero, Gloria
Day, Martyn
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Creagh, Mary
Crombie, Jon
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Day, Martyn
De Piero, Gloria
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Warman, Matt
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Williams, Craig
Williamson, Mr Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wilson, Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wragg, William
Wright, Mr Jeremy

Deferral Division

25 JANUARY 2017

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alexander, Heidi
Arkless, Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, Sir Kevin
Beckett, Rh Margaret
Benn, Rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blackford, Ian
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blenkinsop, Tom
Boswell, Philip
Bradshaw, Mrs Eleanor
Braun, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Butler, Dawn
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, Mr Alan
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Cleave, Rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Corbyn, Rh Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Creagh, Mary
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Day, Martyn
De Piero, Gloria
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Dowd, Jim
Dowd, Peter
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Ellord, Clive
Elliot, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Rh Chris
Fellows, Rh Margaret
Ferrier, Margaret
Field, Rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Rh John
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, Rh Caroline
Flyn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Glindon, Rh Mary
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Rh Peter
Gray, Neil
Greenwood, Rh Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Hanson, Mr David
Harman, Rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Healey, Rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Rh Stephen
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollett, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, Rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Rh Alan
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Susan Elan
Keevan, Tony
Kerr, Calum
Kyle, Peter
Lamb, Rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Rh Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Long, Rh Bailey
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Rh Angus Brendan
Mactaggart, Rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marris, Rh Rob
Marsden, Gordon
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Rh John
McCaig, Callum
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McFadden, Rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Rh Liz
McMahon, Rh Jim
Means, Ian
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Mr Paul
Morden, Jessica
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
O’Brien, Rh Onn
O’Neill, Rh Mairead
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owen, Rh Albert
Paterson, Steven
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Pugh, John
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Rees, Christina
Reynolds, Emma
Ritchie, Rh Margaret
Robertson, Rh Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Ryan, Rh Joan
Saville, Rh Roberts
Shah, Naz
Sheerman, Rh Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Rh Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Rh Cat
Smith, Rh Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Rh Karin
Spellar, Rh Mr John
Starmer, Keir
Stephens, Rh Chris
Streeting, Rh Wes
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Rh Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Rh Nick
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, Rh Stephen
Turley, Anna
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Vaz, Rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Weir, Rh Mike
West, Rh Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Mr Mark
Winnick, Rh David
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Question accordingly agreed to.
Mr Jones: The hon. Lady is right that the farming sector is extremely important. The Government have already put in place measures to ensure that the current level of EU funding is protected until 2020, the end of the multi-annual financial framework period. Furthermore, I think that she should have more confidence in the sector. British agriculture produces some of the finest products in the world, and I have no doubt that the arrangements that are put in place will ensure that they continue to thrive in the international market.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I ask my right hon. Friend how the Government will approach the regulations and directives that will be created and implemented between now and the date we leave the European Union? We probably have no intention of keeping those regulations or directives, such as the ban on glyphosate. The National Farmers Union is very clear that that measure will be very damaging to British agriculture. Will we have to implement it before we leave?

Mr Jones: The Government have made it absolutely clear that, until the date of our departure, we will continue to play a full part in the European Union, which does mean observing all the regulations that are implemented. The great repeal Bill will absorb the body of EU law into British law. Once we have left the European Union, we will be in a position to review all that legislation and take the decisions that are best for British agriculture.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): At this moment in time, the UK Government are withholding nearly £200 million of convergence uplift money that is meant to go to Scottish farmers. Does the Minister agree that the Government should pass that on to Scottish farmers to ensure that they will not be left even more high and dry if there is a hard Tory Brexit?

Mr Jones: I do not recognise that description. The British Government are engaging extremely closely not only with the Scottish Government, but with the Scottish farming unions. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, whatever deal we do, it will be in the interest of Scotland as much as the rest of the United Kingdom.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): Some studies on the future of agricultural policy, such as a recent one by the Centre for Policy Studies, rather downplay the importance of food security. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that food security remains at the top of the Government’s agenda? A shock to the system could completely destroy existing trading links and leave the country in a very vulnerable position.

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. British agricultural standards are among the highest in the world, and I assure him that the Government will do nothing to jeopardise the reputation that British farming enjoys.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Almost 40% of EU funds are spent on the common agricultural policy, so it is clear that supporting farming is a central aim of the European Union. Will the Minister comment on the
schemes that the Government are considering as replacements for the CAP to reflect the importance of farming to the UK?

Mr Jones: The hon. Lady will know that the Government have already guaranteed the current level of CAP funding until 2020. I assure her that the Government will make sure that the interests of agriculture are at the very forefront of our calculations. British agriculture is a huge asset to this country, and we intend to protect it.

UK-EU Relationship

2. Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): When he plans to publish the Government’s plan for the UK’s relationship with the EU after the UK has left the EU.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): I ask the House to forgive my voice. It is just wear and tear, not emotion.

The Prime Minister’s speech set out a comprehensive plan that includes all our central negotiating objectives. She confirmed yesterday that we will publish the plan in a White Paper. It will answer key questions that have been asked on our approach to the single market, the customs union and the type of trading relationship we are seeking. It will be widely welcomed as a serious and ambitious vision of a new, positive and constructive partnership for Britain and the European Union that will be good for Britain and good for the rest of Europe.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but will he please explain to the aerospace industry, the health service, the universities and other major employers in my constituency, which account for thousands of jobs, how they should have confidence in this country’s ability to negotiate beneficial trade deals when we have barely any specialist trade negotiators and we have had no experience of negotiating trade agreements for decades?

Mr Davis: It does not help the hon. Lady’s own industries, which are very important, if she talks them down. Let me say to the Opposition that it is not only the Government who think this deal is eminently achievable. Just recently, a former EU Trade Commissioner said that the trade deal between the UK and EU can be done in a “very reasonable” period of time—[Interruption.] Let me get to the point. He said:

“I am reading everywhere that it takes five, six, seven…years to do a trade negotiation… Yes that’s true—but it’s not for technical reasons, it’s because you can’t get an agreement. Technically you could make an agreement within a very reasonable period of time because we know each other.”

The point he was making is that there is not a technical constraint, and there are quite enough negotiators in Whitehall to do the job we are talking about.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Will the White Paper highlight the words of article 50, which says that the Union must “negotiate and conclude an agreement…taking account of the framework for its future relationship” with the UK? It is therefore impossible to start negotiations unless one has an outline agreement on what that framework should be. Only two frameworks are possible—a continuation of free trade, or a move to trading on most favoured nation terms. Will we press our partners to clarify that right at the beginning of the negotiations?

Mr Davis: We already have done. In my one meeting with Mr Barnier, he talked about a sequential approach, which does not seem practical to me. It really is not possible to reach an outcome on either of the negotiations without a clear idea of the trade aspect of the negotiations. My right hon. Friend’s description is pretty accurate. I have said in terms that we intend all of this to be concluded within the two years.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Government say they want nothing further to do with the European Court of Justice but, as the Secretary of State well knows, in any new free trade agreement with the 27 member states there will have to be a legal arbitration mechanism whose rulings we will be obliged to implement. If the European Court of Justice is not acceptable, what court would be?

Mr Davis: It would not necessarily be a court. The right hon. Gentleman is quite right that most international—[Interruption.] Listen to the answer. Most international trade agreements have an arbitration mechanism, and that mechanism is normally preceded by a mediation mechanism, which is used more often. In the case of the Canada arbitration mechanism, for example, three people—one from each side and one neutral—are appointed by agreement. It is a fall-back if agreement cannot be reached, and it is a simple arbitration mechanism. There is all the difference in the world between a simple arbitration mechanism and a Court that reaches into every nook and cranny of your society.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I very much thank the Secretary of State for the part that I know he played in securing the White Paper, which has been welcomed across the House and is good news. Will he now tell us when it might be published and how much time this place will have to debate it?

Mr Davis: Of course, the decision to publish the White Paper was a decision solely of the Prime Minister, but it is nice to be able to agree with myself from six months ago. On the timing, the Prime Minister said yesterday that it would be published in due course. We will be as expeditious as we can, but it takes time. My right hon. Friend has been in government, and she knows, in any new free trade agreement with the 27 member states there will have to be a legal arbitration mechanism, and that mechanism is normally preceded by a mediation mechanism, which is used more often. In the case of the Canada arbitration mechanism, for example, three people—one from each side and one neutral—are appointed by agreement. It is a fall-back if agreement cannot be reached, and it is a simple arbitration mechanism. There is all the difference in the world between a simple arbitration mechanism and a Court that reaches into every nook and cranny of your society.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I hope that the Secretary of State gets his voice back because he will need it over the next couple of weeks. Does he think that we should be able to see the White Paper before we consider legislation?

Mr Davis: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, those are slightly separate issues. There will be lots of legislation. I assume—I will look at him to see whether he nods—that he is referring to the article 50 legislation.

Stephen Gethins indicated assent.
Mr Davis: He is. The article 50 legislation is about carrying out the will of the British people—the decision was taken on 23 June. There will be much more legislation after that, which will relate to policy and the maintenance of European law. There will be the great repeal Bill, but also other new primary legislation arising from all that. The White Paper will certainly be before all that and, as I said, I will be as expeditious as possible.

Stephen Gethins: Mr Speaker, you will be aware of how helpful the House of Commons website is. It says: “White Papers are policy documents produced by the Government that set out their proposals for future legislation.” Given that article 50 is a significant piece of legislation and this House deserves to scrutinise it, will the Secretary of State commit to publishing the White Paper before the Committee stage—I will give him next week, but before the Committee stage?

Mr Davis: As I said, we will be as expeditious as we can. However, I reiterate that article 50 legislation is about putting in place only the beginning of the procedure that was decided by the British people last year. That is not really conditional on the other policy aspects of this but, as I said, I will be as expeditious as I can.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): In welcoming this decision, may I ask my right hon. Friend which, if any Select Committee Chairmen have expressed an interest in having the White Paper published with the intention of scrutinising it?

Mr Davis: I am pretty sure that the Brexit Committee—I am looking at the Chairman, but he is not paying attention—expressed an interest, but I cannot think of any others.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): I am concerned by some of the responses of the Secretary of State, who seemed to be bursting with enthusiasm for the White Paper. Now it seems that we may not get it as soon as we need it. Given the level of interest in the legislation and the amendments that will be tabled, we need the White Paper before the Committee stage of the Bill. Will he make sure that we get it?

Mr Davis: How do you deal with an Opposition that will not take yes for an answer? I have said that we will deal with the White Paper and produce it as expeditiously—as quickly—as possible. What can you do faster than that?

Jenny Chapman: Well, the Secretary of State can work as fast as he can I suppose, but we need the White Paper before the Committee stage. When we get it, will it be a cut-and-paste of the Prime Minister’s speech, or will we have assessments of the financial impact of different options on this country?

Mr Davis: As I said at the beginning, the Prime Minister’s speech—one of the clearest expositions of national policy that I have heard in many years—answered all the questions that the Opposition and the Brexit Committee raised other than those that would actively undermine our negotiating position. The Opposition, of course, tabled a motion that said, “We will not undermine our negotiating position.” It is right that they expect us to obey the rules of the House, but they should do so, too.

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, may I point out that there are a lot of questions on the Order Paper that I am keen to reach, but exchanges at the moment are quite ponderous? We need to speed up a bit.

Support for Agriculture

4. Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with farmers’ representatives on support for agriculture after the UK leaves the EU.

18. Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues, as part of the preparations for the negotiations on the UK leaving the EU, on support for farmers.

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): We have an unprecedented opportunity to redesign our policies to ensure that our agricultural industry is competitive, productive and profitable and that our environment is protected for future generations. I regularly meet farmers’ representatives from all over the United Kingdom as well as my ministerial colleagues.

Sir Henry Bellingham: Does the Minister agree that, post-Brexit, there are two key priorities for agriculture? First, we need to devise a system of support for the rural economy that does not contain the current levels of EU bureaucracy, which is so expensive. If we achieve that, does he agree that we could then maintain the current levels of support for the rural economy?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Once we have left the European Union, we will be able to redesign our policies to suit the needs of British agriculture. That should lead to a significant reduction in red tape and, as he rightly says, a significant reduction in costs.

Chris Elmore: In the Prime Minister’s speech last week, she failed to mention anything about the agricultural sector. When the Minister publishes the White Paper, will he guarantee that the farming, fisheries and agricultural sector is a key element of it, as the industry really needs assurances of support once we have left the EU?

Mr Jones: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the agricultural industry is indeed at the forefront of our calculations. As I said earlier, we consult regularly with the farming unions from all over the UK, including Wales, and indeed I will meet the Farmers Union of Wales on Saturday. Any suggestion that we are not listening to the farming industry is unfounded.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Will the Minister ensure that the new system of farm support rewards the highest standards of animal welfare?

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend also makes an important point. The United Kingdom is noted throughout the world for its high standards of animal welfare and I have no doubt that the Government will wish to preserve that reputation in the forthcoming legislation.
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Farmers are worried that crops will rot in the ground without a seasonal workers scheme. Will that be included in the promised White Paper?

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes another important point. The farming industry is reliant, to a certain extent, on seasonal agricultural workers. As he knows, a seasonal agricultural workers scheme existed until fairly recently, and that is one of the models that the Government are considering.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I urge my hon. Friend to address the issue of incoming individuals and the controls as soon as possible because one of the big issues—which my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) has already touched on—is the concern about access to global talent. We need to reassure the City and others that the high added value, low volume numbers that come in are welcome: it is the low skilled who are using British benefits who are not very welcome.

Mr Walker: My right hon. Friend is right about the importance of attracting global talent for key industries, such as our financial services sector and the FinTech industry, with which I met earlier this week.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Manufacturing companies in the aerospace and automotive sectors are worried about potential delays at the border and customs duties when we leave the EU. The Secretary of State, and the Prime Minister in her speech, suggested that associate membership of the customs union might be possible. Will the Minister confirm that, unless that associate membership covers most sectors of our economy, it will fall foul of World Trade Organisation rules?

Mr Walker: The Prime Minister has talked about aiming for a frictionless system in which we can agree not to have tariffs or barriers, which is something we should all be aiming for in a new partnership between the UK and the EU.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): In the light of the Prime Minister’s clear statement and the observations of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), does the Minister believe that it might be sensible to set out, at an early date, the rules that will obtain for attracting high-quality and highly skilled talent into the UK?

Mr Walker: In the light of the Prime Minister’s speech and her ambition to create stability and certainty through this process, the sooner we can come forward with those proposals, the better.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Far from being a clear exposition of policy, the Prime Minister’s appeal for a hybrid customs arrangement with Europe sadly raised far more questions than it answered. Will the forthcoming White Paper expand on her remarks and provide businesses across the country with the clarity that they need about how the alternative arrangements might affect them?

Mr Walker: The Prime Minister’s statement has given welcome clarity to businesses and was welcomed by many business groups, but of course we expect the White Paper to set out more detail. We must also, however, protect our negotiating interests throughout the process, as the House has repeatedly instructed us to do.

Government Negotiations

6. Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure a flexible approach in the Government’s negotiations on the UK leaving the EU.

Mr Walker: Our Department, working with officials across government, continues to undertake a wide range of analysis, covering the entirety of the UK economy and our trading relationships with the EU. We are looking at more than 50 sectors, as well as cross-cutting regulatory issues. We want to ensure that British businesses have the maximum freedom to trade with and operate within European markets, and to let European businesses do the same in Britain. We believe a strong partnership and a good deal on market access are in the interests of both the UK and the EU.

Richard Graham: While we will bring in more immigration controls, the ability for key sectors such as aerospace, health and financial services to bring in or relocate skills and talent from different countries is important to their success and our industrial and export strategy. What reassurances can my hon. Friend give about such businesses?

Mr Walker: I know that my hon. Friend is a champion for the aerospace businesses along the M5 corridor and helps them in his role as a global trade envoy for our Prime Minister. As she said, we want the UK “to be a secure, prosperous and tolerant country—a magnet for international talent and home to the pioneers and innovators who will shape the world ahead.”

We will continue to attract the brightest and the best to work and study in Britain. Indeed, openness to international talent must remain one of this country’s most distinctive assets, but that has to be managed properly so that our immigration system serves the national interest.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What will the Minister do to ensure that research leaders from EU countries can continue to take positions at UK research institutions after we leave the EU?

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman raises an important question and I have had a number of valuable meetings with the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation and the Higher Education Funding Council for England to address exactly that issue. We recognise the concerns of the sector and that we need to continue to focus on having an immigration system that attracts the brightest and the best.
The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): Flexibility is important in such complex negotiations, which will require imagination on both sides, and not everybody will be able to know everything at every stage. That is why we have to set out our strategic aim for a new partnership with the EU, encompassing a bold and ambitious trading relationship, and it is also why we will not get drawn into setting out every detail of our negotiating strategy or laying out red lines. Doing so would tie the Government’s hands and make it harder for us to achieve the right deal for the UK, which I presume is what everybody in the House wants.

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) reminded the House that article 50 requires the EU to take account of any future relationship that an independent Britain might have with it as we negotiate the declaration of our independence. Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that as we negotiate our independence, we should also show generosity to the EU27 by continuing to offer them access to our market on a free trade basis?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend is exactly right; we have made it clear that that is our intention. It is one of the reasons, I believe, why the Prime Minister’s speech has been received with such applause around the rest of Europe. I will quote, if I can find it—

Mr Speaker: Briefly.

Mr Davis: In that case I will not quote it, Mr Speaker. The quote is rather long, so I will leave it. I simply say that I agree with my right hon. Friend.

Mr Speaker: Splendid.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Secretary of State has repeatedly said that he can maintain flexibility and give the House a say through the great repeal Bill, but that only covers things in legislation. When will the House be able to consider the value of the EU agencies and the cost of setting up new UK ones?

Mr Davis: That is precisely the sort of thing that might well come up in legislation. In dealing with these EU agencies, we will seek the best outcome in each case for the relevant sector. When doing so, we will of course talk to the House about the costs and benefits of various options, but we will do that when it is appropriate for the House to know, not while we are in the middle of the detailed negotiations.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): In seeking a clean Brexit, we want to be as flexible as possible in negotiating the continuation of our membership of a free trade area, but does the Secretary of State agree that such an agreement might not be forthcoming and that therefore we must be prepared for a situation in which some form of duties might be necessary? Does he also agree that it is perfectly possible in the modern era, with digital technology, to have the border as a part of the journey, rather than a hard border of old?

Mr Davis: Given the constituency that my hon. Friend represents, he will know that better than most people. I understand exactly what he is getting at; he is absolutely right.

11. [908401] Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): There will be a temptation for the Government to think that this is just about Government-to-Government conversations, but would it not be useful for them to look at this as a Parliament-to-Parliament negotiation as well, so that we might all start lobbying together to secure the best possible deal for this country?

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Just say no.

Mr Davis: I am not going to say definitely no to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant); on the contrary, he knows my prejudices—I think that is probably the right word—but it is for Parliament to decide what Parliament wants to do. The essential responsibility for the negotiation is quite properly the Government’s, and the Opposition—indeed, everyone in the House—will hold us to account for that. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman is right that there is a role for Parliaments to talk to other Parliaments about the joint interests of their constituents, and in that respect he has my support.

Single Market Access

7. Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): What his priorities are during negotiations on the UK leaving the EU on access to the EU single market.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): As the Prime Minister said, an important part of the new strategic partnership that we seek with the European Union will be the pursuit of the greatest possible access to the single market on a fully reciprocal basis. Let there be no doubt that that will be a high priority in the negotiations. However, we believe that it is in the interests of both sides to secure it, and it is of course intended to benefit the people of Scotland. We want to get the right deal for the whole of the UK, including Scotland.

Callum McCaig: Exports to Norway from Aberdeen alone amounted to more than £750 million in 2015, and they are a vital part of anchoring the world-class supply chain in oil and gas. Will the Minister ensure that the oil and gas industry will be taken into account in this process, and that access will not be lost as a result of hard Tory Brexit?

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the importance of the industry to his constituency, and indeed to the entire United Kingdom. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has held an energy roundtable with industry leaders who, of course, included oil and gas industry representatives. I look forward to visiting parts of the industry in Scotland in the coming weeks.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that selling into the single market is far preferable to being a member of it, because it is a highly regulatory, bureaucratic mechanism on which 87% of British businesses—the British economy—are not reliant?
Mr Walker: As ever, my hon. Friend makes his case very strongly. I believe that the best possible access to the single market for UK businesses, and to the UK market for European businesses, will be in all our interests.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): I recently met representatives of a very important multinational manufacturing company that employs people in my constituency. They told me that they did not believe that the Government understood the concerns of industry about Brexit, and particularly about the customs union. Why does the Minister think that is?

Mr Walker: The Government are engaging closely with businesses and industries throughout the whole country to ensure that we have taken on board their concerns, and to ensure that we know what opportunities they expect to gain from this process. Many of the business representatives whom I have been meeting are excited about the opportunities for the UK to go out and make trade deals, and trade around the world.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If my hon. Friend has not seen Professor Patrick Minford’s analysis of the liberating effect of escaping from the common external tariffs, I, as a former economics beak, am happy to give him 45 minutes on the subject.

Mr Walker: I look forward to the lesson.

Mr Speaker: What a fortunate fellow the Minister is!

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State provided some clarity on his priorities for access to the single market in response to questions on Tuesday’s statement. He told the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) that he was seeking “a comprehensive free trade agreement and a comprehensive customs agreement that will deliver the exact same benefits as we have”. —[Official Report, 24 January 2017, Vol. 620, c. 169.] He meant the “exact same benefits” as those of being inside the single market. Will the Minister confirm that that is his Department’s negotiating position so that we can measure the Department’s success against it?

Mr Walker: It is absolutely our position to secure the best possible market access, and, as we have repeatedly said, the ability for British businesses to trade with and within the single market.

Manufacturing Industry

8. Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on the manufacturing industry of the UK leaving the EU single market. [908398]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): The Department has been undertaking a thorough analysis of more than 50 business sectors. We have been speaking directly to manufacturers in, for instance, the automotive and chemical sectors in order to understand what they need from us so that they can continue to thrive after we have left the European Union.

Toby Perkins: I am glad to hear that that work is being done. Has the Minister established how many British manufacturing factories are in competition internally with other factories in France and Germany? Does he realise how catastrophic it would be for our manufacturing industry if there were tariffs on products made in the UK that factories in France and Germany did not have?

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. Manufacturing industries are frequently highly integrated across the European Union, and the Prime Minister has made it clear that she seeks customs arrangements that will cater for that. We must bear in mind, however, that when we have left the European Union, the United Kingdom will be the biggest export market for the continuing EU, and it is therefore in our mutual interest to have proper customs arrangements.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm to manufacturers in Kettering that their prospects for future exports are far brighter outside the European Union because while we are a member, we are forbidden from entering international trade agreements of our own?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend is right to point that out. Once we have left the European Union, we will be in a position to strike free trade agreements around the world, which is precisely what the Department for International Trade is doing right now.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The agri-food manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland accounts for some 70,000 jobs and 3.25% of Northern Ireland’s gross value added, which equates to £1.1 billion at basic prices. Will the Minister outline what protection he intends to provide for this massive employer, and what support and advice has been offered in the interim?

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the importance of the agri-food sector not only in Northern Ireland, but throughout the United Kingdom. We have engaged very closely with bodies such as the Food and Drink Federation. There are specific circumstances in Northern Ireland, and he will know that the Government are committed to ensuring that there is as little impact as possible on the sector in Northern Ireland.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware that both Nissan and Jaguar Land Rover are planning for how their export market might well change if we have free trade agreements with India, China and the United States? Does he agree that they are right to say that this is an opportunity for manufacturing, not a disadvantage?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Rather than talking down British manufacturing industry, we have a duty to point out the benefits that will flow from Brexit. There is a world out there and we should be seizing the opportunities.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): My constituency was built on manufacturing and many Livingston companies rely on EU workers. What can the Minister
do to assure me, the companies in my constituency and those workers that they will be able to stay and work in Livingston and Scotland?

Mr Jones: The issue of EU residents in the UK—and, similarly, the issue of British residents in the continuing European Union—is one that we believe should be settled very early in the negotiations. I can tell the hon. Lady that I have already discussed this issue with ministerial counterparts, and they agree that it is a priority.

Higher Education Students and Staff

9. Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the implications of the UK leaving the EU for the free movement of higher education students and staff.

[908399]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): My Department is working closely with the Department for Education and engaging extensively with the higher education sector to understand its interests. A global Britain must also be a country that looks to the future. That means being one of the best places in the world for science and innovation. The UK will always welcome those with the skills and expertise to make our nation better still.

Neil Carmichael: The universities sector is one of the largest contributors to our economy, so it needs to think very carefully about its post-Brexit position. Is there an appropriate point of contact for that sector, with significant staffing, so that it can feel confident that its issues will be dealt with?

Mr Walker: Absolutely. Last week, my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation and I joined with the universities sector to engage on precisely this issue. We were both delighted by the prominence that universities and science played in the Prime Minister’s speech.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I taught for many years in the universities sector before entering this House and saw at first hand the benefits that overseas students bring to our universities financially, culturally and socially. What assurances can the Minister give that overseas students will continue to come in the same numbers and more following Brexit?

Mr Walker: I have been absolutely clear that we should continue to welcome the brightest and the best to the UK. The UK is, and will continue to be, a great place to study. UK universities are home to world-class teaching and innovative research, which are carried out in some of the most intellectually and culturally diverse academic environments in the world. We have four universities in the top 10 and 18 in the top 100. I will be visiting the highest ranked university in the world tomorrow.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Given that migration and visa issues will be close to the heart of negotiations for any future trade deals with India, America, New Zealand and Australia, as well as the EU, can my hon. Friend give an assurance that a new British immigration policy will be sufficiently well developed and can command public support in time for those negotiations to begin in a meaningful way?

Mr Walker: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. This is a challenge for the whole of Government. We need to work across Whitehall with Departments such as the Home Office, the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to come up with the best possible immigration system for a global Britain.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): Does the Minister have any plans to seek an accommodation with the Republic of Ireland to achieve reciprocal processes for staff and students who move backwards and forwards across the border?

Mr Walker: We have made clear—not only during departmental questions, but in the Prime Minister’s speech—our absolute commitment to the common travel area with Ireland. It is vital that we continue to engage with Ireland on cross-border issues, including students and universities, and I am delighted that the Prime Minister will be meeting the Taoiseach next week.

EU Nationals: Residency Rights

10. Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): If the Government will make it their policy to enable the Scottish Government to provide residency rights for EU nationals living in Scotland after the UK has left the EU.

[908400]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): We will make the status of EU nationals in the UK, and of UK nationals in the EU, a priority for the negotiations. I think that we can all agree that this is the right and fair thing to do. The Prime Minister has already set out that we tried to achieve an early agreement on this issue with our EU partners. We will continue to do so. We also want to ensure that our immigration framework operates in the best interests of all parts of the United Kingdom, and we are working closely with the devolved Administrations to achieve that. For example, the Joint Ministerial Committee, which I chair, carefully considered the Scottish Government’s paper “Scotland’s Place in Europe” last week. We have made it clear that we intend to protect the existing rights enjoyed by UK and Irish nationals when in the other state, and to maintain existing border arrangements provided by the common travel area. None the less, immigration is a reserved matter.

Stuart Blair Donaldson: If the Government are not going to guarantee residency rights for EU nationals, may I ask what assessment have they made of the impact on the economy and public services of an exodus of EU nationals and the return of thousands of retired British immigrants?

Mr Davis: We do not intend to pursue a policy that will lead to that. There is a real issue at the heart of this, but the process is not helped by the slightly holier than thou stance of the Scottish National party. Perhaps the House should be reminded of the words of Nicola Sturgeon during the independence referendum in 2014. She said:

“We have set down a robust and common sense position. There are 160,000 EU nationals from other states living in Scotland, including some in the Commonwealth Games city of Glasgow. If Scotland was outside Europe”—after independence—

“they would lose the right to stay here.”

I will deal with the issue properly.
Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend explain why so many EU nationals who start off in Scotland end up in England?

Mr Davis: No.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister will today meet an American President who champions torture and is proud to discriminate against Muslims. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is therefore even more important that this Government should send the strong moral message that goods and chattels are bargaining chips, but human beings are not? Will he confirm the residency rights of EU nationals?

Mr Davis: The hon. Lady knows my stance on torture down the years—better than most, I suspect. The British Government’s stance on torture is very plain: we do not condone it and we do not agree with it in any circumstances whatever.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): At a conference on Brexit in Berlin at the weekend, the uncertainty facing EU nationals who are resident in the UK was made very clear. The Prime Minister’s comments were immensely welcome. Would it be possible for this issue to be resolved as rapidly as possible in the negotiations?

Mr Davis: The Prime Minister has made it plain that she has already tried to get agreement among all the member states. Most of them agree, but one or two of them do not, and we have to keep pressing, as we will, to resolve this as quickly as possible. I hope that EU nationals who are currently here will take heart from what we are saying. Our intention is to give them the guarantees that will also apply to British citizens abroad.

EU Clinical Trials Directives

12. Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (UKIP): If he will discuss with Cabinet colleagues the future of the provisions of the EU clinical trials directives after the UK leaves the EU.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): The Prime Minister’s speech set out the negotiating priority to ensure that the UK is one of the best places in the world for science and innovation. As part of the negotiations, the Government will discuss with EU member states how best to continue co-operation in the field of clinical trials. In respect of the hon. Gentleman’s question, the UK successfully applied sustained pressure to reform the current directive in the best interests of patients and business. We will follow the EU rules until the point of exit, and those new rules will come into effect shortly. The great repeal Bill will convert EU law as it applies, including EU regulations, into domestic law on exit. If needs be, we can reform the regulations after that.

Mr Carswell: Given the harmful effect of EU directives on clinical trials and science in the UK, when the time comes to write our own rules will the Secretary of State undertake to listen to some of the clinical practitioners and scientists, not just the big corporate vested interests whose business model depends on having an army of lobbyists in Brussels?

Mr Davis: The short answer is absolutely. The hon. Gentleman is right that the original clinical trials directive was a very poorly drafted piece of EU regulation that has certainly increased the burden of undertaking such trials and, if I remember correctly from my own constituency, particularly small trials. [Interruption.] Yes, and those are exactly the sort of people he is talking about. Their views will be taken very seriously in the new regime after leaving.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Since the referendum both the US biotech company Alnylam and GlaxoSmithKline have announced that they are making very substantial investments in the UK. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this demonstrates that, even after we leave the European Union, we will still be a very competitive place for biotech companies to do business?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is exactly right. I recently went to see some of those biotech companies in Cambridge, and one of the problems with people who talk the country down and talk these industries down is that they underestimate the extent to which pharmaceuticals, life sciences, finance and software are fantastically powerful British industries in which we already have a huge critical mass of talent, which will continue into the future.

EU Nationals in the UK

13. Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): What priority he plans to accord to the future status of EU nationals in the UK during negotiations on the UK leaving the EU.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): The Prime Minister was clear in her speech that she wants to guarantee the status of EU citizens who are already in Britain and our nationals in the EU as early as she can. As I have said, she has already tried to get mutual agreement, and we will continue to try to get it.

Sir Simon Burns: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that answer is extremely welcome because there is genuine and widespread concern on this issue? What problems is he encountering with a few member states that are stopping a reciprocal agreement being arrived at now?

Mr Davis: Truth be told, I am not 100% sure of the actual problems. In the run-in to these negotiations, the Commission and some member states have taken a very stern stance on no negotiation before notification, and they may think that such an agreement is trying to pre-empt that. That is not the intention; the intention is to act in the interests of European citizens, which after all should be the principal aim of the European Union.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Those problems notwithstanding, there are many talented people from the European Union who have made an enormous contribution to the economy and the cultural life of our country. Surely the right hon. Gentleman agrees that he does not need an agreement with other EU member states. There is going to be an agreement, and he would
Mr Davis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the tone in which he put his question, but we have a dual responsibility. We have a responsibility within our own country to maintain a high moral stand in what we do—I see this as a moral question—and, on the other hand, we also have a responsibility to our citizens abroad, and it is a legal responsibility as well as a moral one. We will get this resolved, and I give him an undertaking that we will resolve it as fast as we possibly can.

Trade Dispute Mechanisms

15. Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What assessment has he made, as part of his Department’s plans for negotiations on the UK leaving the EU, of the potential merits of different forms of trade dispute mechanisms with the EU. [908406]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): We recognise that the large majority of trade agreements involve some form of dispute resolution or enforcement mechanism, and there are a range of models for dispute resolution mechanisms in international trade agreements. We have been clear that we will bring an end to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the United Kingdom. The dispute resolution mechanisms adopted as part of our future trading relationship with the EU and other international parties will be a matter for negotiation.

Vicky Foxcroft: The Prime Minister has said that she wants a comprehensive free trade agreement with the EU and that, in future, our laws will be interpreted by British judges in British courts, but every comprehensive free trade agreement has some sort of independent trade dispute resolution mechanism. Does the Secretary of State agree that this sort of inconsistency needs to be ironed out by rigorous parliamentary scrutiny of the Prime Minister’s plan?

Mr Davis: It is not an inconsistency but a lack of understanding on the part of the Opposition. As I have said, there are a range of models and a large number of international trade agreements with arbitration mechanisms, but they are just that. They are agreed arbitration mechanisms; they are not mechanisms that bring the influence of the European Court into all parts of British society—that is what is going to be resolved by leaving the European Union.

Security Policy

16. Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on ensuring future co-operation with the EU on security policy after the UK has left the EU. [908408]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): Britain has played a key role in protecting Europe’s security, and the Prime Minister has been clear that we will continue to co-operate with our European partners on foreign and defence policy as we leave the European Union.

Craig Williams: As we are a global player in counter-terrorism and law enforcement, does my right hon. Friend agree that both we and our EU partners have much to benefit from a co-operation agreement?

Mr Jones: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I discussed the issue with several of my European counterparts earlier this week. They fully understand the intelligence strength that Britain brings to the table, and they understand the value that we will be able to bring to the table after we leave the EU.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister understand that parliamentarians across Europe are deeply worried about the knock-on effect of our leaving the EU on NATO’s stability and future? That is the truth. Forget about what is happening in the United States with the new President; will the Minister assure the House that this country’s commitment to NATO will be redoubled, not diminished?

Mr Jones: We are absolutely committed to NATO, and I assure the House that that commitment will continue after Brexit.

Consulting Parliament

17. William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): What the Government’s policy is on consulting Parliament on the final agreement on the UK leaving the EU. [908410]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): As the Prime Minister said, we will put the final deals agreed between the UK and the EU to a vote in both Houses of Parliament. We have always said that we will observe the constitutional and legal obligations that apply to the final deal. As I have said many times, we will keep the House informed throughout the process.

William Wragg: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that both Houses of Parliament will have several opportunities to vote on a wide range of legislation determining substantial policy decisions as we exit the EU?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The article 50 Bill will be introduced imminently. A great repeal Bill is to be introduced in the next Session—an important piece of legislation that will ensure that all EU law is converted into UK law, including on issues such as workers’ rights and environmental regulations, which I would have thought would matter to the Opposition. There will be subsequent legislation on those and other issues. But that is just the beginning. Exiting the European Union will give this Parliament control of its own laws again. Decisions on policy will be taken here, not in the European Union, and we will be back to being a free country again.

Topical Questions


T2. Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.
The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): The Government will shortly introduce a straightforward Bill to enable us to trigger the EU exit mechanism. The question is not about whether we should leave— that decision was taken on 23 June—but about respecting the referendum result and doing what the majority of people in the country want: to get on with the job of making a success of our new position in the world. The Prime Minister has been clear about what she seeks to achieve and has set out a bold, ambitious plan to build a global Britain that the whole UK can get behind.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: In the Prime Minister’s speech at Lancaster House on 17 January, she promised to “put the preservation of our precious Union at the heart of everything we do.”

Given that we are told that this is a Union of equals, what formal role will be given to the devolved Administrations when the UK negotiates its new relationship with the EU?

Mr Davis: The formal role is already in place. We have a Joint Ministerial Committee at which the Scottish Government is represented, and representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive and the Welsh Government also attend. We have had three meetings so far and have another meeting on Monday in Cardiff and another in early February. We are taking formally the papers submitted by the Scottish and Welsh Governments, and we will take them on board. The point that we have made throughout the process is that the negotiation is sophisticated and complex and will be difficult. It must be done under a single banner, but it will be done in a way that reflects and protects the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom.

T5. [908384] Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): With the UK being a net importer of agricultural goods from the EU and the EU being the UK’s biggest agricultural market, what assurances can my right hon. Friend give to farmers that a key part of our negotiations will involve removing agricultural tariffs on both the UK and EU sides, which is in both our interests?

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): My hon. Friend is entirely right that this is a Union of equals. Friend is entirely right that there is significant two-way trade in agricultural products, and in food and drink products. I would imagine that it is just as much in the interests of the continuing EU as it is in the interests of the UK that sensible arrangements continue.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Now that we have a commitment to a White Paper, the role of Parliament in the article 50 process needs to be determined, which is why Labour will seek to table an amendment to the proposed article 50 Bill to require the Secretary of State to lay before the House periodic reports, at intervals of no less than two months, on the progress of the negotiations under article 50. Will the Secretary of State commit now to the principle of periodic reports?

[ Interruption. ]

Mr Davis: From behind me I hear, “Like he’s not going to do that.” The hon. and learned Gentleman says two months. Since September, over five months, I have made five statements in front of this House, participated in 10 debates, and appeared in front of a number of Select Committees. That process will continue. I suspect that two months will be a rather unambitious aim.

Keir Starmer: The role of Parliament at the end of the exercise will also be important. The Prime Minister has said that MPs will have a vote on the final agreement. Will the Secretary of State today state categorically that MPs in this House will have no less involvement in the process and no less a say over the final article 50 agreement than MEPs in the European Parliament?

Mr Davis: The role of the MEPs will be somewhat limited and peripheral, in many respects. Mr Verhofstadt will be allowed at the treaty negotiations, but I do not think he will be making the decisions.

T7. [908386] Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): British citizens in the EU and EU citizens in the United Kingdom make valuable contributions to the countries they live in. When some of them gave evidence to the Exiting the European Union Committee last week, they expressed great concern about three particular areas: pensions, health and the rights of children. Has the Minister or his colleagues been working on those issues with their counterparts across the European Union?

Mr David Jones: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The interests of British residents in the continuing European Union are at the top of our agenda. In fact, only on Monday I had a discussion with representatives of British residents in Malta. He can be assured that we will continue to reflect the interests of British residents as the EU negotiations commence.

Mr Jones: These are certainly important matters and we are addressing them, but the hon. Lady will understand that we will not be publishing impact assessments that might be useful to those with whom we will be negotiating.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The seafood processing sector is vital to the local economy in the Cleethorpes constituency. Will the Minister assure me that its interests will be at the forefront of considerations during the Brexit negotiations? Will he meet business leaders from the sector to pass on his assurances?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend is entirely right that this is an important sector of the economy. Indeed, it may well be that I have already met those representatives, as we have been having extensive engagement with the agri-food industry.

T4. [908383] Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): This week, the Health Secretary told us that Brexit would mean Britain leaving the European Medicines Agency. This move is likely to send Britain to the back of the queue for innovative new drugs, make
regulation more complex and threaten jobs in the UK’s thriving pharmaceutical sector. Will the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union tell us why his Government have so readily given up our membership of this vital body? Will he explain the measures he will introduce to ensure that people across Britain will enjoy the same access to medicines as our European neighbours?

Mr David Davis: That is all very well, but the complete premise of the question is wrong. That is not what the Health Secretary said; he was misreported and misinterpreted. What I will say to the hon. Lady is this: what we will be doing is, first, putting the clinical safety of the British people at the front of the priority list, and then looking after the interests of British industry, particularly biosystems and life sciences, in which we are a world leader now and will continue to be after we leave.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): As chair of the all-party group on rare, genetic and undiagnosed conditions, I know that the issue of clinical trials is a big one for patients, as they are concerned that exiting the EU will mean that nothing will replace those trials. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House and those patients that the trials will be replicated as soon as we leave the EU?

Mr David Jones: I can assure my hon. Friend that we are in extensive discussions with the biopharma industry on that particular issue, and those discussions will continue.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): This week, the Kingdom of Fife is pleased to welcome almost 200 students from around the world who join very nearly 4,000 students from 137 countries at the University of St Andrews. When will that university be given absolute guarantees that nothing about Brexit will jeopardise its reputation as the most international of universities?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): We need to engage with the university sector and work with it on a vision for a global Britain that continues to make the UK one of the most attractive places in the world for key talent to come.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has rightly been very clear that this Government will do nothing to damage our industries. I believe that leaving the European Union will be a good thing for our steel industry. This week, the all-party parliamentary group on steel and metal-related industries published its “2020 Vision” report. Would he like me to send a copy to him so that he can look at its recommendations as part of the ongoing policy debate?

Mr Robin Walker: Yes, we would be delighted to receive it.

Mr Robin Walker: We should absolutely welcome the fact that we have seen the highest level this century of car production and car exports from the UK. We continue to see key investments by the automotive industry, such as Jaguar Land Rover’s expansion in Coventry. We want to work with the industry to make sure that it has the best access to European markets, and indeed global markets, as we move ahead.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): About 9 million Brits will visit France this year, and 15 million will visit Spain. In return, about 4.5 million French will visit the UK and about 2.5 million Spaniards. Will the Government be seeking visa-free travel for tourists across Europe post-Brexit, and in those negotiations will they be making it clear that it is very much in our European friends’ interests to do so?

Mr David Jones: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of the two-way tourism industry in Europe. These are issues that we are considering, but I can assure him that our aim is for frictionless arrangements.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): What settlement have the Government made with the Crown dependencies in their relationship with the EU via protocol 3? When we exit the European Union, does it mean that the Crown dependencies will also exit the customs union?

Mr Robin Walker: I met the Chief Ministers of Crown dependencies only yesterday as part of a formal process of ongoing meetings that we are holding to take their views into account. Following the Prime Minister’s speech, I also spoke to each Chief Minister, and they are very pleased with our direction of travel.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Higher education is one of the UK’s greatest exports. As we seek to grow our export markets post-Brexit, does the Minister agree that we need an approach that plays to our strengths and builds on them?

Mr Walker: Wholeheartedly.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): In response to an earlier question, the Secretary of State said that we needed both flexibility and imagination in tackling these complex negotiations. My manufacturing sector and my university want competence, and they are worried about the competence of the team sitting on that Government Front Bench to carry out the negotiations thoroughly.

Mr Davis: I had better deal with this one.

Interestingly, if we look at the response around Europe to the Prime Minister’s speech about competence, we see, for example, that the Spanish Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, whom I saw only a couple of weeks ago, welcomed it widely and said that we had an eminently achievable aim in everybody’s interests.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): In my constituency, we are lucky to see the excellent Airbus A400M as it flies from RAF Brize Norton. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is an excellent example of defence
Mr David Jones: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I visited the Airbus factory in Bristol just before Christmas and saw the wonderful work that it is doing there. He is right to say that integrated manufacturing across Europe is important and I have no doubt that we will be putting in place arrangements to ensure that it continues.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): An RAF Typhoon flown from my constituency and HMS St Albans have man-marked a rusting Russian aircraft carrier as it makes its journey of shame through the English channel on its way back from raids on Aleppo. Does that not demonstrate the important role that the United Kingdom must play after our exit in ensuring the defence and security of Europe as a whole?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend is right. Britain is a leading power in NATO and will continue to be after we leave the European Union.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Will my hon. Friend visit Dorset to speak to our businesses and hear their concerns, and also to discuss the manifold and great opportunities that Brexit will provide?

Mr Robin Walker: I would be delighted to do so. We are getting out and talking to businesses across the country. I look forward to visiting businesses in my hon. Friend’s constituency.
Yemen

10.35 am

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) (Urgent Question): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Yemen, from a humanitarian perspective and on diplomatic efforts to end the conflict.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The UK supports the Saudi Arabian-led coalition military intervention, which came at the request of the legitimate President Hadi. We are clear, however, that military gains by the coalition and the Government of Yemen must be used to drive forward the political process. A political solution is the best way to bring long-term stability to Yemen and end the conflict.

The UK has played a leading role in diplomatic efforts, including bringing together key international actors to try to find a peaceful solution. This is known as the quad and involves the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the United States. Other Gulf Co-operation Council countries and the UN have also been involved. The first meeting was held in London in July 2016; it was one of the first acts of the Foreign Secretary. The last quad meeting was held in Riyadh on 18 December, and I attended. I last spoke to President Hadi on 15 January to discuss the importance of taking measures to prevent economic collapse.

We continue to strongly support the tireless efforts of the UN special envoy, Ismail Ahmed, to achieve a political settlement. We are providing over £1 million to his office to bolster the UN’s capacity to facilitate the peace process. He is due to brief the Security Council today in New York on the latest developments and the UN’s plan. Our ambassador to the UN, Matthew Rycroft, met him yesterday.

We share a deep concern for the humanitarian suffering of the people of Yemen, which we all have an obligation to alleviate. The UK is the fourth largest donor to Yemen, committing more than £100 million this year. Last year we helped more than 1 million Yemenis. Through the conflict, stability and security fund, we are funding: £700,000 for demining and clearing the explosive remnants of war; £400,000 for UN Women to support bringing women into the peace process and political dialogue; and £140,000 for other track II activities in support of the UN-led peace process.

Yemen is historically reliant on imports for more than 90% of its food and fuel needs. The Department for International Development is providing £1.4 million for the UN verification and inspection mechanism to speed up the clearance process for ships, so that food and fuel can get into the country more easily.

It is critical that all parties to the conflict renew their commitment to the cessation of hostilities, for the sake of the people of Yemen. All parties must engage constructively with the De-escalation and Co-ordination Committee, a mechanism created by the UN so that when incidents of concern are raised, they can be addressed effectively to reduce the likelihood of escalation.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I am grateful to the Minister for that statement. When the UN Security Council meets this afternoon, it will do so against a backdrop of heavy fighting in the Red sea ports of Mocha and Al Hudaydah and an increasingly dire humanitarian situation across the country. There are already 7 million people living in Yemen. If those ports are destroyed or besieged, the delivery of vital aid that is required to avert famine in Yemen will become even more difficult.

The only way to prevent this unfolding humanitarian disaster from deteriorating even further is to agree an immediate ceasefire. Today’s meeting of the Security Council provides a key opportunity to bring that closer. The Scottish National party believes that the UK is in a unique position to be able to show positive international leadership in order to bring about a ceasefire. It is vital to the lives of millions of Yemenis that we do so.

I ask the Minister, therefore, will the UK Government commit to use today’s meeting of the Security Council to back a ceasefire and urge all conflict parties to protect women, boys, men and girls from all forms of conflict-related abuse and violence; to ensure that all conflict parties allow civilians safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance; to strongly condemn all violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in Yemen; and to call for the establishment of an international, independent and impartial commission of inquiry to investigate them? Will the Government think once again on their own position and listen to Members across this House; and please consider halting all sales of arms to Saudi now, and in doing so, urge all Governments to follow suit?

Mr Ellwood: Yet again, it is a tribute to this House that we discuss these important matters. There are so many challenges in the middle east and north Africa at the moment and Yemen sometimes tends to get buried or overshadowed by some of the other challenges that we face, so I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising this matter, on which we also had a thorough debate last week.

The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the work that is taking place at the United Nations Security Council today, where the UN envoy, Ismail Ahmed, will lay out his plans for what we expect and hope to achieve in 2017. We ended the year in a better place: the Houthis were minded to support the road map—although they have yet to come to the table—and President Hadi was looking more favourably on providing support in order to rejoin talks in Kuwait in the very near future. Key aspects of the road map still need to be ratified. Once that is done, we are in a process that will lead to that important cessation of hostilities.

I understand the hon. Lady’s desire to call for a ceasefire—a cessation of hostilities—immediately. We will see what comes out of today’s meeting and the United Nations, but I am absolutely in agreement with her that that is what we want to happen. Calling for it needs to work in conjunction with the art of the possible; otherwise it is just words. In order for us to ensure that any ceasefire will hold, we need to be able to say what happens if either side breaches the cessation of hostilities, which means there need to be some prior agreements in place. There need to be some confidence-building measures as the build-up to the call for a ceasefire.

I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady’s concerns about safe access. humanitarian access to the country has been extremely limited, not least in respect of use of the ports, which we have discussed on many occasions.
She yet again repeats her call for a UN independent commission of inquiry into some of the allegations on humanitarian and human rights law. In our previous debate on this matter, I stressed that it is the protocol for any country to conduct its own activities. I have said that if I feel that the reports that are due to come—and are slowly coming from a country that has never had to be pressed to write a report before—are deemed to be unworthy, unsuitable or miss the purpose for which they are being written, yes I will join with her and say that this should be moved to an independent examiner, possibly the United Nations, as well. But until we reach that point, I will continue to back Saudi Arabia conducting its own inquiries, in the same way as we do ourselves, and America does itself, not least when it hit the hospital in the north of Afghanistan.

The hon. Lady mentions arms sales. We have one of the most robust sales processes in the world. Each sale is conducted and scrutinised on its own basis. As we have said in the past, where we see ourselves at the moment is that we fully support the continued sales of arms to Saudi Arabia.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Given the significant interest in the subject, I appeal for pithy questions and pithy replies. I call Bob Stewart.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Everyone in this House totally understands that a ceasefire is the only way ahead; and it is going to come. But it is only going to come when President Hadi and the Houthis agree it. I think the Minister will agree with me that when that happens, we will expect there to be breaches of it, but we must not break the ceasefire.

Mr Speaker: Order. Well, I suppose the Minister can invent a question mark at the end and then provide a sentence of reply—it was not a question but a statement. But can we have a brief sentence?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend raises an interesting question—

Mr Ellwood: But he does make an important point, in that President Hadi is not the only stakeholder, nor are the Houthis: there are the Zaydis that do not support the Houthis, and there are the many tribes that do not support President Hadi. It is a complex country; we need to make sure that all the stakeholders are buying into the ceasefire, and that if there are breaches of the ceasefire, they can be reconciled without the whole ceasefire collapsing.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) on securing this urgent question, and I agree with everything she said.

We need once again to ask the Government what they are doing to end the conflict in Yemen. The Minister talks about the need for a political solution. When is he going to present our resolution to the United Nations? When are we going to get proper investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law? Why are we continuing to sell Saudi Arabia the arms to wage this conflict? Ultimately, when are we going to bring the suffering of the people of Yemen to an end and then get to them the humanitarian aid that they need?

In every debate, every month, and now every year, we ask the same basic questions, and every time the Minister, whose name is now, I am afraid, synonymous with the Yemen conflict, stands there and gives us the same non-answers. We have had the same today, so let me simplify these things for him a little and ask him some plain, factual questions. First, did he read the excellent article on Tuesday for “Middle East Eye”, which was written by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell)? If he did, can he tell us what in that analysis he disagrees with?

Secondly, and even more straightforwardly, questions on which we must get answers today: how many civilian deaths in total are involved in the 252 alleged violations of humanitarian law by the Saudi-led coalition, which the Ministry of Defence admitted today that it is tracking? Have any of them been the subject of one of the 13 reports that the coalition’s joint incidents assessment team has produced over the past nine months? If so, which ones? If not, why not?

Thirdly, does the Minister really think that Yemeni mothers who are today desperately scavenging for food for their children would agree with him that we ended 2016 in a better position than we started it in?

Mr Ellwood: I think I answered many of those questions in my opening replies, but on the UN resolution, which the hon. Lady raises again, the UN special envoy is in New York today, so we will hear when it is appropriate for him to promote the resolution. It is likely, once we have confirmation from the parties that agree that, that they can confirm that the UN resolution is there to consolidate and legalise the process. So we will wait to hear an announcement today; I am sure that, by the end of the day, we will have a statement by the UN envoy himself.

Regarding the sales, I repeat what I said earlier: we have one of the most vigorous arms export licence schemes in the world. Export sales are subject to our consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

We are getting humanitarian aid into the country. The process is slow and cumbersome, but we are making a significant contribution to providing support to the people who are caught up in this awful conflict. The sooner the people of Yemen recognise that there is no military end to this, but that there must be a political solution, the sooner we can get even more aid into the country.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): The Houthi rebels in Yemen enjoy the support and patronage of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is the world’s most prominent state sponsor of terror, responsible for genocidal violence in Syria. What pressure is being brought to bear on the regime in Tehran to advance the cause of peace rather than to continue to glory in slaughter?

Mr Ellwood: I visited Iran last week, and I was in Tehran. I raised a whole range of issues, including some of the regional matters. I made it very clear that not just Yemen but the wider region will benefit if this cold war
that almost exists between Saudi Arabia and Iran were to thaw. If we can get the security right and have an understanding of where things should go in the future, the prosperity for the region will be huge, and not least the benefits for Yemen, because we will then see an end to this war.

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Before the war, up to 70% of Yemen's food supply came through Al Hudaydah port. What representations are the Government making to the Saudi-led coalition, urging them not to pursue a sea and air attack and instead to pursue a ceasefire?

**Mr Ellwood**: I pay tribute to the work that the hon. Gentleman does on these matters, in which he takes a huge interest. He is right to highlight the importance of that port in gaining aid access to the country from the Red sea, further up, because the port of Aden cannot cope. The port is currently in Houthi hands, although the UN has access to part of it. The problem is that the cranes are not working. I have been in discussions with Oman, which has similar cranes that could perhaps be put there, and that would speed up the process of getting aid into the country.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Does the existence of the rebel Iranian-backed regime pose an existential threat to the stability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the entire region?

**Mr Ellwood**: If I understand my right hon. Friend's question correctly, we have an indigenous stakeholder in the north of the country that is part of Yemen—they are part of the future of the country themselves—but they have attacked Saudi Arabia in the north. They have killed people and struck villages and so on, so the war has spilled beyond the borders of Yemen. That is all the more reason why we need to work towards a ceasefire and a political agreement.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): Has the Minister seen and examined the reports of UK military personnel in Saudi Arabia? Do these reports justify his continuing support for the Saudis' own investigation into breaches of humanitarian law? Can he give any explanation or succour as to why the Government are refusing to buck the international and independent examination? Given that the Foreign Secretary himself has described this conflict as being in the nature of a proxy war, why do the Government persist in giving such unfailing support to Saudi Arabia?

**Mr Ellwood**: We have a long historical, and close, relationship with Saudi Arabia, but I have been the first on many occasions to make it very clear that this is a country where the establishment are on the liberal wing of a conservative society. They are not used to having the limelight shone on them in this way. A sustained war, which, again, they do not have experience of, has exposed a number of absences of skills, which they have had to learn the hard way, one of which is going through proper investigations to show what happens when mistakes and errors are made. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman; I do not refuse to say that I will call for independent investigations. I am first asking Saudi Arabia to provide those reports itself, and if they are found wanting, then yes, I will stand with the right hon. Gentleman and ask for the United Nations to take on that role.

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): The Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said last week in Davos that he could see no reason why Iran and Saudi Arabia should have hostile policies towards each other. He went on to say that they should work together to end the miserable conditions of the people in Syria and Yemen. Does the Minister have any indication that this is a new initiative, because it would be very good news for the peace process?

**Mr Ellwood**: My hon. Friend makes a very important wider point as to where the relationship between these two important countries in the region will go. I hope that we will endeavour to see a thawing of that cold war. Other countries such as Kuwait and Oman are looking at this to see what they can do to help—to see whether there is an ability to develop the communications that we need, to allow for a greater understanding so that mistakes cannot be made, and to improve security and prosperity for the region.

**Mr John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm that the Saudi-led coalition is operating in pursuance of a UN resolution, and that the conflict is fuelled particularly by the ambitions of Iran? Will he stress the UK's very important security and defence relationship with Saudi Arabia and its importance to security, not only in the region but in our own country? Finally, can he confirm the enormous importance of Saudi Arabia to our world-beating aerospace industry and its skilled workforce?

**Mr Ellwood**: The right hon. Gentleman raises some important points. The UN resolution gives legitimacy to Mr. Hadi's call for support by any means—I think those are the words that were used—which is why it was possible to put together the Saudi-led coalition to thwart the advance of the Houthis from the north of the country.

The right hon. Gentleman is also right to underline our important relationship with Saudi Arabia, which it values and we value. Saudi Arabia is learning the hard way, and making those steps has been difficult. It is better that we do as we are doing and take Saudi Arabia through the process than for it to join other countries that would not exert the same pressure concerning humanitarian issues, women's rights and all the other aspects that we want it to move towards.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What discussions have my hon. Friend and his colleagues had with the UN Under-Secretary-General for humanitarian affairs, Stephen O'Brien? Have the United Kingdom Government agreed to meet any request that the United Nations has made in that respect?

**Mr Ellwood**: The Minister of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) met Stephen O'Brien only a couple of weeks ago, and I meet our former colleague regularly. At the UN General Assembly in September last year, he co-chaired a meeting with the Secretary of State for International Development to
raise funds, to ensure that other countries joined us in providing the finances necessary to give humanitarian support to Yemen. I pay a huge tribute to him and the work that he is doing in the United Nations.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Minister agree that repeated violations of international humanitarian law would feed the humanitarian crisis in Yemen? The UK Government’s assurances that no such violations have been committed by the Saudi-led coalition are worthless when, in the Minister’s own words, “neither the MOD nor the FCO reaches a conclusion as to whether or not an IHL violation has taken place in relation to each and every incident of potential concern that comes to its attention.”

**Mr Ellwood**: I have mentioned that we had the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia come here and answer that question directly. Saudi Arabia has no interest in somehow bombing Yemen back into the past, and the storyline that some are trying to perpetuate is simply wrong. We are talking about an ally and a neighbour, and the two countries have a long combined history. It is in Saudi Arabia’s interest for Yemen to thrive and prosper, so the idea that Saudi Arabia would continue to want to bomb agricultural areas, schools or other such things for the sake of it is simply misleading.

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on any progress made on the Gulf Co-operation Council initiative for peace?

**Mr Ellwood**: The GCC initiative for peace and the partnership for peace were previous initiatives that the Houthis signed, prior to 2014 when they left their communities in the north and pushed in towards the capital. Those initiatives are the basis from which UN Security Council resolution 2216 has been crafted, and I hope that they will be the basis for the road map that we will work towards. The fact that the Houthis signed those initiatives in the past is, I hope, a good indication that they will back the road map.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that the Government are at present tracking 252 allegations of humanitarian law violations by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, and has he heard what the former Business Secretary told the BBC? The former Business Secretary said that he was “staggered” by the number of potential breaches, and that if he were still in government, arms exports to the Saudis would have stopped “a long time before now”.

**Mr Ellwood**: The tracking and covering of the various elements of what is happening in Yemen is done by the Ministry of Defence. If I may, I will get the MOD to write to the right hon. Lady with details of where things stand.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Could the Minister confirm the presence of al-Qaeda and Daesh in Yemen and comment on whether this is also a threat for us here at home?

**Mr Ellwood**: In all the discussions that we have had about the Houthis, President Hadi and other stakeholders, we can end up glossing over the fact that al-Qaeda was and has been in the Arab peninsula for some time. Al-Qaeda is responsible for the Charlie Hebdo attack, the printer bombs, the underpants bomb and many others. This is one of al-Qaeda’s most advanced and complex capabilities. That is why it is so important for us to get good governance in Yemen so that al-Qaeda cannot take advantage of the vacuum of governance.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Secretary of State has confirmed in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams), that the US has been feeding arms to the Saudi coalition, fuelling the desperate humanitarian crisis in Yemen. What will Ministers do to persuade their new American counterparts to stop supplying these deadly cluster bombs in future?

**Mr Ellwood**: I have worked quite hard to get not only Saudi Arabia but all the GCC nations to show a willingness to join others around the world in signing the convention on cluster munitions. The Americans are obviously not a signatory to it, but I hope that Saudi Arabia, which is considering this, will recognise its importance. I would say that Rex Tillerson, the new Secretary of State—he lived in Yemen for three years, and knows the area very well—will meet my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in the very near future.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): People in Kettering agree that providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people in war zones is a proper use of our overseas aid budget. How many people are we supporting in Yemen, and what plans do we have to extend that budget in 2017?

**Mr Ellwood**: As I have said, we are the fourth largest donor for the country of Yemen, providing over £100 million. We are looking at ways of getting other countries to match our funding and to work with the United Nations. I hope my hon. Friend’s constituents will be reassured that we check to make sure that the funds going to the country do go where they are actually needed.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): Further to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), will the Minister confirm that all the evidence we hold about violations will be passed to any inquiry, preferably an independent, UN-led commission of inquiry?

**Mr Ellwood**: Again, in relation to that question, I will ask the Ministry of Defence to write to the hon. Lady with details of how the process works.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that the UK remains fully committed to diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Yemen?

**Mr Ellwood**: That is at the heart of what we now need to achieve. As I have mentioned, the quad met on 19 December 2016. I pay tribute to John Kerry for the work he did in forming the quad. We are now in
discussions, and we will speak to the UN envoy about the quad meeting at the very earliest opportunity, so that we can get the parties back around the table in Kuwait and put in place a cessation of hostilities agreement.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I hope the Minister will join me in welcoming the fact that the Disasters Emergency Committee has raised £17 million, which I believe includes DFID funding. Does that not show the importance of the UK meeting its 0.7% target as an example of global leadership? Will it, as I hope, encourage other countries to contribute to the UN appeal, which is currently only 60% funded?

Mr Ellwood: I confirm—I think for the third time—that we remain absolutely committed to the 0.7% target. Perhaps we do not see it so much in the House, but when we attend meetings at the United Nations General Assembly or in Geneva and Vienna, our soft power—the leadership we show, our commitment to helping others less fortunate than ourselves across the world and our leadership in how such money is spent—allows us to punch above our weight across the world.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Building on the last question, will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating all those in this country who do such important work in fundraising and collecting items to send to people in humanitarian crises such as this one?

Mr Ellwood: I do. People often ask what they can do as individuals, and their contributions, whether financial or otherwise, are certainly very much appreciated. It is also very important that we thank the non-governmental organisations providing the facilities to make sure that such processes can be followed. I pay tribute to Oxfam, which is conducting a conference on this subject today, at which the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border will be speaking.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister mentioned the discussions within the United Nations. When the Prime Minister meets President Trump, will she emphasise to him the important role that the United Nations has in resolving regional conflicts such as the one in Yemen, and will she tell him not to undermine the UN by cutting the US contribution to it?

Mr Ellwood: I read an article, in The New York Times I think, suggesting that there may be such changes. It is important that people not just in America but across the world understand that the United Nations is pivotal as the international forum in which countries can come together to resolve their issues. If it did not exist, we would invent it. However, we must recognise that the troubled period it has had in the past six months or so, because of the use of the veto, means that it is perhaps now time for it to be reinvented.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): As my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) has said, 7 million people in Yemen are going to starve to death. Ninety per cent. of the food that will keep them alive has to be imported. The sea ports to which the Minister of State, Department for International Development, referred are being bombed into oblivion. As I said earlier, the Al Hudaydah port is divided into two areas, one operated by the Houthis, the other by the United Nations, and they can get ships in, but there is a queue of ships because the working cranes are not large enough to get the kit off. That is the bottleneck that we need to resolve.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): When the Saudi Foreign Minister came twice to speak to Members and the Minister, he made it clear that he would investigate the allegations. As we have heard, there are 252, yet we have had responses to only a handful. When will the Minister say enough is enough, not least given the potential humanitarian consequences of an attack on Al Hudaydah?

Mr Ellwood: I will join the hon. Gentleman and say that the pace of the reports coming out is far too slow and that the process needs to speed up, but Saudi Arabia did not even have an investigations process. When we think about some investigations that have taken place, for example Chilcot, we should ask ourselves how long did they take. Perhaps I am comparing apples with pears, but when starting from scratch, it takes time to have the processes in place to ensure that there is the necessary evidence for a report to be compiled. I will invite Adel al-Jubeir, the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, back here so that we can put those questions to him again.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), what can the Minister do to ensure that cranes are available to get the ports working and to get aid in?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border, the DFID Minister, has just spoken to Simon Collis, our ambassador in Saudi Arabia, and I raise the matter regularly. The challenge that we face is the question of who has ownership of the port and the fact that it was used to bring in weapons. That was the coalition’s concern. Several possibilities—joint ownership, ownership by the United Nations—are being explored to ensure that the humanitarian challenges, particularly with winter coming on, can be met.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The revelation that the Ministry of Defence is tracking 252 allegations of international humanitarian law violations by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen is truly shocking, but with the civilian death toll now passing 10,000, according to the UN, and the country on the brink of famine, when will the Government halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia until the alleged IHL breaches can be properly investigated?

Mr Ellwood: Again, I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her interest in the process and for holding the Government to account, but I reiterate that we have a robust arms
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export licence system and we are doing all we can to ensure that we can get humanitarian aid into the country and that we work with Saudi Arabia so that it improves its systems and become more accountable and transparent.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): It is clear that the Minister’s patience with the Saudis’ ability to carry out investigations is wearing a little thin. Have we a timescale in mind for when the Government will finally say, “Enough. We now need an independent, international investigation”?

Mr Ellwood: Yes, I do feel that my patience is being tested here. Saudi Arabia is aware that this is in the limelight and that the international community is getting more and more concerned about some of the events and incidents that have taken place. It is not good for Saudi Arabia or any members of the coalition. I will endeavour to make a statement after we have heard what the UN Security Council has said on the matter, so I think that we have a plan for 2017 and some better news.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Children in Yemen face a desperate situation. Recent estimates show that some 40% of children could be malnourished—double the proportion that the World Health Organisation recognises as a food emergency. Does the Minister agree that the British Government should increase diplomatic efforts with Saudi Arabia to address urgently the food crisis for children in Yemen?

Mr Ellwood: The question gives me licence to say that it is not just us or the United Nations doing this: the coalition is putting in a lot of effort to get aid into the country. Last year, a series of Saudi Arabian trucks full of aid were blown up by the Houthis. The aid commitment by Saudi Arabia and the coalition is significant and they are doing their part to make sure aid gets into the country.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): The Minister just made the point: is not the Gulf Co-operation Council the biggest donor to Yemen in direct aid—and indirect aid, through remittances—and should not the sensible position of this House be to support the council in its efforts to seek peace in Yemen, instead of playing silly games?

Mr Ellwood: The work of the Gulf Co-operation Council is important in bringing together a collaborative and joint approach from the Gulf nations. I was pleased that our Prime Minister was able to address the council’s summit last November, where many of those issues were raised.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Is not the difference between Afghanistan—where obviously the UK and the US carried out their own investigations—and Yemen, the sheer number of allegations that have been made? Does not that justify moving to an independent investigation as soon as possible?

Mr Ellwood: Looking at the number of allegations that took place in Afghanistan, I would not necessarily agree with the hon. Gentleman. He is looking at only the British and American—or allied and Operation Enduring Freedom—side of things. If we include what the Afghans were doing as well, the numbers would rise. He is not comparing like with like. We have to include not only what the international community is doing, but what Saudi Arabia is doing.
Business of the House

11.11 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): The business for next week will be as follows:

**Monday 30 January**—Second Reading of the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords].

**Tuesday 31 January**—Second Reading of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill (day 1).

**Wednesday 1 February**—Conclusion of Second Reading of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill (day 2).

**Thursday 2 February**—Select Committee statement on the seventh report of the Public Administration and Constitution Committee, entitled “Will the NHS ever learn?” followed by general debate on the armed forces covenant report 2016. The subject for debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

**Friday 3 February**—Private Members’ Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 6 February will be as follows:

**Monday 6 February**—Consideration in Committee of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill (day 1).

**Tuesday 7 February**—Continuation of consideration in Committee of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill (day 2).

**Wednesday 8 February**—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill (day 3) followed by remaining stages of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill.

**Thursday 9 February**—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

**Friday 10 February**—The House will not be sitting.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 6 and 9 February will be:

**Monday 6 February**—Debate on an e-petition relating to the domestic ivory market in the UK.

**Thursday 9 February**—Debate on the sixth report from the Science and Technology Committee on smart monitoring of electricity and gas.

Valerie Vaz rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. In recent weeks, exchanges at business questions have been notably protracted and it would really help if questions and replies could be pithy, including the exchanges between the Front Benchers.

Valerie Vaz: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Your comments are duly noted.

I thank the Leader of the House for the business. Will he confirm that 20 July will be the date on which the House rises for the summer recess? The great repeal Bill will be in the Queen’s Speech: will he let the House know when that will be debated?

The British people owe a debt of gratitude to Gina Miller. Because of her courage, the highest court of the land—the Supreme Court—confirmed that it is inconsistent with longstanding and fundamental principles that far-reaching constitutional change should be brought about by ministerial decision or action alone, as it requires an Act of Parliament. Has the Prime Minister got the memo that Parliament is sovereign?

White Papers are a tool of participatory democracy, not an unalterable policy commitment. Earlier this week, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and 13 other Members from across the House asked for a White Paper. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on Tuesday did not, could not or would not answer. Instead, the Prime Minister announced it in response to a question at Prime Minister’s Question Time. Will the Leader of the House please confirm whether all policy U-turns are now to be so announced? If so, will we have to negotiate an extension for Prime Minister’s Question Time?

Will the Leader of the House respond to what hon. Members have asked for today? Will the White Paper and the risk assessments be published before the Committee stage—in the coming two weeks? The Government clearly do not do process or substance. The Secretary of State said:

“What we have come up with...is the idea of a comprehensive free trade agreement and a comprehensive customs agreement that will deliver the exact same benefits as we have”—[Official Report, 24 January 2017: Vol. 620, c. 169.]

Same outcome, different name! We call it the single market, they call it a free trade agreement; we call it the customs union, they call it a customs agreement. Will the Leader of the House ensure time to debate this alternative terminology so that there is no confusion?

Staying with the EU, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the comprehensive economic and trade agreement between the EU and Canada? The Secretary of State for International Trade has apparently given a commitment on behalf of the Government before the plenary vote in the EU on 15 February, and confirmed to the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee that he had overridden parliamentary scrutiny. I am sure that the Leader of the House will say something about that.

The Government cannot use the Brexit shambles as an excuse for policy failures or fiscal irresponsibility. May we have a debate on the National Audit Office report on Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs’ contract with Concentrix? Some £23 million was paid as commission to Concentrix, could an y damages for breach of contract be set aside and £10 million provided to cover the costs of child burials? I refer to the campaign started by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) in memory of her son Martin.

May we also have a debate on the climate change risk assessment report published on 18 January? The report highlighted urgent priorities. It said that more action was needed on flooding and coastal change risks; highlighted the risks to health from high temperatures; and pointed out the risk of shortages in public water...
supply. Despite this, there has been no speech or statement from Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Department’s Twitter account is silent. It is eerily similar to what is going on in the White House. Can we have a statement from the Secretary of State? As mothers, fathers, uncles, aunties and grandparents, we need to know what steps will be taken to protect future generations.

Will the Leader of the House raise the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe with the Foreign Secretary? She has had her five-year sentence confirmed, but it is not clear what the charges are. Representations must be made.

I am sure the Leader of the House and all Members will join me in celebrating the consecration of the first woman bishop in Wales, Canon Joanna Penberthy, who will be Bishop of St David’s—a great little city.

Finally, whatever the shape of the Bill to be published later today, I would like to remind hon. Members that the procedural hub is open in the Library to help Members with amendments. Parliament is indeed sovereign.

Mr Lidington: I join the hon. Lady in welcoming the new Bishop of St Andrew’s—I mean St David’s—to her duties. [Interruption.] I am getting carried away by Burns night this week. The bishop must be taking charge of one of the most picturesque and delightful diocese anywhere in the country.

On the question of Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe, which the hon. Lady rightly raised, my hon. Friend the middle east Minister spoke to the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister on Monday to express our concern at the appeal verdict. The case has also been raised directly by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary with President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif, and our ambassador will continue to raise it at every level and at every opportunity in Iran.

The Government have accepted that Concentrix provided unacceptably poor service, and also that HMRC itself needs to learn lessons from the experience. I hope the House will recognise that the Government were right to prioritise the people whose tax credit claims had been either handled wrongly or not properly assessed. HMRC has now dealt with all the 181,000 cases that were taken back from Concentrix.

I shall consider the hon. Lady’s request for a debate on climate change. As she will know, the Government continue to give a high priority to the issue, and we played a leading role in helping to forge the Paris agreement last year.

I cannot, as yet, give the House details of the dates of the summer recess or the Queen’s Speech, but I hope to do so as soon as possible.

The hon. Lady asked about the comprehensive economic and trade agreement and the override. There was a need for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade to override the normal scrutiny procedures, because the EU timetable for agreement within the Council accelerated faster than we had expected, and it was in our interests—in terms of our relationship with Canada, our support for free trade as a principle, and our EU relationships with other countries—to agree. The UK has been championing that agreement since the inception of negotiations. However, I said in my evidence to the Scrutiny Committee two weeks ago that we would seek an opportunity possibly to try to link the debate on CETA to a wider debate on international trade before much longer.

As for the hon. Lady’s broader questions about Europe, I am sorry that she was a bit grudging in her response to the Government’s announcement about the White Paper. The Opposition normally complain when an announcement is made by way of a written statement or a press release, away from the glare of parliamentary scrutiny. In this case, the Government made their announcement during Prime Minister’s questions, with a packed House, a packed Press Gallery and a packed Public Gallery. I thought that the hon. Lady might have welcomed that. I hope that it will not be much longer before, equally in prime time, we shall finally have the authoritative statement of what on earth the Opposition’s policy on Europe is. We have been waiting for that for far too long.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on regulations surrounding the operation of Uber? While I entirely understand that it works very well for some people, it is having an adverse impact on the licensed taxi trade in Southend.

Mr Lidington: I understand my hon. Friend’s concern about the position in Southend. I understand that there have been allegations that drivers whose licences had been revoked by Southend Council continued to work in the town by obtaining TFL licences and working for Uber. My advice to my hon. Friend and his constituents is that those concerns should be raised directly with Transport for London. It is the responsibility of local licensing authorities to ensure that not just taxi drivers but private hire drivers are fit and proper persons to hold such licences.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): May I personally thank you, Mr Speaker, for an immaculate Selkirk Grace last night, and also let you know that you are down for “Tam o’ Shanter” next year?

I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week—and what a week it is going to be. First there was to be no vote; now there is to be a vote. Then there was to be no Bill; now there is to be a Bill. Then there was to be no White Paper; now there is to be a White Paper. We should have chanced our arm and said that we should definitely stay in the European Union.

The Bill’s Second Reading will take place on Tuesday, and a Committee of the whole House will debate it the following week. Everything will be rushed through and concluded before the following Thursday. As the guardian of the House’s procedure and its business, will the Leader of the House guarantee that the White Paper will be published in time for the Committee stage, so that the House can consider it before debating a Bill of such importance and such magnitude?

May we have a debate about special relationships, and, in particular, about how you are supposed to be behave when you are in one of those special relationships? When a United States President bucks torture as an instrument of policy, when particular religions are picked out for exclusion and when women’s rights are set back decades, should this country not be a little bit more cautious before accepting a Trumpian embrace?
Lastly, may we have a debate about Scotland’s place within the United Kingdom following some of the discussions there have been in the Supreme Court, because we now know that all these Scotland Acts and devolution settlements are not worth the vellum they are written on? We now know that there is no such thing as permanence in this Parliament, and what we have heard about the Sewel conventions being enshrined in law is nothing other than parliamentary waffle. Week by week, a Brexitised Britain looks a less and less attractive prospect for Scotland. We need to know that our views are going to be respected, or we will have to reconsider remaining in this particular place.

Mr Lidington: In reply to the hon. Gentleman’s questions, first, we hope to publish the White Paper as soon as possible.

On the very important question the hon. Gentleman asked about torture, the Prime Minister said very clearly yesterday that the United Kingdom remains resolutely opposed to torture on the grounds of moral principle, on the grounds of our participation in the UN convention against torture and other such international legal instruments, and on the grounds that it does not work because we cannot place much value on information or evidence extracted by means of torture. That continues to be, and will continue to be, the Government’s position.

On the hon. Gentleman’s question about the place of Scotland in the United Kingdom, it was the Scottish Government’s decision to go to the Supreme Court over the question of consultation with the devolved Administrations, but it has always been the case, and is set down in the three devolution Acts, that the United Kingdom’s participation in, and membership of, international organisations is a reserved matter under those devolution settlements.

On the hon. Gentleman’s other questions about Europe, this House voted overwhelmingly for the referendum Bill to give the decision to the people and voted overwhelmingly for the Prime Minister to trigger article 50 by the end of March, and that is what we are seeking to deliver.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. In reminding colleagues of the need for brevity, I also remind them that those who came into the Chamber after the statement had started should not be standing—I am sorry, but it is as simple as that.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Can the Leader of the House confirm that during the Committee stage of the withdrawal Bill, the Government’s intention will be to resist every and each amendment that seeks to tie the Government in legal knots and impede their negotiation?

Mr Lidington: As hon. Members will see when they have studied the Bill, it is a short Bill which empowers the Prime Minister formally to trigger article 50 and commence the negotiation. That is all that the Bill is about.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Since this Government came into office they have sought to avoid parliamentary scrutiny of their plans to leave the EU and to achieve their aims by resorting to the use of the royal prerogative, bypassing this Parliament. First, they lost in the High Court, then they lost in the Supreme Court, and now, finally, they have had to concede that Parliament is sovereign by publishing a Bill and a White Paper. But I was astonished at the amount of time that the Leader of the House has given this House to debate the Bill, and he is being very coy about whether the White Paper will be published before the Committee stage of the Bill. Can he give us more time and tell us that he is going to publish the White Paper before next week?

Mr Lidington: If we consider that this is a two clause Bill, of which the second clause deals only with the extent of the Bill in respect of the United Kingdom, there is plenty of time, including two full days on Second Reading, for all opinions to be fully expressed.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): May we have a debate on the ongoing witch hunt of former service people who served in Northern Ireland during the troubles, because this is a travesty of justice, brings shame on our country and has to stop?

Mr Lidington: There will be Northern Ireland questions next Wednesday, on 1 February, when my hon. Friend may wish to press this point, but, as he knows, the Secretary of State has already expressed concern about this. It is important that criminal investigations are conducted independently and impartially, but that servicemen and women are not singled out in any way.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement, and for giving the House confirmation that the Back-Bench debate on the armed forces covenant will take place on Thursday 2 February. Earlier this week, the Backbench Business Committee determined that a debate on Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories would be scheduled for the next available date. That will be on 9 February. We are also hoping to schedule a debate on the governance of football on that date, but we need to get confirmation from the applicants that that will be okay. I should also like to let the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) know that an application has been made for a Back-Bench debate on the position of former UK armed forces personnel in regard to previous activities.

Mr Lidington: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that information. I try to assist him by giving him adequate notice of Back-Bench time, and he is helping the whole House by indicating where future opportunities will lie.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting representatives of Age UK Warwickshire and hearing about the excellent work that they carry out in my constituency. In the light of increasing life expectancy and the rise in the incidence of conditions such as dementia, may we have a debate on how we can better support such organisations and on the benefits of closer co-operation between such bodies and local authorities?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is quite right to highlight this point, and I should like to congratulate him and those people in Warwickshire who are working so hard...
to improve services for people living with dementia and
to raise money for dementia research. The Government
have doubled research spending on dementia, and we
are looking to spend more than £300 million during this
Parliament, but as my hon. Friend says, helping people
who are living with dementia involves families, voluntary
organisations and local authority statutory services
co-operating closely.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): May I say to the
Leader of the House that providing just three days to
debate the most important issue facing this country in a
generation, the repercussions of which will affect generations
to come, is totally unacceptable? I hope that every
Opposition party in the House, and every Member who
cares about parliamentary democracy, will vote against
this contempt of Parliament when we vote on the
programme motion.

Mr Liddington: I remind the right hon. Gentleman
that his party supported the European Union Referendum
Bill on putting the question to the people, and it supported
the timetable for triggering article 50 by the end of
March. This Bill is designed to ensure that those objectives
are met.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole)
(Con): Does the Leader of the House agree that there is
in fact ample time to debate the article 50 Bill? We will
have two days on Second Reading and three days in
Committee to debate what will be a very narrow Bill.
Can he confirm the precise sitting times on those days?

Mr Liddington: We will try to ensure that there is
plenty of time, and that adequate protection is given
against the risk of statements or urgent questions so
that Members on both sides have the opportunity to
debate these matters fully.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is
a pleasure and a surprise to be called to speak before my
hon. Friends. Previously, I have asked the Leader of the
House about the budget for the National Audit Office
and the possible Barnett consequentials for Scotland,
but he has still to get back to me. Last week, the
Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission agreed
that there should be Barnett consequentials following
that budget. May we have a statement telling us how
much Scotland is going to get and when that will
happen?

Mr Liddington: I would obviously like to see the response
that the hon. Gentleman has had from the NAO about
this, but I will do my best to provide him with a
response.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Because
the Prime Minister has been so clear, I do hope that the
White Paper will not tell us anything that we do not already
know.

Mr Liddington: I cannot promise that all colleagues
will have followed the Government’s various statements
on our approach to EU exit with the assiduousness
that my right hon. Friend has undoubtedly shown.
The Prime Minister has been very clear that, while we
wish to provide clear statements about our objectives, it
would not be in the national interest to set out our
negotiating position in detail. That would be the most
foolish step for any Government to take.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Arising
from what has been said, should it not be made clear
not only that the UK does not sanction torture, as stated
yesterday, but that it will condemn its use by the
United States if waterboarding is brought back? Would
it not be absolutely wrong if this Government became
an apologist for a totally bigoted and wrong-headed US
President?

Mr Liddington: There is absolutely no question of this
country endorsing or supporting torture. The rejection
torture is written into various international agreements
to which we are party and has been integral to numerous
statements on the subject by the Prime Minister, the
Foreign Secretary and many other members of the
Government.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Can we have a debate on
how the Government can do better to ensure that the
prosperity agenda stemming from defence procurement
is used to ensure that existing clusters of high-tech
businesses in the south-west, such as in Yeovil, benefit
from inward investment by large beneficiaries of UK
Government spending such as Boeing?

Mr Liddington: My hon. Friend highlights some real
opportunities for business to benefit from technology.
One of the things that this country needs to improve is
how we turn our inventiveness and technological expertise
into commercial, job-creating opportunities. This may
be a good opportunity for him to seek either an
Adjournment debate or a Backbench Business Committee
debate to pursue the matter further.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Last week, I attended
the wonderful Eastborough Junior Infant and Nursery
School in my constituency. It now has a free breakfast
club, which is attended by around 70 children each day.
The club is provided and facilitated by Huddersfield
Town football club with its charity partners. The club
supports a number of schools in the district. May we
have a debate on how we can encourage or, indeed,
mandate other football clubs to do other types of
community initiatives to support the community?

Mr Liddington: I cannot promise a debate in Government
time, but I applaud the initiative that is taking place in
the hon. Lady’s constituency. There are many parts of
the country in which local sports clubs and other voluntary
organisations are supporting schools in comparable
ways.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Some in
this place can talk for Britain—not me, of course—but
we can hardly complain that we are getting five days on
a two-clause Bill, including until midnight on Tuesday.
No more delay. The Bill is just implementing the will of
the British people. But, just to put the icing on our
cake—[Interruption.] If we get something, we should
always ask for something more. Can the Leader of the House confirm that he will try to avoid urgent statements on any of those days?

Mr Lidington: We will try not to have unnecessary statements, but obviously events happen and other business has to be presented to Parliament. That explains why we have said that, next Tuesday, Second Reading will continue until midnight. I am sure that hon. Members will have every opportunity to speak and make all the points they want to make during that debate.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Does it not beggar belief that the Government are so afraid of proper debate that they have allocated only a pathetic three days to the Committee on the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill? That is less time than we had on the Lisbon treaty, on the Amsterdam treaty or on the Single European Act, and a tiny fraction—an eighth—of the time we had on the Maastricht treaty. Does it not speak volumes about the deficiency of the Government’s plan that they are trying to gag Parliament in that way?

Mr Lidington: I have more respect for the hon. Gentleman than to think that that is anything more than synthetic rage. There is no comparison between previous Bills that sought to ratify EU treaties that had a direct impact on many different aspects of UK law and a two-clause Bill, of which a single clause is substantive, that is entirely about giving authority to the Prime Minister to trigger the article 50 process and begin negotiation.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Last Friday, I had the great honour of attending Brecon barracks to help commemorate the 138th anniversary of the battle of Rorke’s Drift, which was immortalised in the film “Zulu.” With that in mind, can we have a debate on the importance of educating young people on the great history of our armed forces?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend draws attention to the deep connection between Brecon in his constituency and the 24th Regiment of Foot. I understand that the regimental museum of the Royal Welsh is at Brecon barracks, and I hope that the commemoration went well and that he will seek other parliamentary opportunities, such as an Adjournment debate, to highlight it further.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Leader of the House would not want to constrain the debate on the article 50 Bill, so will he bring forward a money resolution to allow the widest possible range of amendments to be tabled?

Mr Lidington: I do not think that the Prime Minister needs any additional resources to trigger article 50 once the authority has been given.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming today’s growth figures? May we have a debate on the fundamental strength of the UK economy, which grew by 2% last year?

Mr Lidington: I would like to think that that good news on growth, which is also good news for jobs and living standards, would be welcomed right across the House. That achievement is a tribute to British industry and British workers.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): The late Lord Hailsham, a former Conservative Lord Chancellor, described government in this country as an “elective dictatorship”. This Government seem determined to prove him right with their timetabling of the EU withdrawal Bill. Whether Lord Hailsham was right or wrong, it was in the name of democracy that people campaigned for us to leave the European Union, so I repeat the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie): why are this Government trying to muzzle the voices of people in Parliament with their timetabling of the Bill?

Mr Lidington: Five allotted days can hardly be described as muzzling. The House voted both for the people to take the decision and for the March timetable for the triggering of article 50. The Bill’s passage through Parliament is intended to ensure that the House’s wishes can be delivered.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): One of my constituents will appear in the Supreme Court next week because the Department for Education wants judges to interpret the word “regular” in relation to school attendance. If the Government win the case, the law will retrospectively criminalise the actions of tens of thousands of parents. If the law needs to be changed, it should come before Parliament for proper debate and scrutiny. Will the Leader of the House encourage the Secretary of State for Education to make a statement on the situation?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend will understand that it would be inappropriate for either the Secretary of State or me to comment on this case when it is currently before the courts. The Department requested permission to intervene in the Supreme Court, supporting the local authority, because following the lower court’s decision we need clarity on what the law actually means before we can take any policy decisions that may be necessary.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Last week, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy announced a major review of limited liability partnerships and their association with international criminal activity. On Monday, however, the Treasury brought forward a legislative reform order to the Regulatory Reform Committee seeking the formation of a new type of limited partnership with even fewer controls. May we have a debate on the use of LROs?

Mr Lidington: As the hon. Gentleman will know, limited liability partnerships have a genuine purpose in Scotland and, as I understand it, have existed for a long time in Scottish law. However, as he says, there have been serious allegations and evidence that the status has been abused, which is why the inquiry is happening. If the inquiry concludes that changes in the law are necessary, the Government will clearly want to consider them quickly but carefully.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It seems as though Labour Back-Bench Members are seeking to oppose the Government’s programme motion for the article 50 Bill, but has the Leader of the House received representations from Labour’s Front-Bench team to indicate that they are similarly seeking to oppose it?
Mr Lidington: It is not for me to disclose on the Floor of the House conversations that may have happened through the usual channels. However, there have been numerous, and often contradictory, messages in public about the approach that the Opposition plan to take.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Hull has had an excellent start as the UK’s city of culture, with nearly 350,000 people attending in the first week, and I hope that you, Mr Speaker, might be able to attend during the course of 2017. Many of those visitors arrive through the railway station, so imagine my surprise when I learned that TransPennine Express, which operates the station, has decided to close the waiting room and toilets at 7 pm due to antisocial behaviour. After the three Hull MPs made representations, the operator said that the facilities will be kept open until 9 pm, but only if there is no more antisocial behaviour. May we have a debate about when we decided that yobs could dictate what facilities passengers and members of the public can use? This would not happen anywhere else in the country.

Mr Lidington: First, may I congratulate the city of Hull on its first weeks as the city of culture? I hope that many hon. Members from both sides of the House are able to go there this year. I remember visiting city hall the last time I went and being hugely impressed by the architecture and the sense of civic pride in Hull.

On the particular question about antisocial behaviour, I have a lot of sympathy with what the hon. Lady says. I very much hope that the franchise holder, the local police and the local authority can work together to find an effective solution, so that those facilities can remain open when tourists will want to use them.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I welcome the Government’s commitment this week to publishing a White Paper, and thank my right hon. Friend for his work in enabling that to happen. Will he outline what discussions he has had to enable debates in the House, and particularly in the Chamber? What will the timescales be to allow my constituents’ views to be heard in parliamentary time?

Mr Lidington: Obviously, there will be opportunities to debate the Bill that has been published today, although it is pretty narrow in scope. The Government have said we will introduce the repeal Bill fairly rapidly after the Queen’s Speech later this year, and there will continue to be general debates on various aspects of our departure from the EU that will provide opportunities for issues discussed in the White Paper and elsewhere to be raised in full.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): Notwithstanding the importance of issues such as Brexit, will the Leader of the House consider how we ensure that other legislation receives the prominence it deserves? Yesterday was a historic day for this Parliament, with the passing of the gender pay gap regulations, which will force large companies with more than 250 employees to publish their gender pay gap information. That sort of legislation also deserves prominence, so will he consider how we provide it?

Mr Lidington: I am very happy to consider that, because I think we would all wish to see much greater public knowledge and understanding of the things that go on in Parliament that perhaps do not happen at prime time and grab the headlines. The regulations the hon. Gentleman spoke of are a good example of that, and were on an issue that commanded considerable consensus on both sides of the House.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Last week, residents in Oundle suffered from a gas issue that meant the town was disconnected from the network for a considerable length of time. Along with National Grid and Western Power working around the clock to put it right, the community rallied round to protect and look after vulnerable and elderly people. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking them for all their efforts on the ground in Oundle, and may we have a debate next week on getting emergency planning right?

Mr Lidington: I cannot promise a debate next week, given the other business we have to deal with, but perhaps that is Adjournment debate territory. I unhesitatingly both thank and congratulate the statutory services and individual constituents in Oundle on what they managed to do.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May we have a debate in Government time and a statement on cuts to Equality and Human Rights Commission funding? With hate crime on the increase, does the Leader of the House appreciate that many hon. Members believe that those cuts send the wrong message to women, the black and minority ethnic community and those who suffer from disabilities?

Mr Lidington: Because of the need to bring the public finances under control, all parts of the public sector are having to face difficult decisions about spending. I point the hon. Gentleman towards Women and Equalities questions on Thursday 2 February, when he will have the opportunity to raise that matter with Ministers.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House and I were both first elected in 1992, and he will recall the many, many days we spent on the Maastricht treaty. Will he tell the House how much consideration he has given to previous debates on such matters, not only in ’92 but in the 1970s, when we joined the European Union? What discussions were there at that time and what consideration was given to what the Opposition parties said then, compared with now?

Mr Lidington: If I am honest, any of us who came into the House in 1992 would probably not look back at those debates on the Maastricht treaty as the greatest moment of glory for the House of Commons, and they are not something that we necessarily want to put more recently arrived colleagues through. Given the very narrow scope of the Bill that is being published today, the five days that we have announced and the substantial amount of additional time, particularly on Second Reading, Parliament has plenty of opportunity to have a debate on this matter in full.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Next Monday, we will be discussing the Pension Schemes Bill—a missed opportunity for this Government to deal with the issue raised by Women Against State Pension Inequality. In the light of the 245 MPs who have lodged
petitions on behalf of their constituents and in the light of the vote that took place in this Chamber on 1 December, when this House agreed that we had not discussed the WASPI issue, will this Government bring forward a debate and ensure that they introduce proposals that deal with the women who are suffering?

Mr Lidington: The coalition did commit more than £1 billion to lessen the impact on those who were the worst affected by the change in pension age. No one will see their pension age change by more than 18 months. Those who face the largest increase in the state pension age received at least seven years’ notice. However, we must also be realistic about the fact that people are living longer and that, if we are going to equalise the state pension age, we need to raise the state pension age both for men and women. The cost of reversing the Pensions Act 2011 would be more than £30 billion.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): In Blaenau Gwent, the air is fresh and pure. However, walking around this week, the air in London is putrid. Can we have a statement on air quality and the impact of diesel emissions? The Government need better to protect the public health of their people.

Mr Lidington: Improving air quality is a priority for the Government and in particular for the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Our plans have always followed the best available evidence, but we are ready to update those if necessary. We have been at the forefront of action in Europe to make sure that there is more accurate real-world emissions testing of diesel cars in particular. I can point the hon. Gentleman to the green transport initiative and to plans to introduce clean air zones around the country. There is no instant solution to this problem, but it continues to be a Government priority.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Transport Ministers have confirmed that residents in Cheshire West and Chester will not qualify for reduced tolls on the new Mersey crossing, which completely contradicts the promises made immediately before the last general election by the then Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne). Can we have a debate on car tolls so that the Government can explain why they have broken their promises to my constituents?

Mr Lidington: I cannot promise a debate in Government time. This may be an Adjournment debate opportunity, but I will ask the relevant Minister to contact the hon. Gentleman about his point.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): The Clydesdale Bank’s decision to close 40 branches in Scotland, with the highly regrettable loss of 200 jobs, will have a particular impact on my constituents in Clackmannanshire, who will be left without a single local bank branch. Can we have a debate about the importance of local bank branches to local communities, so that we can send a strong signal to banks, including the Clydesdale, about the negative impact these closures have on local communities and economies?

Mr Lidington: That may be something that the hon. Lady will want to raise by way of an Adjournment debate, or a Backbench Business debate on the issue more generically, but I understand the plight that some of her constituents are facing. It is incumbent on the big retail banks to reflect very carefully on this, particularly before closing the last banking outlet in a community.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House do me a favour and stop suggesting that those on the Opposition Benches—and also on the Government Benches—who believe passionately that the scrutiny of this European Bill should be thorough are trying to overturn the popular vote on the referendum? He knows that is not the case. Will he please be honest about it?

Mr Lidington: As well as voting for the referendum, this House also voted for the Prime Minister to trigger article 50 before the end of March 2017. Because of the Supreme Court judgment, it is necessary for a Bill to go through all its legislative stages in both Houses for the wish of the House, in respect of the timetable, to be met. The five days that we have allotted will give ample opportunity for that narrow issue to be adequately debated.

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): May we have a statement next week on High Speed 2 in south Yorkshire? HS2 has had a consultation on a station at Sheffield Meadowhall, which has plenty of support in south Yorkshire but there is no consensus. Consequently, it is currently consulting on the M18 eastern re-route through south Yorkshire. We learnt this week that it is now looking at eight sites along that re-route for a parkway station, but none of them is out for public consultation. Can we ensure that we have a good return for public money? It is wasting money hand over fist.

Mr Lidington: I will report to the Minister with direct responsibility for HS2 the point that the right hon. Gentleman has made. Like you, Mr Speaker, I have some constituency experience of wrestling with HS2. It is important that his constituents get clear answers and are able to make strong representations.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): In January last year, a group of MPs invited trade union leaders to address a meeting in Parliament. It has since emerged that the meeting was secretly recorded without the knowledge of the speakers or the event’s organisers. Given that MPs of all parties hold meetings on the parliamentary estate, I would be grateful if the Leader of the House could clarify the rules on third parties recording meetings without consent and give me his view on whether those rules might have been breached.

Mr Lidington: I am very concerned by what the hon. Gentleman says. If he lets me have the full details, I will investigate the matter as quickly as possible.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): The Prime Minister has indicated that Parliament will vote on the terms of a final Brexit deal, but what if there is no deal? Will there be a reference back to this House and a vote on whether we leave the EU on no terms?

Mr Lidington: The decision to leave the EU was taken in the referendum. The House knows where I stood on the referendum, but as democrats we have to accept the outcome. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, if there is no deal under the terms specified in article 50, we will have to fall back on other arrangements.
Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): The Scottish National party will most certainly oppose what is quite a disgraceful programme motion. Can we get this straight: will the White Paper setting out the Government’s position, authorising an irrevocable step in the greatest constitutional change in this country for 50 years, be published before the Bill’s Committee stage, and if not, why not?

Mr Lidington: As I said a few moments ago, I hope that we can publish the White Paper as soon as possible. The other point that I will make to the right hon. Gentleman is that the authorisation for our departure from the European Union was given by a referendum of all people of the United Kingdom. Some of us like that decision and some of us do not, but it was a democratic decision that the electorate were entitled to make.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): After 22 weeks there is still no date for the restoration and renewal debate. Has the Leader of the House turned into Oscar Wilde, who said, “Never put off till tomorrow what could possibly be done the day after,” or Ellen DeGeneres, who said, “Procrastinate now; don’t put it off”? Or does he seriously think that we can just carry on like this and hope that somehow we will muddle through? He will say that we will have the debate someday, but someday is not a day of the week.

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman makes his point forcefully, as he did during the debate in Westminster Hall earlier this week. He will know from the business that faces us over the next two weeks that it has not been possible to schedule the debate on restoration and renewal then. I hope that we will be able to identify a date as soon as possible.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): The Leader of the House will be aware of the controversy in Northern Ireland surrounding the renewable heat incentive and the many millions of pounds that have been lost. A month ago a colleague of mine sought information from two Whitehall Departments through a freedom of information request. This week he received a letter from both stating that too much work was needed to get the information, so he has submitted the questions again. Is there not a danger that that will be a new dark age?

Mr Lidington: Mr Trump has been elected by the people of the United States under their democratic constitution. Under Conservative and Labour Governments alike, it has rightly been a national priority in terms of our security interests, our geopolitical interests and our interests in prosperity and trade to forge as close as possible a partnership with and an understanding of a new American Administration. That has to be in the interests of the people whom we represent and that is what the Prime Minister will seek to do in Washington.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), can we have an urgent debate to discuss the Government reneging on their promise to provide special help on tolls for small businesses in Halton when the new Mersey gateway bridge is opened? That is the second time they have reneged on something. The decision was announced by the then Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), on 23 April 2015. Can we have an urgent debate to find out why the Government are again refusing to honour their commitments?

Alex Salmond: As I said a few moments ago, I hope that we can publish the White Paper as soon as possible. The other point that I will make to the right hon. Gentleman is that the authorisation for our departure from the European Union was given by a referendum of all people of the United Kingdom. Some of us like that decision and some of us do not, but it was a democratic decision that the electorate were entitled to make.

Mr Lidington: The deadlines set under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are of course a matter of law, not a matter of discretion for Ministers or officials. Ministers here do not have any direct authority over the devolved Departments within Northern Ireland, but I certainly hope that any Whitehall Department would respond well within the timeframe specified in the freedom of information legislation.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): We all wish the Prime Minister well in her work to increase exports, but is it not time for us to debate the relationship between this country and the President who, since his inauguration, has behaved like a petulant child, out to destroy the highest achievements of his predecessors? A new age is promised between Trump and the United Kingdom. Is there not a danger that that will be a new dark age?
Mr Lidington: Under the Parliament Acts, the House of Commons will have the final say, as on practically all legislation. As is always the case, the House of Lords has its own procedures. It is not in the gift of the Government to set down what time for debate there will be in the House of Lords on any Bill.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab) rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): And the prize for patience goes to Jeff Smith.

Jeff Smith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: And I wish the hon. Gentleman a happy birthday.

Jeff Smith: Thank you also for that, Madam Deputy Speaker—I am grateful.

It is quite right, of course, that other parliamentary business should be shelved over the next couple of weeks so that we can debate article 50, and that includes the Bus Services Bill. In Manchester, we have been demanding London-style bus franchising powers for many years. We can wait a little longer, but may I encourage the Leader of the House to reschedule the Bus Services Bill as soon as possible after the recess so that Manchester can properly manage its transport network?

Mr Lidington: This may be an inadequate birthday present, but I will do my best to deliver what the hon. Gentleman wants.

Points of Order

12.5 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am glad the Brexit Secretary is here for his moment of history, but perhaps I could just detain him a second. During Brexit questions, he quoted my successor as First Minister—Nicola Sturgeon—somehow suggesting she wanted to deprive 160,000 European citizens of their right of residence in Scotland. By the wonders of modern technology, I have traced the original quote from July 2014. In fact, Ms Sturgeon was arguing exactly the opposite: that their right of residence was one of the reasons why Scotland would remain, as an independent country, a member of the European Union. I know the Brexit Secretary well—he is a decent and honourable man—but I found that another Minister used the same smear last October, so I am bound to conclude that some teenage scribblers in his Department are feeding out misleading information to hapless Ministers, who are then repeating it to the House. I am sure the Brexit Secretary—perhaps even before he has his moment of history—will want to correct the record.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Further to that point of order, I call Mr Secretary Davis.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course, if I am wrong, I apologise. I will send the right hon. Gentleman the quote that I gave from The Scotsman at that time.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it a separate point of order?

Chris Bryant: Yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will first answer the point of order from the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), which, as he and the House know, was not a point of order. The right hon. Gentleman sought, in his usual rhetorical way, to set the record straight. The Secretary of State has responded adequately to the point raised by the right hon. Gentleman, and I hope that honour is satisfied on all sides. A point of order—Mr Bryant.

Chris Bryant: And this one is a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you know, when a Minister makes a statement to the House, a printed copy is circulated around the Chamber the moment they sit down by the Doorkeepers. That is very useful for many Members—we can check exactly what the Minister has said, in case we slightly misheard something. The one time we do not do that is for the business statement. Now, I admit that it is a business question, so it is slightly different, but would it not be for the convenience of the House if, the moment the Leader of the House finished announcing the forthcoming business, it was circulated around the House for all hon. Members?
Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point of administration, and it might be that the Leader of the House would like to say something further to the point of order.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I completely concede that it is a perfectly reasonable request, and I will make sure that that happens.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Once again, that was not a point of order for the Chair, but we are having a very well-balanced session of points of order.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): It gets better, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the right hon. Gentleman says, it gets better. Would he care to make a point of order?

Sir Desmond Swayne indicated dissent.

Madam Deputy Speaker: No? This seems a good point for requests to Ministers, as we seem to be having a 100% record of having requests fulfilled. That was not a point of order for the Chair, so we will move on.

BILL PRESENTED

EUROPEAN UNION (NOTIFICATION OF WITHDRAWAL) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Secretary Davis, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Boris Johnson, Secretary David Mundell, Secretary Alun Cairns, Secretary James Brokenshire, Ben Gummer and the Attorney General, presented a Bill to confer power on the Prime Minister to notify, under Article 50(2) of the Treaty on European Union, the United Kingdom’s intention to withdraw from the EU.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 132) with explanatory notes (Bill 132-EN).

12.9 pm

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the Pubs Code established in July 2016 to deliver a fairer relationship between large tied pub companies and their licensees and to deliver the principle that the tied licensee should be no worse off than a free-of-tie licensee; introducing a Market Rent Only option for tenants, the right in certain circumstances to have an independent free-of-tie rent assessment and to pay only that sum; is dismayed that pub companies are thwarting the Code and are routinely flouting Regulation 50 that tenants who exercise, or attempt to exercise, their rights under the Code should not suffer any detriment; notes that this includes refusing to allow deeds of variation to leases, forcing tenants wanting to pursue the Market Rent Only option to agree a new lease on unfavourable terms; believes that fees being proposed for independent assessors are wholly unreasonable and that unfair additional charges are being demanded which make it unviable to pursue the Market Rent Only option; expresses strong concern that the Pubs Code Adjudicator (PCA), Paul Newby, who holds shares in, and has loans to Fleurets, which derives substantial income from the regulated pubcos, is failing to stop these practices or uphold the Code; calls on the Government to ensure that the Code works as intended and to accept the recommendation of the former Business, Innovation and Skills Committee to reopen the appointment process for the PCA; further notes that the Code does not apply in Scotland; and urges parity for Scottish tenants.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the time for this important debate. I thank the hon. Members for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) and for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White), who are, with me, lead Members on the debate. The hon. Member for Hartlepool is the Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, and I pay tribute to all the work it has done on this. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington, who is also a member of the Committee, has seen at first hand how pubcos are thwarting tenants in exercising their rights under the pubs code, and the failure of the Pubs Code Adjudicator to address this. I must declare my interest as the chair of the British Pub Confederation, which represents the vast majority of tenants’ organisations in the pubs sector, and pub campaigners as well.

It is now six months since the start of the statutory pubs code—the anniversary was 21 January. I wish to make it clear to the House that I did not want to have to call this debate and to bring to the House what I have to bring today. More than anyone, perhaps apart from the beleaguered pubco licensees, I wanted this issue solved. I wanted the unfair business model operated by the pub companies, and all the tales of abuses detailed by the Select Committee and others, to be a thing of the past, but that will not happen. I am afraid, unless the pubs code is working and being enforced by the adjudicator, and that is currently not the case.

Let me say at the outset that the pubs code must work as intended: it is the law. At the moment, pubcos are flouting the code to prevent tenants from being able to access the market rent only option. That is thwarting the will of Parliament and of the Government, who laid out how the code should work—and, of course, it is causing a great deal of stress to tenants.
Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is no surprise that the pubcos are doing their utmost to thwart the market rent only provisions—that is to be expected—but it is a surprise that the adjudicator appears to have conceived of his position as being that of a kind of private arbitrator and not what we in this House set him up as—a judge who enforces the law?

Greg Mulholland: I warmly welcome the right hon. Gentleman and thank him for his intervention. He has looked at this issue with great thoroughness and intellect, and he is absolutely correct in his assessment.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the real issue is that the adjudicator needs to have the confidence of all parties involved, and that does not seem to be the case at the moment?

Greg Mulholland: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is simply not acceptable to have ignored the fact that the majority of tenants’ organisations rejected the adjudicator and do not have confidence in him, and then to have rejected the recommendation from the cross-party Select Committee to replace Mr Newby and reopen the process.

In the course of my speech I will present evidence from the numerous cases that have been taken to the adjudicator. I pay tribute to the organisations representing tenants that have supplied that evidence, including the Pubs Advisory Service, the Guild of Master Victuallers, the Forum of Private Business, Licensees Supporting Licensees, the Punch Tenant Network, and Justice for Licensees. That has led to the British Pub Confederation report, which has 19 detailed pages all based on direct evidence from instances where tenants have sought to secure their legal rights under the pubs code by taking their case to the adjudicator.

So what has the Pubs Code Adjudicator produced after six months? A two-page press release. Worse than that, this press release—this glib statement—from the adjudicator’s office is not an honest description of the situation. It provides unexplained and meaningless data while failing to deal with, or even mention, any of the big issues facing tenants. The adjudicator ignores the ways in which the regulated pubcos are systematically breaching the code, covering up his own failures to uphold and enforce it. In effect—this goes back to the point made by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin)—he admits his failure both to enforce the pubs code and to understand the real role of the Pubs Code Adjudicator. The statement makes no mention of the myriad complaints about pubco behaviour; no mention of the many complaints about the adjudicator from tenants and their representatives who have approached him; no mention of the cases where tenants are giving up and giving in because of the failure of the code and his office; and, extraordinarily, no mention of the key issues of complaint and concern on which people are seeking clarification, including the systematic ways in which pubcos are insisting that the market rent only option requires a new lease, often on detrimental terms—a clear breach of the pubs code.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the whole point of the pubs adjudicator was to even up an inequality of arms between a single tenant—a sole trader, in effect—or a family business, on the one hand, and very large and powerful chains on the other, and that the lack of equal access to justice or advice for tenants is causing great problems?

Greg Mulholland: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I am afraid that the intention is not the reality, and that is why this House and the Government must take action.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, I have seen some of these things at first hand, and it has been an unsatisfactory experience. I would like to share with the House the following quote from a pubco: “Moving to a Market Rent Only commercial free of tie lease agreement, means larger upfront payments and the loss of our award-winning, business-friendly services and support, aside from business insurance.” Without naming the pubco or the pub involved, does he agree that this could be interpreted as threatening, and is not a business-friendly approach at all?

Greg Mulholland: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I welcome the support that he is giving to his publican constituents. I have that quote in my speech.

Let me remind right hon. and hon. Members that the pubs code and the adjudicator were introduced in the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015. The code came into force last year. It applies only to businesses owning 500 or more tied pubs in England and Wales, of which there are six, and governs their relationship with their tied pubs. The quasi-judicial statutory Pubs Code Adjudicator was created to uphold and enforce the pubs code so that it is properly implemented, and to act as an impartial arbiter when there are disputes on certain issues.

I wish to praise the current Government and the civil servants in the Department—formerly Business, Enterprise and Skills, now Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—for their very hard and diligent work in bringing through the pubs code, which is a strong, clear document. At this stage, six months in, Ministers and civil servants should not have to intervene given that the adjudicator’s role, as laid down in primary and secondary legislation, is to implement and enforce the code. The role of Ministers should now be to oversee and scrutinise that activity, but I am afraid that they now have to intervene because the Pubs Code Adjudicator is not doing the job as laid down in the pubs code and in the law.

Regulation 50 of the pubs code specifically states: “A pub-owning business must not subject a tied pub tenant to any detriment on the ground that the tenant exercises, or attempts to exercise, any right under these Regulations.”

This regulation is being routinely ignored and flouted by pub companies. Let me give some examples.

Pub companies are refusing to allow a simple deed of variation to leases if tenants suggest that they want to exercise their right to a market rent only option. This forces them to accept a new lease, which is offered only on unfavourable and clearly detrimental terms, clearly flouting regulation 50. Enterprise Inns is doing this systematically and then telling tenants that they will have to go to arbitration over what is clearly not an arbitration matter but a legal breach of the code’s regulation.

Tenants seeking the market rent only option are being presented with unreasonable charges and terms by pubcos, making it unviable to take or even pursue
the option—for example, unreasonable and unaffordable demands for up-front, quarterly payments of rent, or unjustifiable and excessive dilapidations charges. Pubcos are also, as the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington said, presenting so-called free-of-tie offers, sometimes calling them MRO offers as though they were the same thing as the market rent only option, which they are not; they are deliberately confusing the two. I remind the House that the market rent only option gives the tenant the right to an independent assessment of the market rent, and the right then to take the option on an existing lease with no other changes to the lease or the terms. Yet pubcos are insisting on shorter leases on detrimental terms, clearly breaching the pubs code. In addition, I can tell the House that that document being given to tenants is a Punch document.

Brigid Simmonds, the chief executive of the British Beer and Pub Association—the trade association of the pubcos—has said that it is “inevitable” that free-of-tie agreements would have “terms that more closely reflect commercial rental agreements elsewhere in the marketplace”. With the market rent only option, that is not allowed; it constitutes detriment. The lease has to continue on a free-of-tie basis, with the payment of independently assessed rent.

One thing that is putting people off is the fees proposed by assessors for carrying out that independent assessment. I have been sent a document from a surveyor that suggests that the fee can be up to £6,000. Under self-regulation, the maximum fee was £4,000, which was split into a maximum of £2,000 for the tenant and a maximum of £2,000 for the pub company. That was transparent and fair, unlike what the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors is presenting. Who is a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors? Mr Paul Newby, the Pubs Code Adjudicator. It is a clear case of jobs for the boys, because the people demanding those unjustifiable and excessive fees are his former colleagues, associates and friends. I have to say to the Minister that that shows us again why a surveyor was a wholly inappropriate choice to be the adjudicator.

Pub companies are confusing and misleading tenants so that they miss their trigger point—the very limited window in which they can seek to take the market rent only option. Pub companies are putting pressure on tenants by sometimes bribing and sometimes bullying them into signing on the dotted line, so that they stay tied and do not have the chance to exercise their rights.

Returning to the adjudicator, I remind the House that Paul Newby, the director of pub estate agents and surveyors Fleurets, was appointed as Pubs Code Adjudicator and started work in March 2016. Despite the majority of tenants’ groups objecting to his appointment, and despite the fact that he had ongoing financial links to the pubcos that he is supposed to regulate, Mr Newby failed properly to declare the conflict of interest when he applied for the role. As well as being a former director, which he did declare, he astonishingly—and completely unacceptably for someone in a quasi-judicial role—retains shares in Fleurets and has outstanding loans of more than £200,000 to it, with a repayment agreement that is set to last until 2023. That information had to be dragged out of him, and he published it only in December. Just to be clear, Fleurets declares that 20% to 23%—a fifth or more of its income—comes from the regulated pubcos.

To make matters worse, Mr Newby has been allowed to construct his own conflict of interest policy, and—surprise, surprise—it falls well below the industry standard for such documents. Surprisingly, it even falls well below the standards of his own professional body, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. The conflict of interest policy should be similar to that of the Groceries Code Adjudicator, but, unlike the GCA, the Pubs Code Adjudicator has chosen to publish a separate register of interests, along with an explanation of how his conflict of interest policy will be applied in relation to the register and, specifically, to his own conflict of interest. Mr Newby is setting his own rules to avoid having to disclose fully his conflicts of interest when he takes on cases.

The Select Committee was clear in July 2016 that not only was Mr Newby evasive, but he could not command the necessary confidence of pub tenants, and the appointments process should be reopened. Mr Newby also misled the Select Committee on important points, and has not responded properly to letters asking him for an explanation.

To return to the key point that the right hon. Member for West Dorset made, Mr Newby is the adjudicator, and his job is to uphold and enforce the pubs code. The Government state on the website:

“The Pubs Code Adjudicator (PCA) is responsible for enforcing the statutory Pubs Code.”

He is failing to act as an adjudicator; he is refusing to make rulings on important, basic matters such as the deed and variation versus new lease issue; and he is failing to uphold, never mind enforce, the code. Does he not understand the role—does he not properly understand the code and the legislation—or is this a deliberate attempt to undermine the whole statutory code, as many tenants now fear? The case-by-case approach that he is taking means that there will be no opportunity to look at many of the issues being raised repeatedly by tenants about the way in which pubcos are trying systematically to flout and thwart the code.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his campaigning on this issue over many years, and on securing the debate. What he is saying about the motives for the delay may well be true, but the feedback that I am getting is that the entire industry is frustrated about the failure to make any adjudications. The entire industry will benefit from the certainty that will come from the adjudicator’s getting on and making some decisions, and providing clarification on many of the important points that the hon. Gentleman is raising.

Greg Mulholland: I know that the hon. Gentleman had a meeting with Mr Newby the other day, and I would be interested to know what was said. I issue a word of caution to the hon. Gentleman to be careful who he listens to, and to listen to the licensees who are concerned about the cases being brought before the adjudicator.

The hon. Gentleman is right when he says that Mr Newby must make rulings. His job is not to horse-trade behind closed doors or to muddy the waters; he needs to
provide clear guidance on what the code means and deal with breaches. The hon. Gentleman is right that tenants and pubcos need clarity, which Mr Newby is not providing. Let us be clear that his refusal to step in and stop those breaches, or to make general rulings on certain points, amounts to a refusal to perform his important statutory role. That is simply not acceptable.

The most extraordinary thing that I want to set before the House is the fact that Mr Paul Newby, in his role as Pubs Code Adjudicator, has breached the very pubs code that it is his statutory duty to enforce. Extraordinarily, he has breached regulation 38 of the code, which states that if a pubco and tenant cannot agree on the appointment of an independent assessor, the adjudicator “must, within 14 days of the notification...appoint an assessor”. Rather than doing so—that is clearly an important part of his role and laid down in legislation—he is passing that duty on to his colleagues in the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors dispute resolution service, who are demanding a fee. They have no right to do that; it is not in the pubs code, which the adjudicator has no right to ignore. That has been raised by the Pubs Advisory Service, which made a complaint because tenants were being charged the £250 fee. Mr Newby has said that tenants will no longer be charged, and that those who have been charged will be refunded, but he let that happen. He says that the fee will still be charged but will be paid from levies.

During the very strange period in which Mr Newby wrongly and illegally delegated his duty to appoint an independent assessor, RICS—with the adjudicator’s knowledge—appointed a surveyor called Barry Voysey for a tenant in a Punch rent case, even though Mr Voysey was acting at the same time for Punch Taverns in another rent case. The tenant was appalled at the obvious conflict of interest and refused to accept Mr Voysey or to pay his up-front invoices. The appointment of Mr Voysey breached RICS guidelines—it is defined as a red non-waivable conflict—but it happened under the nose of, and with the knowledge of, the Pubs Code Adjudicator, Mr Paul Newby, who is a member of RICS.

I want to refer to a couple more issues that are of importance to the House. The first is the proposed Heineken takeover of 1,900 of Punch Taverns’ pubs. That is of great concern to Punch licensees and is opposed by the Punch Tenant Network and the Scottish Licensed Trade Association. Star Pubs and Bars, which is owned by Heineken, has 1,100 pubs, so we would be talking about a pub company with 3,000 pubs.

It is clear—this is a worrying competition issue—that Heineken seeks to take over Punch so that it can insist on many more pubs stocking its product rather than that of its competitors. The Heineken bid document states that the company intends to “improve visibility and increase sales of Heineken brands in high-quality pubs”. It is clearly a bid to gain market share through the acquisition of pubs, which would, as people have said, create a monster tie and make it much harder for brewers of all sizes to get their products into pubs—that remains an issue.

It is surely time to look again at the maximum number of pubs that a brewery can own, to stop this sort of market dominance, and consider placing a limit on the number of pubs that can be owned by any company—unlike the flawed beer orders. They were flawed because Ministers caved in to lobbying from big brewers and agreed to the loophole that allowed the huge, non-brewing pubcos to emerge, dominate and create their own unfair model; and here we are today.

In relation to the role of the adjudicator, the concern is that Heineken will seek to force Punch tenants to stock only its products—despite the discussions, there is nothing in the code that says it is allowed to do so—but the adjudicator has so far refused to clarify that simple point, which is within his remit. This lack of clarity means that brewers may be able to use the current confusion to threaten legal challenges that could again be seen as putting off discussion of tenants’ rights under the code.

I must mention Scotland, which is just as important as England and Wales to the British Pub Confederation. The Scottish Licensed Trade Association, which is a member of the British Pub Confederation, does a lot of wonderful work in Scotland. Like the British Pub Confederation, the Scottish Licensed Trade Association supports having the same rights for Scottish licensees tied to pub companies. We have the absurd situation that people tied to the same company have certain rights on one side of the border, but a mile away across the border in Scotland, have none of those rights. Those rights should be extended to Scotland, and I look forward to hearing the comments of the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless), who will speak for the Scottish National party.

Toby Perkins: That is a very important point. In the process of passing the legislation, I believe I am right in saying that SNP Members voted with us in the victory on the vote that was predominantly about pubs in England, because they wanted same rights in Scotland in the future. It is a shame that the system has not been brought in there.

Greg Mulholland: The hon. Gentleman is right. The only way to get such rights and fairness for Scottish tenants was for the system to be established in England first, and I was delighted that SNP Members supported that. I am also delighted that they are represented in the Chamber today, because it is simply wrong that Scottish tenants are discriminated against in comparison with their English and Welsh counterparts.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I will, indeed, touch on some of the points that the hon. Gentleman and other colleagues have made during the debate. He has made an excellent case, and has outlined many of the deficiencies of the Pubs Code Adjudicator, particularly his conflicts of interest, which seem to have a causal link with the lack of real adjudication. However, I am slightly confused about why the hon. Gentleman is recommending the system to another jurisdiction given that, by his own admission, it does not seem to be working correctly?

Greg Mulholland: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. It was made in the briefing that the British Pub Confederation and the Scottish Licensed Trade Association sent to him. I was with the delegation that met the Minister, Fergus Ewing MSP, and that told
him—this is one of the exciting possibilities—that it could be done in a simpler, clearer and better way and in a way that is appropriate for Scotland, which is the challenge for the Scottish Government. The Scottish Licensed Trade Association and British Pub Confederation would be delighted to offer support in achieving the best possible result for Scottish licensees. We need to learn some of the lessons about what is going wrong in this country and about the sort of person who should or should not be the adjudicator, if Scotland chooses to follow the adjudicator model.

In conclusion, the reality is that the statutory pubs code is not working as Parliament intended when we voted it through, and it is not working as this Government intended when they drafted the pubs code. It has been routinely flouted and ignored by pubcos, and Mr Paul Newby—a wholly inappropriate choice for Pubs Code Adjudicator—is failing in his basic statutory duty to uphold and enforce the code. Tenants seeking to exercise their legal right to the market rent only option are being discriminated against, misled and bullied into accepting tied deals. The problems identified by four Select Committee reports and now by the British Pub Confederation report are simply not being addressed.

Two things need to happen. I must say that Ministers have so far ignored this matter and washed their hands of it, but they can no longer do so because the pubs code and the law are being flouted. First, they must intervene now and ensure that the pubs code works as they and Parliament intended. They must ensure that the office of the Pubs Code Adjudicator actually upholds and enforces the code. Secondly, having heard the reality of what has gone on in the six months during which the code has been operating, I am afraid that the Secretary of State must now accept the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee’s recommendation and reopen the appointment process for the Pubs Code Adjudicator. We need an adjudicator who clearly understands and properly fulfils this important statutory role. That will require someone who does not have the conflicts of interest that Paul Newby has, and someone who will carry out the role as intended, rather than seek to skew the role and undermine the code.

MPs, Ministers, civil servants and the Select Committee have put in a lot of time, but all their work is being thwarted and ignored, so the code must now be made to work, with an adjudicator who will enforce it and who can be held to the appropriate standards for someone in a quasi-judicial position. The law must be made to work, and the will of the House and of Parliament must be upheld.

12.35 pm

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) on his energy in securing this debate. I thank him for the constant help he certainly gives me, as he perhaps gives other hon. Members, when I encounter certain issues or problems with tenants and leaseholders of pubcos in my constituency.

I declare a non-registered interest in that my sister is the tenant of a pubco. Some of my remarks have been generated by my experience in that respect, but not exclusively so, because I have a large number of pubs in my constituency. One or two of them are now closed and are being changed into housing or car parking. The concern about pub closures and about the lack of profitability of many pubs is my motivation for taking part in this debate.

Let me say from the outset that I am not instinctively opposed to the pubco model as such. It has a number of advantages. It allows people with very little capital to go into the pub trade in the first place. In ordinary circumstances, the pubco takes responsibility for the building and exterior work, which can be very expensive, as we all know. When the system works well, the pubco can provide some professional back-up. The model provides access to a wide range of beers. It does not insist that wines and spirits are included in the tie, although I may come back to that point. It provides an opportunity for the landlord to run a restaurant on the premises, and it provides accommodation where the landlord can live. There are some good aspects of the pubco model, in theory at least, so I am not out to attack pubcos as such.

In practice, however, there have been a lot of problems. For example, rents have been very unfairly assessed in many cases. They are based not only on the profit that the pub makes from the tied beer, but on the anticipated profit that it might get, in certain circumstances, from food. The pubco benefits from the sale of its own beer, but when the business does better, the rent is quite often increased, even though the pubco has benefited from the extra beer sales, which seems quite unfair. Pubcos sometimes insist that landlords go on educational courses—it really stretches the imagination to believe that someone who has been in the trade for a long time actually needs to go on such courses—and the pubco benefits from the cost of the courses.

On many occasions, pubcos insist that landlords use the pubco’s own insurance policies, which are enormously more expensive than those that can be found elsewhere in the market. They will not allow another product to be used unless the wording of the alternative insurance policy is identical, which seems very unfair. This costs landlords an awful lot of money. I have even known cases in which the tenant or leaseholder has been told that he must take out an insurance policy that covers the building, even though they are not responsible for the building. Tenants are charged for cover for fixtures and fittings that is not necessary in many cases, and in which the assessed value of the fixtures and fittings is far greater than their actual value, so the landlord again loses out in such cases.

So there are all those problems and the rate of pub closures persuaded Parliament to change the law, but as the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) comprehensively showed, the legislation is not working as it should. For example, confusion surrounds who is entitled to the free-of-tie option. Some landlords feel that only leaseholders or protected tenants are eligible. That needs clarifying and I hope that the Minister can do that for us today.

Some tenants are not protected under the clause in the Landlord and Tenant Acts that provides that a tenancy or a lease has to be renewed unless the organisation that owns the building wants to take it back for its own use. Many tenants or leaseholders have that clause struck out in the agreement that they reach. That is all
well and good until they get to the point when they need a new tenancy or a new lease and they ask the pubco for a free-of-tie option. Because they are not protected, the pubco can simply refuse to renew the tenancy. Is that fair? I suggest that it certainly is not. Again, I would appreciate some clarification of the exact position. It is an important matter. In answer to a recent written question, I was told that around 11,500 tenants are protected by the code, but there are many more pubs than that in the UK. It is not always easy to get a new tenancy if tenants ask for a free-of-tie arrangement.

The pubcos also often use outside agencies to negotiate the new tenancies, including chartered surveyors, who probably do not understand the local trade at all. I have also received complaints that pubcos’ business development managers do not properly discuss the available options with tenants. Tenants are told that even if the pubco is prepared to offer them a new tenancy, the rent might go up considerably. Of course, that is when the adjudicator is supposed to be brought in. Two points arise from that. First, that system makes for bad relations between the tenant and the pubco, and that is not a good situation to be in. Secondly, it poses the question of whether the adjudicator effectively and efficiently engages with pubs and landlords who take cases to them. My experience so far is that that is not happening.

Another tenant told me that the start of his new tenancy—I emphasise “new tenancy”; he has already had one—means effectively having to apply for his own pub as if he is a new tenant, filling in CVs and application forms, having to submit a new business plan and going on training courses, which I mentioned earlier, that he had to attend when he entered the trade. He has been running a pub or a similar establishment for nearly 20 years, so where is the sense and fairness in that?

All that causes a great deal of stress and problems. It is worth pointing out that tenants could fear—and end up—being not only out of work and out of business, but out of a home, because the pub is their home. It is unlikely that, in the course of being a pubco tenant, they have been able to build up sufficient capital to buy a new home or a new business. They are in a precarious position, and the House of Commons did not intend that when it passed the legislation.

The value of pubs to their communities, particularly in rural areas, is enormous. They are often meeting places, and places where people can dine together, clubs and societies can be formed and friendships can be made. Pubs also raise a lot of money for charities—that is often forgotten. Pubs are valuable community assets. I ask the Minister, as far she can today or following the debate, to try to answer some of the questions and consider whether anything else can be done, as the hon. Member for Leeds North West said, to give effect to the law and to what the House of Commons intended when it introduced the changes.

12.44 pm

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): May I begin by saying how grateful I am to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this important debate to take place? I thank the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland), and the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), who has just spoken. I bow to their superior knowledge and awareness of the pubs code and how it should operate. I also pay tribute to the hon. Members for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) and for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), who are in their places, and are fantastic and assiduous members of the Select Committee on Business, Enterprise and Industrial Strategy, which I am privileged to chair. All who have spoken so far have worked hard on pubs and the pub industry.

The industry has been characterised for many years by an imbalance in power between large pub companies and the tenants of pubs tied to those companies. The market has not worked in a fair and equitable way, and tenants have had unfair conditions imposed upon the manner in which a variety of things happen: how they sell beer and, particularly, the rent that they pay and the lease under which they operate.

The pubs code sets out how pubcos should deal with their tenants in a much fairer way. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), my predecessor on the Select Committee, who worked hard on pushing the matter and ensuring that the Government’s feet were held to the fire, is in his place. I pay tribute to him, his Select Committee and my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), who was on the Labour Front Bench at the time and did some great work on the subject. I am pleased to see him in his place. Those hon. Members have worked incredibly hard to try to rebalance the power relationship between pubcos and tenants.

A key part of addressing the imbalance is the Pubs Code Adjudicator. The adjudicator provides guidance on complying with the code and judges transactions to make things fairer. As we have heard, Mr Newby is the first adjudicator. In many respects, by being the first appointment, Mr Newby will shape the nature, style and tone of the job and the way in which matters will be dealt with by his successors. His judgments will set precedents, which could have ramifications for the pub trade and the pub property business for decades.

Dave Mountford of the Pubs Advisory Service and a landlord himself said to the Select Committee when we were taking evidence:

“The Pubs Code Adjudicator needs to be fair and impartial, and the decisions that he makes need to be based on our common law of justice and fairness such that they can then be applied to similar cases, so the precedent is set.”

I do not think that anybody would disagree with that. It is therefore essential that this first appointment of someone to a key role commands universal respect immediately and is not subject to any criticism or accusations of conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived. Perception is important in such matters.

Sir Oliver Letwin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the imbalance of which he rightly speaks means that the adjudicator’s proper role is not solely to maintain an impartial view, but specifically to consider cases of abuse by the pubcos? They are asymmetrical cases of abuse: the tenants are not abusing the pub code, the pubcos are allegedly abusing it. The adjudicator’s role should therefore be to enforce on the pubcos obedience to the code. At the moment, we see examples of his looking as if he is just an arbitrator between the two parties.
Mr Wright: The right hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly important point. The adjudicator has to redress the balance in the power dynamics in the industry and there is evidence to suggest that that is not happening.

I want to be clear: Mr Newby’s professional credentials and expertise are not disputed. His knowledge of the industry, having worked in the pub property business for something like 35 years, is not in doubt and cannot be questioned. However, having looked at the matter in the Select Committee, we believe that there is a significant reason why Mr Newby will find—and is finding—it difficult to command the confidence of all parts of the industry, namely a strong perception of a conflict of interest, made worse by Mr Newby’s ongoing financial interest in his former firm.

Chris White: During the speeches of the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and the Chair of the Select Committee, a number of criticisms have been made of the Pubs Code Adjudicator. Does the hon. Gentleman think that he should be called before the Select Committee again?

Mr Wright: The issue has attracted enormous interest, not just from our Select Committee but from predecessor Select Committees, which helped to change the law. As Chair of the Select Committee, I maintain that, given the hard-working and determined members of the Select Committee such as the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Cannock Chase, the issue will not go away, but continue to command our attention. We want to put pressure on the Government to look again and reopen the appointments process so that this important appointment is seen as fair and impartial, and that is not happening.

I want to touch on an issue that came up in the Select Committee’s consideration. Simon Clarke is a tied tenant and a surveyor; and both he and Mr Mountford expressed surprise and concern that Mr Newby, as a chartered surveyor, even applied for the job. Both said that someone from outside the industry was needed. Mr Mountford told us that they had said to the Department that the post required “a judge, a retired lawyer or somebody with legal experience. We definitely said it should not be a surveyor.”

Mr Clarke said that it definitely should not have been a chartered surveyor, because there would always be a conflict of interest as surveyors would, in all likelihood, have advised one of the parties.

That brings me to the central concern about Mr Newby’s appointment. Before becoming the Pubs Code Adjudicator, Mr Newby was a director of Fleurets, a firm of business property valuers and surveyors. As the hon. Member for Leeds North West mentioned, in giving evidence to the Select Committee Mr Newby said that about 20% to 23% of the firm’s fee income—a material amount—derived from advice provided to the large pubcos. That alone lends itself to accusations of potential and perceived conflicts of interest. However, Mr Newby also continues to have financial interests in the company. He gave evidence to the Committee in May and then clarified some of his self-confessed inaccuracies in a letter to me in November—at, he said, the instigation of the Minister. Mr Newby has both shares in Fleurets Holdings Ltd and debenture loan notes owed to him by the company.

The Committee asked Mr Newby if he would provide a clean and definable break with his old firm by divesting himself of those financial interests. He stated in his November letter to me that the company is unwilling to do so in order to avoid putting “undue strain on capital resources”—it is probably more accurate to call it the firm’s cash flow. That is very serious and really undermines the ability of the adjudicator to command the trust and respect of all sides of the industry. He has a significant financial interest in shares and loans from the company, which derives a significant part of its revenue from large pubcos, but he cannot alter that situation because that would put strain on cash flow. In other words, he retains an ongoing financial interest, and it is in Mr Newby’s interest for the firm to do well to secure the moneys owed to him. That could mean that his judgments would assist large pubcos that have commissioned Fleurets to advise on tenancy arrangements so as to maintain the firm’s cash-flow position and profitability, and thus allow payments to be made to Mr Newby.

When Mr Newby came before the Committee, he said:

“I have taken off my previous hat and thrown it away.”

But he has not: the ongoing financial interests mean that he is still clearly wearing that hat. There is a clear perception of conflict of interest. This is like a referee officiating at a football match between Chelsea, who are top of the premiership, and Newport County, who are bottom of league two—

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): Or Hartlepool.

Mr Wright: They are not bottom just yet. It would be like a match between Newport and Chelsea, with a huge imbalance in skills and experience—perhaps that is a subject for a different debate—only for fans to discover that the referee owned shares in Chelsea’s shirt sponsor. It is as close a relationship as that. Perceptions of conflict of interest would have started immediately on appointment, and as I said to Mr Newby at the Select Committee, he cannot possibly win. Any judgment he makes will now always be accused of being unfair and partial—like that referee, who would not be seen as independent. This is a serious failing in the ability of the pubs code to operate effectively.

A vivid contrast was brought home to me in the Select Committee when I asked tenants and landlords and then executives from large pubcos whether they had confidence in Mr Newby and his appointment. The large pubcos said that they did not have a problem. The tenants were clear that they did not believe that judgments would be fair and impartial. That contrast shows that the code cannot operate effectively. The pubs code has broken down before it has even begun, and the Minister needs to intervene to ensure the code starts to work.

I am disappointed that the Secretary of State rejected our calls to reopen the appointment process. I hope the Minister accepts that this case demonstrates a serious perceived conflict of interest, and that perception is stopping the code working effectively. To ensure the viability of the pub industry and to protect the interests of tenants, which have not been addressed for many
years, will she look again at reopening the process and have an adjudicator that is, and is seen to be, completely impartial and independent?

12.55 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) on securing the debate. He is a great pubs campaigner who speaks powerfully on behalf of tenant groups and the whole industry. I am pleased that we worked together to get the Government to introduce the statutory pubs code in the last Parliament and to ensure that a free market rent only option was a part of it. It is a great honour to take over from him as the chair of the all-party parliamentary save the pub group and I am sure that we will continue to work closely together on these issues.

The work we have done together in the past has taken us some of the way to where we are today. I hoped that I would be part of a Labour Government that would get to deliver the pubs code, but sadly that was not to be. The pubs code was a contentious and important battle to win. I recall campaigners’ tears of joy when we finally secured the victory that ensured that the free market rent only option was part of the code, after the hon. Gentleman tabled an amendment on Report. Many campaigners told me, “It’s too late for me—I have gone bankrupt as a result of the imperfections in the way in which the industry has been run in the past—but it is crucial to me to know that Parliament will bring such abuses to an end.” It is important that those campaigners, who spent many years getting the Government to recognise the power imbalance in the industry and the exploitation of that situation, have confidence in the pubs code and that we deliver the expectations expressed in those tears of joy.

The Labour Government of 2005 to 2010—this included excellent work by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey)—looked at the issue and set a final challenge for the industry. The coalition Government who followed were wary of regulating a complicated industry and attempted to do everything in their power to give the industry time to put its own house in order. It was very much a last resort for the Government to introduce a statutory pubs code, and it came as a shock to them when we were able to get the House to include a market rent only option into the legislation.

Critics always claimed that we should not legislate because it would make matters worse, and pointed out that the beer orders did not turn out as expected. It is important that those people who have faith in the code get the impression that the Government are serious about ensuring that the legislation delivers what we intended. It is to the credit of the Government that following the election they stuck to their word and introduced the code that they had committed to, and it is now in the entire industry’s interest to ensure that the pubs code’s meaning is established, that all those in the industry have confidence in the rigour with which it will be enforced, and that the Pubs Code Adjudicator is, and is seen to be, impartial.

The motion—supported by the Chair of the BEIS Committee as well as the hon. Member for Leeds North West—makes it clear that those tests of confidence are not being met. We have heard at some length deeply concerning allegations about the conduct of pub-owning companies when tenants wish to avail themselves of the market rent only option. A key test of the adjudicator will be whether it offers clarity to tenants and pub-owning businesses on issues such as the appropriateness of deeds of variation as a tool for transferring from a tied to a free tenancy. I have not heard a convincing reason why that should not be appropriate in the majority of cases.

I will come in a moment to the appointment and performance of Mr Newby, but it is fair to say that, alongside my praise for the Government for introducing legislation, I have legitimate questions for them about its implementation. It might seem harsh to criticise them for being too slow and too hasty, but there is a reasonable argument that they were guilty of that. The issues facing the industry have been long discussed and are well known, and the Government could have come forward much sooner with a draft code, giving notice to the entire industry of what was in store, appointed an adjudicator earlier and allowed more time for the set-up process. Given the scale of the changes to the code, most of which I support, the lead-in time was rather short and left the adjudicator and industry with little time to establish the new rules of the game.

I am conscious of the Select Committee’s strong criticisms of the process that led to the appointment of Mr Newby, repeated by my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), and the question of whether his background opened him up to perceptions of partiality, and I sympathise with many of those sentiments. The hon. Member for Leeds North West mentioned my meeting with Mr Newby this week. I was happy to have that meeting. As always, my approach is to meet all parties involved. In the couple of weeks I have been in post, I have also met some of the campaigners my hon. Friend has met. I have not yet, however, met the British Beer & Pub Association, the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers or the other organisations, but I will do, because it is important that everyone gets an opportunity to be heard. That is always my approach.

I said to Mr Newby that the focus on his background would continue while there are no adjudication decisions coming from his office and while the perceived conflicts of interest persist. We all want the adjudicator to get on and adjudicate and start answering questions about the interpretation of the pubs code. Once some initial decisions have been taken, tenants will have much greater clarity. As the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) said, the adjudicator will then have the opportunity to represent the people he is there to represent—those we set up the pubs code to protect—and to say to the pub-owning companies, “We’ve met previously about The Red Lion, and now you’re coming back with the same issues with The Dog and Duck. Why are we still having these arguments?” The hon. Member for Leeds North West made the important point that there might be differences of interpretation and fact between individual cases, but themes have emerged that could be looked at and quickly processed to give clarity. Across the industry, on both sides of the argument, there is real frustration as to how long it is taking for decisions to emerge. Mr Newby has assured me that decisions will start coming out of his office within the next month. We all hope he delivers.
The motion refers to Mr Newby’s shareholding and loans to Fleurets. The Commissioner for Public Appointments reviewed his involvement in Fleurets and decided that there was no conflict of interest, but the fact that it is still being raised undermines his perceived impartiality. Mr Newby told me, as he told the Select Committee, that he had attempted but been unable to come to an early settlement of his loan to Fleurets. I will be writing to Mr Newby and Fleurets to urge them to recommence talks aimed at ending his involvement with the firm so that the perceived lack of impartiality might be addressed.

I call on the Minister to do the same: to ask Mr Newby and Fleurets to recognise that this perception is undermining his ability to be seen as impartial and to take every possible step to find an alternative source of money. I will not mention the amounts concerned on the Floor of the House, but in the context of the industry, they are not huge sums. It would pose a serious question about the stability of a company if it was unable to replace such a sum of money. It is significant enough, however, for it to be relevant—or at least to be perceived as being relevant—to an individual’s decision making. I said to Mr Newby’s face that the perceived relationship would undermine his decision making. It is important that the adjudicator be free to adjudicate on the basis of the evidence. If he knows that every time he makes a decision, people will say, “Well, he hasn’t based his decision on the evidence; he made it because of his interest”, it will undermine his decisions.

I know that campaigners have called for Mr Newby’s dismissal and the restarting of the process. I am anxious that restarting the entire process might push the prospect of resolution further away for many tenants who desperately need the certainty that the code adjudications will bring. The hon. Member for Leeds North West is right that people are already walking away from the process, either by settling, having lost confidence in the process, or having gone bust or been unable to carry on in the trade. If the Government are minded to agree with the motion, I would ask them to set out how quickly we can start getting some decisions. Much like Brexit, sometimes no deal and a bad deal are the same thing. We need to start getting some decisions. Mr Newby has been described to me as a “rabbit in the headlights”, afraid to make a decision that will ultimately need to be made, and the sense of frustration at the failure to start providing certainty is a strong and real one. The Government and Mr Newby should be under no illusions about the damage that further delays will pose to the entire process.

In summary, the pubs code and the adjudicator need to gain public confidence. This has not been a great start. The Government should do more to identify the cause of the delays and provide whatever support is needed to clear the blockage. They should also urge Fleurets and Mr Newby to sever their ties, which are comparatively small and should not be beyond the wit of man to overcome, and give the industry the certainty it is crying out for.

1.7 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) on securing this debate and compliment him on his tenacious commitment to this cause, which I know goes back over many years. That we are having a debate now, on the application of the pubs code, rather than its introduction, is some consolation and a reflection of the progress made.

I feel a sense of déjà vu standing here and once again debating this issue. In 2009, I was on the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, chaired by Sir Peter Luff, that did an inquiry into pubcos—the third such inquiry, two predecessor Committees having held similar inquiries—and as the Committee Chair, I chaired another such inquiry in 2014. I had hoped, after the Government eventually accepted the Committee’s recommendation to introduce the code, that it would be the last time we would feel the need to debate it. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) for chairing the successor Committee, which has been prepared to look at the issues arising from the appointment of the adjudicator and to carry the torch carried so long by different manifestations of the Committee.

I think it fair to say that the history of this issue has been characterised by obstructiveness and an unwillingness on the part of the pub companies to recognise the reality of the injustices done to their tenants and licensees, and the flawed business model of which they are part. Their failure to act on the often quite moderate recommendations of successive Select Committees has reflected their obstructiveness when it comes to any legislation that challenges their business model; and, in fact, we have legislation because of that obstructiveness. The pub companies have exploited every opportunity to thwart the will of Parliament, and I am afraid that it was always likely, even following the implementation of legislation, that they would continue to do so. Current experience and, indeed, this debate are a reflection of the culture that prevails in the industry.

The pub companies proclaim publicly that they accept—indeed, embrace—the legislation, and are anxious to make it work, but the evidence submitted by the hon. Members for Leeds North West and for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) demonstrates overwhelmingly that their private actions completely contradict their public posturing. The most common approach seems to be to make rent demands which in themselves reflect the level of profitability that would come from a tied tenancy—perhaps just for negotiating purposes, perhaps not—and then to add a number of other conditions which have the potential to make the agreement even more uncompetitive.

It is not surprising that in the first five months of his appointment, the adjudicator has received some 376 calls. I believe that there are currently 77 referrals before him, most of which relate to the market rent only option. That in itself, given the obstructiveness of the pub companies and the lack of clarity in the information conveyed to many licensees—in effect, to obscure their rights to take such action—reflects profound dissatisfaction with the process so far.

As several hon. Members have said, the role of the adjudicator is crucial to the successful outcome of the legislation, and to the implementation of successive Select Committee recommendations. Generations—almost—of parliamentarians have committed themselves to making this system work, and if we do not get it right,
a great deal of effort on the part of many Members of Parliament and a great deal of parliamentary time will have been wasted.

The role and financial interests of Paul Newby have been subjected to considerable scrutiny, and I commend the Select Committee for the forensic way in which it interrogated him, and my instinct was to say, “Let us just see how he gets on before we make a judgment.” However, given the key nature of the adjudicator’s job, the culture that he is there to change and the role that he has in changing it, I think that certain issues have to be resolved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), among others, referred to Paul Newby’s financial involvement with Fleurets. As the old adage has it, perception is reality. When an adjudicator has a financial interest in a body that is associated with one side of the arbitration procedure, there will always be a perception that he or she cannot act impartially. We heard from, I think, my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool that he has absolutely no confidence in the person who is carrying it out. My hon. Friend used the metaphor of a football referee.

It concerns me greatly that many tenants who need that adjudication, and whose livelihood it might preserve in the long term, will be unwilling to use the processes that are available, and which Parliament has fought to secure over the years. If they feel that going to the adjudicator means that they will not have an impartial hearing, and indeed that by doing so they could prejudice their own business position, they will be reluctant to take such action. Built into the adjudicator’s appointment is the implication that the potential benefits of the legislation will be undermined from the start.

I think there is a way forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield said that Paul Newby should divest himself of his financial interest, and certainly, if Paul Newby is really committed to making his role a success, it should not be beyond his ability to find some way of doing so. If he refuses to act on that recommendation, I think that the House should propose that further action be taken to ensure that he is removed, or the problem should be dealt with in some other way.

This Parliament and Members within it have worked for many years to get this far. It is crucial to the livelihood of thousands of publicans up and down the country, and essential to the future success of the business model, that the system works. We cannot have someone at the heart of the process who potentially undermines the working of that process. The adjudicator should divest himself of his interest, or Parliament should act.

1.18 pm

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland), not only on securing the debate but on his tenaciousness, which has been documented. I suggest that he is indeed the pub champion of Westminster. At the very least, given the secondment of the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) to the Tory Whips Office, he has a clear run at that title now—and goodness me, our pubs need a champion.

I was brought up in a pub—thankfully, the right side of the bar. My parents owned a couple of pubs when I was a kid, which extended to a snooker club where I spent most of what some would describe as a misspent youth. If any Members would like to challenge me to a game on the green baize in a nearby establishment, the evidence of that will be there for all to see.

I have always thought of pubs not necessarily as places where people get drunk, but places where people meet one another. I have been fortunate enough to live in various places throughout the United Kingdom, and the first place where I would always go to meet members of the community would be the local pub. It is not only the place to get a drink and have a chat, but anyone working for a plumber can find one in my constituency within 10 minutes, and even get seven or eight different reviews of that plumber from people sitting at the bar.

So pubs are crucial to communities. They bring communities together—they are not only about the pursuit of alcohol—yet they are struggling. Some 25% of our pubs in Scotland have disappeared over the past 10 years. There are social, economic and all sorts of other challenges that they face. People tend to drink at home now; they are reclusing inside their house instead of opting to go to the community-friendly pub. I think that is a great shame, so it is very heartening to have people such as the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) championing this cause. I wish him all success on the wider issue of bringing pubs back into communities.

The hon. Gentleman gave a detailed analysis of the problems we are facing with the Pubs Code Adjudicator. He and I have spoken on this issue a couple of times, and in particular on the conflict of interest position that the Pubs Code Adjudicator allegedly finds himself in. Being a former lawyer, I am acutely aware of what constitutes a conflict of interest. The word “perception” has been used many times in today’s debate, and I would suggest that a perception of a conflict of interest is indeed enough to create that conflict of interest. We cannot enter the controlling mind of that person and say whether in any given circumstances that particular financial interest is likely to cause them to make a different decision; the perception of that conflict is enough, and I cannot understand why the Government cannot see this. This is the clearest example that I think I have ever seen of a conflict of interest position, and something must be done, be it as a matter of great urgency—perhaps not reopening the appointments process, but at least the Government should call Mr Newby before them to see whether that conflict of interest position is tenable. I cannot understand how anyone looking at this situation could fail to see a clear conflict of interest.

Greg Mulholland: Perhaps I should say, to help the hon. Gentleman on that point and to remind the Minister, that part of the problem is not only that these conflicts were not properly declared by Mr Newby, but that the right questions were not asked at the appointments process. So these things were not known, which is why we have the absurd situation of the Select Committee forcing him to publish his real conflicts of interest when he had been in the job for five months.
Richard Arkless: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. If clear evidence is given to the Select Committee that that is indeed the case, surely that ought to compel immediate action from the Government.

It is clear that there is a conflict of interest position here, and if the whole point of the adjudicator is to address the inequality of arms between big breweries and small, defenceless tenants, that matter needs to be addressed with the greatest urgency.

There have been many excellent speeches here today and I will run through some of the points made in them before I make some further comments on the position in Scotland, which has been alluded to in the debate.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) outlined, as everybody did, some of the problems the Pubs Code Adjudicator process is facing, and he asked the Minister to answer some questions. I was particularly interested in the problem he outlined in relation to the renewal of tenancies. He asked the Minister to give some clarity on that issue, and I call on the Minister to do so. The hon. Gentleman described pubs as valuable community assets; given what I have said, I clearly agree wholeheartedly. I hope we can start campaigning to make the consciousness of the public turn back towards seeing pubs as community assets and places where communities can be brought together.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about awareness of the pubs code, which is crucial. If tenants do not know that they have a code and the right of redress, Mr Newby will get away with any conflict of interest position he puts himself into, because if people do not know their rights, they will not pursue them.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, made an excellent speech, and again touched majorly on the conflict of interest point; I can add nothing to his comments. He touched on the perception point, and I reiterate that a perception of a conflict of interest is indeed a conflict of interest.

Lawyers are acutely aware of conflicts of interest; we look for them in every single transaction we do. As a lawyer, I was taught by a partner how to identify a conflict of interest. He said to me, “If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck and walks like a duck, chances are, Richard, it’s a duck.” So if it feels like a conflict of interest and it looks maybe like a conflict of interest, it is, categorically, a conflict of interest.

I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), who admitted that the Pubs Code Adjudicator process had not made a great start; that was corroborated by Members across the Chamber. He provided useful historical context from the past 10 years, summarising the good work he did in the last Labour Government to initiate and bring about this change. He has been campaigning very successfully on this issue. I would politely add that he has been marginally more successful here than in his last campaign, where he was suggesting that supporters of the Scottish national football team should be singing “God Save the Queen” before matches, which even for the most ardent of Unionists would have been a bitter pill to swallow. That is a bit like asking Manchester City fans to sing “Glory, glory Man United” before City play.

Toby Perkins: I never made any such suggestion.

Richard Arkless: If that is the case, I stand to be corrected, but the House was full of leaflets detailing this a number of months ago—but if I am mistaken, I would never attempt to mislead the House.

Toby Perkins: I will be brief, because I do not want to detain the House on this, but actually what I was proposing was that the English football team should have a separate national anthem from “God Save the Queen”, and that “God Save the Queen” should only be used when Britain was playing and England should have an English national anthem. I was not telling Scotland or Wales what to sing at all.

Richard Arkless: I will have another look at the leaflet to see if I stand to be corrected—and, indeed, I do not think we should detain the House on matters not relevant to this debate.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) talked about déjà vu. Again I do not think he was talking about a déjà vu experience that is positive, and we seem to be back here discussing some of the other problems that have occurred in respect of the Pubs Code Adjudicator. The fact that we keep coming back to these problems indicates that it would be a slavish policy for the Scottish Government to accept a system of a one-size-fits-all, broad-brush approach that clearly has problems.

I should make it clear that I am committed personally to fairness to pub tenants, and the Scottish Government are committed to making sure that inequality of arms does not persist. The motion “urges parity for Scottish tenants”, and clearly I would urge parity in fairness, but whether fairness exists within the current system, given the problems we have identified, is another matter, and I think the Scottish Government are right to take the approach they have taken, which I will outline in more detail now.

The Scottish Government introduced a voluntary code for pubs and landlords in 2015. Clearly, a voluntary code is not, potentially, as effective as a compulsory code, and we consulted from July 2016 and published a 77-page report in December of that year. It highlighted that the pub sector in Scotland has different facets and characteristics from the pub sector in the rest of the United Kingdom. Some 40% of pubs in the UK are tied, while only 17% are tied in Scotland. There is also a much higher proportion of longer leases across the rest of the UK than in Scotland. That is further evidence that a one-size-fits-all policy might not be the best suggestion, but that is not to say that we do not recognise that there are concerns.

The report stated:

“The evidence collected did not suggest that any part of the pub sector in Scotland was unfairly disadvantaged in relation to another. As a result, further dialogue between the relevant trade bodies, government, and other interested parties, should continue before making any changes to legislation”—but that is not, I emphasise, ruled out.

The report continued:

“Based on the findings from the research, it is clear that there is more work to be done in ensuring that the relationship between Pub Companies and tenants is further strengthened and clarified.”

I think everybody would welcome that. The report added:
“Further clarification is also required on beer costs, the cost of entry into the sector and the value of...benefits.”

The report also stated:

“The contractor faced significant challenges in recruiting licensees and other pubs to participate in the research, created by an apparent unwillingness to engage on the subject at a detailed level. As a consequence, it is recommended that a further more detailed study should not be undertaken without a significantly increased level of interest and involvement from the wider industry.”

To put it bluntly, we feel more evidence is required before we can go down the road of having a compulsory pubs code adjudicator, and clearly there are lessons to be learned from the system implemented by this place. I do not think there is anything wrong with that; sometimes Holyrood will do things first and this place will learn, and sometimes this place will do things first and Holyrood will learn—[Interruption.] Yes, and of course, ultimately, Holyrood will, without question, do it better, but that is a very healthy process.

That concludes my comments, but finally I reiterate that we believe in fairness for pub tenants. We are not at the stage in Scotland yet where the evidence has been compelling enough to make us go down this road, but we are looking at the system, thinking about it and analysing the mistakes, and hopefully in the future we will devise a system that properly protects the rights and fair treatment of tenants of tied pubs.

1.29 pm

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Members for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing the debate and for being real supporters and defenders of pubs. The pubs code came in after much wrangling in Parliament. It had been called for by many stakeholders in the pub industry, particularly around the role of the Pubs Code Adjudicator and to explore the collapse of the larger pubcos. In all those meetings, there were recurring themes that appeared to unite all the stakeholders, of which was business rates. We must focus on the protecting pub tenants against the very large pubco organisations. The market rent only option was successfully introduced to give pub tenants more flexibility in their operations, and it was welcomed by many stakeholders. However, as we have heard, there are serious questions about the effectiveness and implementation of the code, and about the role and conduct of the Pubs Code Adjudicator and the perceived conflicts of interest relating to him. The hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) used his legal background to explain clearly how that perceived conflict of interest could be a serious barrier, and said that the issue needed to be looked into.

Since the introduction of the code last year, 77 referrals have been put forward to the Pubs Code Adjudicator. Most of them have related to market rent issues, a crucial matter for many of the small operators in the sector. There is clearly a demand for arbitration via the code, and it is a matter of great concern to me and many others that not one of those cases has yet reached resolution. I recognise that the Pubs Code Adjudicator has been in post for only six months, but he should have made his mark on the industry in that time in order to try to gain the confidence of the market. It is essential that the process of referrals and subsequent decisions by any adjudicator should be seen to be fair and free of any conflict of interest. This is an issue that the Government need to address urgently, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool said.

The pub industry employs 850,000 people in the UK, mainly in the local pubs that form the hub of many communities. At this time of Government cuts to vital local services, we have seen community pubs stepping in to provide libraries and cafés to serve their communities. I commend the work being done by the not-for-profit organisation, Pub is the Hub, in this regard. It is crucial that the pubs code should work for everyone as the effective measure it set out to be and was expected to be.

This brings me to the points raised by hon. Members on the role of the Pubs Code Adjudicator. There have certainly been raised tensions in the debate over the appointment of Mr Newby as the PCA. As I have said, I welcome the points that hon. Members have made about the perceived conflict of interest issues surrounding Mr Newby’s former employer. I urge the Minister to look into the recommendations of the Select Committee, particularly those relating to the perceived conflict of interest and to Mr Newby’s shareholdings and the loan issues that have been raised today.

In my view, we should not hide away from serious concerns such as these. The Government must ensure that the role of the Pubs Code Adjudicator is truly impartial and independent, so that the pub tenants whom the pubs code is there to serve can be satisfied with the work being done. That is clearly not the case at the moment, as the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway pointed out. Only in this way will we ensure a fair and proper process and a focus on the real and important issues. I urge the Government to examine the role of the Pubs Code Adjudicator and to explore options that will increase transparency and fairness.

Over the past couple of weeks, I have had many meetings with representatives of pub tenant groups and of the larger pubcos. In all those meetings, there were recurring themes that appeared to unite all the stakeholders, one of which was business rates. We must focus on the
issues that act as barriers towards a thriving pub industry. The pub is a long-established part of British life, and a visit to a pub is now No. 3 on the list of things to do for tourists coming to the UK. We must do everything we can to ensure that that continues.

The pubs code is there to help local pub tenants to get a fair deal when negotiating with the large pubcos, but we have already heard today that some in the industry are unconvinced that it is working for them. I strongly urge the Government to do what they can to ensure that the pubs code is properly implemented for everyone, but in particular for the tied tenants who have long campaigned for fair negotiations. Also, it is only fair to Mr Paul Newby that the Minister should review the way in which he was appointed and the matters that have arisen from this debate and from the Select Committee, so that we can move on and make progress towards ensuring that the pubs code is properly implemented and that everyone has confidence that it can work in the way that it was meant to do.

1.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) on securing today’s debate on the Pubs Code Adjudicator, and I thank all Members across the House who have contributed to the excellent debate on the Pubs Code Adjudicator, and I thank all Members who have contributed to the excellent and thought-provoking debate. Clearly this subject continues to attract strong views and passionate debate, and I want to reassure the House that the Government are fully committed to ensuring that tied tenants can operate in an environment that is fair and that allows them to thrive. That is why we introduced the pubs code. I pay particular tribute to the role that the hon. Member for Leeds North West played in bringing about that piece of legislation.

The pubs code regulates the relationship between around 11,500 tied pub tenants and the large pub-owning businesses that rent the pubs to them and sell them tied products. The pubs code applies to pub-owning businesses with 500 or more tied pubs in England and Wales. There are currently six pub-owning businesses that fall within the scope of the code: Admiral Taverns; Enterprise Inns; Greene King; Marston’s; Punch Taverns; and Star Pubs & Bars, owned by Heineken.

The two principles of the pubs code are: fair and lawful dealing by pub-owning businesses in relation to their tied tenants; and that tied pub tenants should be no worse off than if they were not subject to any tie. The pubs code should make sure that tied pub tenants receive the information they need to make informed decisions about taking on a pub or new terms and conditions; have their rent reassessed if they have not had a review for five years; and are enabled to request a market rent only option to go free of tie in specific circumstances, including at a rent review or on the renewal of tenancy.

I will first address the appointment of Mr Newby and the performance issues raised in this debate. I am sure we can return to some of those important issues during my speech. We believe that he is the right person to ensure that the pubs code delivers its statutory objectives and, for reasons I will set out, we think he got off to a good start with his responsibilities.

Since his appointment, Mr Newby has explained his role and responsibilities, and has shown his determination to help to create a fairer business environment for tied pub tenants that allows the pubs, which are so important to our communities, to thrive. Contrary to what we have heard, he has been raising awareness among tenants that under regulation 50:

“A pub-owning business must not subject a tied pub tenant to any detriment on the ground that the tenant exercises, or attempts to exercise, any right under these Regulations.”

It is important that he continues to make that case.

Toby Perkins: Will the Minister clarify that, in the context of that desire and regulation 50, a pub-owning business that moves from a tied model to a free-of-tie model will be able to do it with a simple deed of variation? That would make it the only change to the business’s terms and conditions, and all the other terms and conditions would not have to be reviewed as a result. Can she confirm that that is consistent with what she has just said?

Margot James: I have great sympathy with the hon. Gentleman’s point, and I hope that it will be clarified by the Pubs Code Adjudicator in due course. The pubs code itself is not clear on that aspect, and it will be up to the Pubs Code Adjudicator to pronounce on it when he feels that he has enough evidence. I reiterate that I have considerable sympathy with the hon. Gentleman’s point.

Mr Newby has received a positive response from tenants, with the majority supporting his role. I accept that some tenants are deeply opposed to his role, and I could not have sat here for the past hour and a half without realising that, even if I had not known beforehand.

Greg Mulholland: Will the Minister give way?

Margot James: I will make some progress before giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Greg Mulholland: Give us the evidence.

Margot James: I might as well have given way to the hon. Gentleman, because he is making his point anyway. I will shortly come to his point about tenants who support Mr Newby. Suffice it to say that the number of referrals that Mr Newby is getting bears witness to there being tenants who support his role.
Tenants are coming to the Pubs Code Adjudicator to seek the protections provided by the pubs code. In its first six months, the inquiry line set up by the adjudicator to provide information about the pubs code received 435 inquiries, 91% of which were from tied pub tenants or their representatives, which bears out the imbalance that these businesspeople have had to suffer over many years. In the same period, the adjudicator received 121 referrals for arbitration.

I will now respond to a few of the comments made in the debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and others observed that the Pubs Code Adjudicator has a dual role in both upholding and enforcing the code and in adjudicating on alleged breaches of the code. The pubs code was introduced in law to bring greater protection to tenants and to strengthen their position on what was a very un-level playing field. The PCA’s role is therefore to uphold the law and not to interpret it in a way that is biased towards one party or another on the adjudication side of his responsibilities.

We have heard allegations of ongoing abuse by pub companies, particularly from the hon. Member for Leeds North West, to whom I listened very carefully, and my hon. Friends the Members for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) and for Tewkesbury. Tenants seeking a market rent only option, it is alleged, are being undermined by tactics deployed by the pub companies that threaten to make the pursuit of a market rent only option unavailable, in direct contravention of regulation 50. There have clearly been instances in which the code has been flouted, and hon. Members are right to bring those cases to the House this afternoon. The code is designed to root out those cases, and I urge hon. Members to refer them to the Pubs Code Adjudicator.

On the performance issues, the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) rightly raised his concern that there have not yet been any adjudications. There is a clear appetite, shared by the Pubs Code Adjudicator and the Pubs Code Adjudicator, for adjudications to start coming out, and I do not inhibit a tied tenant from accessing their rights.”

Greg Mulholland: I remind the Minister of her wonderful work when she was a member of the Select Committee and shared exactly its view. She must substantiate her statement that the majority of tenants support Paul Newby. Does she realise that the only organisations he cited in support are: the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers, which has a regulated pubco as a member; the British Institute of Innkeeping, which is run by someone who used to be a boss of a former pubco; the Federation of Licensed Victuallers Associations, which is run by a former director of Enterprise Inns; and Enterprise Inns, which pays for licensees to sign up to membership? Those are the only people who have signed up, so will she correct the record? The majority of tenant-representing organisations oppose Mr Newby and always have.

Margot James: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman’s criticisms. I am sure that he has not interviewed all 11,500 tied tenants. From the representations that I have seen, the number of tenants that the British Pubs Confederation represents is open to question. It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to be so critical of the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers and the Federation of Licensed Victuallers Associations—

Greg Mulholland: It was no criticism.

Margot James: Well, it is all very well for him to say what he said, but they are credible organisations. They welcomed the Pubs Code Adjudicator’s appointment and said that it is essential for the post to be held by someone with an in-depth knowledge of the market. When I visited the office of the Pubs Code Adjudicator in Birmingham and met the staff who work behind him, they were relieved that they had the leadership of someone who knew so much about the industry and the market.

Members raised other important issues, including the conflict of interest mentioned by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright). There have been two accusations against Mr Newby: that he has conflicts of interest through his financial interests in Fleurets and—I do take this seriously—that the perception that he is conflicted means that he is not able to carry out his role effectively. There is a delicate balance to be struck when saying that the perception is the reality, which can lead to opportunities to give further credence to the conflict of interest. However, as the Secretary of State explained to the BEIS Committee on 14 December, the appointment process for the post was run in full accordance with the code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies. It was a proper and rigorously followed process. The panel concluded that Mr Newby had no conflicts of interest that would call into question his ability to do the job.

The Commissioner for Public Appointments, Peter Riddell, also considered the matter and has confirmed his view that nothing was hidden and that there had been a proper, transparent process. He is also satisfied that the panel was entitled to conclude that Mr Newby has no such conflicts of interest. It would be wrong to deny the judgment of the independent figure responsible for overseeing such procedures. Mr Riddell is a man of great integrity who has a deep understanding of the principles of public appointment.

The Government do not agree that Mr Newby’s previous employment with and financial interests in Fleurets create a conflict of interest that could give rise
to a reasonable perception of bias—[Interruption.] I am sorry that hon. Members are dissatisfied with that. We have heard the accusations that Mr Newby misled the BEIS Committee about his financial interests in his former company, but he has not attempted to disguise the nature of his financial interests in Fleurets. He answered the questions he was asked to the best of his ability at the time and there was no intention to mislead. He later became aware that some technical parts of his evidence were inaccurate and wrote to the Select Committee to set the record straight.

The request for early repayment was referred to by the hon. Member for Chesterfield, who was backed up by the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), whose speech I listened to with great attention having sat on the former Business, Innovation and Skills Committee in the early years of my time in Parliament when he was its Chairman. During his oral evidence, Mr Newby was open about the nature of his loan arrangements with Fleurets. In order to be helpful, he said:

“I could ask if it would be possible to be repaid more quickly, but that agreement was already in place when I left.”

Mr Newby took the opportunity to update them on that request when he wrote to the Committee. His willingness to seek to address the Committee’s concerns should not be construed as an admission that he is conflicted, nor that the Government think that that is the case.

In conclusion, the pubs code is important for the pubs sector. It is vital that Mr Newby is now allowed to get on with the job. Many adjudications are awaiting an outcome and I share the frustration that we have not yet seen any results. However, six months is not a long time, considering the burden of work associated with the role and the small team of nine people. It is therefore incumbent on us all to give Mr Newby the space to do his job properly over the next few months. I am sure that hon. Members will no doubt request a further statement or perhaps another debate, and I hope that hon. Members will no doubt request a further statement or perhaps another debate, and I hope that we will be talking more about the outcome than the process. Mr Newby is doing a good job and has much important work to do. Through that work and his adjudications, it is important that the sector’s confidence is built up and, most important of all, that tenants in all our constituencies are protected as Parliament intended.

1.55 pm

Greg Mulholland: I thank all the hon. and right hon. Members who have taken part in this important debate. Excellent contributions have come from both sides of the House. Notably, not a single Backbencher stood up in support of Mr Paul Newby or claimed that the pubs code was working. I like the Minister, who did great work with the former Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, I pay tribute to all colleagues on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and to the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), its former Chair. I remind the Opposition that the process was started by a Conservative former Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, Sir Peter Luff, so it has involved cross-party working.

However, the things that the Minister has had to say today must have stuck in her craw, because she was regurgitating the misleading nonsense that is coming from the office of the Pubs Code Adjudicator. She spoke of visits, visibility, roadshows and what a lovely, backslapping chap he is, but that is precisely the kind of backslapping approach that has got this sector in such a mess. We have surveyors who know pubco bosses and play at the same golf clubs: we have to get away from that and have a proper system and a real adjudicator, just as the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) said. I urge the Minister to listen to him, the hon. Members for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) and for Peterborough (Mr Jackson), and all her colleagues who understand the situation. She did admit that there are clear examples of where the code has been flouted, but she did not acknowledge that the Pubs Code Adjudicator is doing absolutely nothing about them, including deeds of variation, on which I hope we will now get some action.

Will the Minister meet me and representatives from the British Pub Confederation? We will send her a copy of the report, which we must discuss with her and her officials. As we have heard today, the reality is that Mr Paul Newby’s position is untenable. He cannot perform this role and will never have the confidence of tenants. The whole situation around him stinks. The hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) said something like, “If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck.” Frankly, Mr Newby is worse than a dead duck: he is a duck that is in real danger of compromising, skewing and watering down everything that the Government tried to do in the pubs code and what this House stood for.

This situation will not go away; Mr Newby will never have the confidence of tenants. The pubs code must be made to work and it is the duty of the Minister and her ministerial colleagues to do that. I look forward to meeting them to discuss that and to present the real evidence, not the nonsense. I remind the House that Greene King, one of the six regulated pubcos, is a member of the very organisation that Mr Newby has claimed supports him. That is the situation, and it is not good enough. The vast majority of tenants, representative organisations and licensees, and all the people whom the British Pub Confederation is representing in cases, oppose Mr Newby and have no confidence in him. He must go. That will happen, but it depends on whether we see leadership from the Government or whether the situation has to drag on for another six months or a year. It will not go away.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House welcomes the Pubs Code established in July 2016 to deliver a fairer relationship between large tied pub companies and their licensees and to deliver the principle that the tied licensee should be no worse off than a free-of-tie licensee, introducing a Market Rent Only option for tenants, the right in certain circumstances to have an independent free-of-tie rent assessment and to pay only that sum; is dismayed that pub companies are thwarting the Code and are routinely flouting Regulation 50 that tenants who exercise, or attempt to exercise, their rights under the code should not suffer any detriment; notes that this includes refusing to allow deeds of variation to leases, forcing tenants wanting to pursue the Market Rent Only option to agree a new lease on unfavourable terms; believes that fees being proposed for independent assessors are wholly unreasonable and that unfair additional charges are being demanded which make it unviable to pursue the Market Rent Only option; expresses strong concern that the Pubs Code Adjudicator (PCA), Paul Newby, who holds
shares in, and has loans to Fleurets, which derives substantial income from the regulated pubcos, is failing to stop these practices or uphold the Code; calls on the Government to ensure that the Code works as intended and to accept the recommendation of the former Business, Innovation and Skills Committee to reopen the appointment process for the PCA; further notes that the Code does not apply in Scotland; and urges parity for Scottish tenants.

Breast Cancer Drugs

1.58 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the provisional decision not to provide the breast cancer drug Kadcyla for use in the NHS on 29 December 2016; and calls on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and pharmaceutical company Roche to come together and re-assess this decision to ensure Kadcyla is kept available for patients, and consider how access to both innovative new breast cancer drugs and off-patent drugs used for breast cancer, such as bisphosphonates, can be improved.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for the swift manner in which it allocated time to have this important debate. I want to put the spotlight on an issue that affects the lives of millions of people—those who are living with breast cancer and their family and friends. I am sure that almost everyone here today will know someone who has had this disease. My own friends have suffered from breast cancer, and I am so pleased that many of them are in the Public Gallery to watch today’s debate. I have received a large amount of communication on this, including as late as last night in a message from a Vivienne Ashley, who cannot be here today but will be watching on TV.

The disease affects people irrespective of their class or job. Many hon. Members have suffered from breast cancer, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire)—also my Whip—who has had a great recovery. An Opposition Member approached me only yesterday to explain that she was receiving treatment, and that although she wanted to be involved in the debate, she felt the issue was too close to her to do so at the moment.

I am sure all Members would agree that we need a health system in which the most effective cancer treatments are available to all patients. Today, I want to let people living with cancer, especially secondary breast cancer, know that we have not given up on them and that we all want an NHS that provides us all with access to the most effective treatments.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If the deliberations used by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, particularly for metastatic breast cancer, take insufficient account of the needs of young families to spend more time with their mothers, is the remedy something that NICE itself can provide by altering the way it goes about those deliberations, or is it something that we in this House and the Government need to do?

Siobhain McDonagh: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman’s question is both. There are issues with how NICE assesses new drugs, particularly cutting-edge drugs such as Kadcyla. He will know, because of his involvement in the last Government, that they established the cancer drugs fund. It is not an either/or, but something we all need to come together to discuss, and that people with more scientific knowledge than me might wish to consider.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. Does she share my concern at news that the Government appear to be ready to leave the European Medicines
Agency following the Brexit vote? Many people fear that that will lead to a slowdown in access to new medicines. She talks about the importance of NHS patients getting access to medicines; this could make the situation worse and leave us disadvantaged compared with other countries in Europe.

Siobhain McDonagh: Breast cancer knows no boundaries, whether class, social or geographic. Anything that reduces access to better forms of treatment is detrimental.

The ability to lead an enriched and longer life as a result of medical advances should not be limited only to those who can afford private healthcare. Those advances should be accessible to us all. This debate will focus particularly on the provision of the breast cancer drug Kadcyla, which is under threat. Most Members will be aware of the lease of life that Kadcyla has brought to thousands of women in England with incurable secondary breast cancer. These women rely on Kadcyla to enrich their lives and to give them extra precious years to live. Indeed, in many ways it is a revolutionary drug. By targeting cancer cells directly, it helps to reduce the number of side effects, boosting women’s quality of life immeasurably. Members who have heard these women talk about their experiences will be humbled to learn of the distress and despair that they face as a result of NICE’s decision to provisionally reject the future use of Kadcyla on the NHS.

Today we are all supporting Breast Cancer Now’s “Keep Kadcyla” campaign to encourage NICE to reverse its decision and enable continued access to the drug, which both improves the quality of life and extends the lives of thousands of women in this country, on the NHS. Since NICE’s decision was announced at the end of December, thousands of people throughout the country have had their views heard. They have signed the petition and contacted their local MPs to ask that we do not give up on women, on the children who are dependent on mothers, and on the families who want that precious extra time with their loved ones. That is why we are all here today: to raise our collective voice in support of these women and defend the treatment that allows them to live their lives.

The focus of much of what I have to say today will be on Kadcyla, but we also need to consider other specific breast cancer drugs, as well as the broader issue of how decisions about access to treatment are made. Unfortunately, we are yet to see any improvements in access to off-patent drugs, some of which can prevent the development of certain cancers, thereby saving countless lives, as well as saving the NHS a great deal of money. Just a few months ago, the front pages of national newspapers highlighted the poor access to vital bisphosphonate drugs, which can prevent women from developing secondary cancer, yet the Government have barely acknowledged the problem of access to such treatment. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about when we can expect tangible results regarding access to off-patent drugs, including bisphosphonates. To be clear, many of the women who today owe their lives to Kadcyla might never have developed secondary breast cancer had they had access to bisphosphonate drugs in the first place.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I will discuss off-patent drugs in my own speech, but on bisphosphonates, which are in the category of repurposed drugs, is my hon. Friend as concerned as I am about the results of the UK-wide survey undertaken by the UK Breast Cancer Group in March last year, which showed that currently only 24% of breast cancer clinicians are offering bisphosphonates to patients? That is something that the Government could urgently address.

Siobhain McDonagh: I completely agree with my hon. Friend and hope to say a little more about that later in my speech.

This debate is about not just Kadcyla, but the lives of the thousands of women who rely on it to survive, so I want to share the words and experiences of two of my friends whose lives have been transformed by having access to Kadcyla. One of my friends is present today—I went to primary school with her, but I shall not tell the House just how many years ago that might have been. Her name is Samantha, and she said:

“When I got the breast cancer diagnosis, I glibly thought—oh it’s OK I’ll get cured, but sadly about 18 months ago I found out that this wasn’t the case and my cancer had spread to my liver. And that’s when I really knew that my cancer meant business!”

And that is where Kadcyla comes in. You see for breast cancer, although I coped and kept going with surgery, chemo and radiotherapy, it was grim. I worked a bit, but regular chemotherapy is not a dodder. Exhaustion and hair loss is just the least of it.

Putting on a brave face and wearing a wig is just a surface issue, getting up vomiting and going to work to deal with the VAT is about the hardest thing I have ever done. It wasn’t simply because I don’t have enough sick pay at work to cover my mortgage, I actually like work—work allows me to make my contribution, and I think that’s pretty near the most important thing, making my life make a difference. And Kadcyla? Well that means that my life isn’t over, it really gives me hope.

There is a big hole where my 45 mm tumour used to be in my liver, and scar tissue and other bits, but I am cancer free without having to take another year off my life. My work is precious; I have kept the business going. Eight people are employed, because I could keep going, and Kadcyla made it possible for me.”

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. She certainly makes a powerful speech on behalf of her friend. Does she agree that when NICE looks at the cost-value ratio, stories such as that of her friend, who kept eight people in work, should also be a factor? We should be looking at women’s economic life and economic role, in both the workplace and the home.

Siobhain McDonagh: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I appreciate that the equations and calculations are difficult, and I do not underestimate NICE’s work, but it is about life and quality of life, and it is about so many more people than only those who have the cancer.

My friend Leslie said:

“In 2013 my world was turned upside down when I was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer, a rare and aggressive kind of cancer that develops in the lymph vessels.

After 15 months’ treatment comprising 8 chemotherapy treatments, a mastectomy, 15 radiotherapy treatments and a year of Herceptin, it appeared that the cancer had gone. However, 4 months later I noticed a rash around the scar tissue of the mastectomy and a biopsy showed that the cancer had recur in my skin.

My oncologist told me that I was in a very tight corner. Because the cancer had returned so quickly I wasn’t eligible for the usual drug treatments, radiotherapy wasn’t an option because I had recently completed a course, and surgery wasn’t possible because of the location of the cancer. I was told the cancer was incurable and referred to the Royal Marsden. They confirmed
that surgery was not feasible because the cancer had spread so quickly over a large area making skin grafts impossible. I was told Kadcyla was my best chance.

I have now been treated with Kadcyla for 22 months and I have been told of others that have been treated for 5 years. Signs of the cancer disappeared very quickly and so far I have remained cancer free. Kadcyla has enabled me to live a reasonably normal life and participate in and contribute to my local community. Kadcyla has been a life saver for me and without it my future was very uncertain. I feel profoundly fortunate to have received it and I am incredulous that such an effective drug will now be denied to other people in my situation.

I also wish to mention Rosalie, who was featured in Friday’s Evening Standard. She is just 33 and is living with incurable breast cancer. She is a single parent to two children, aged three and six, and is terrified of a future without the option of Kadcyla and terrified of her kids’ growing up alone. These are Rosalie’s own words:

“I hate feeling like a victim. But I have to fight for my kids. They are more important than me feeling vulnerable about going public. I have to fight for life for them.”

Then there is Mani. Members may have seen her last week on the “Victoria Derbyshire” programme when she spoke so eloquently about how Kadcyla had given her hope. She said that it had improved her life both significantly and quickly, enabling her to live a much fuller and richer life, going on holiday and playing an active part in her young daughter’s life.

These are just a few of the many women whose lives have been made possible through access to Kadcyla. I am sure that many hon. Members will share the experiences of their constituents. The hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) will no doubt talk about the incredible Bonnie Fox, the face of the Keep Kadcyla campaign of Breast Cancer Now. Thanks to the hard work of Bonnie and of Breast Cancer Now, this campaign has seen more than 100,000 people sign the petition, calling for NICE and Roche to come together to reassess the decision and find a solution to keep Kadcyla available.

Bonnie is an incredible advocate for the Keep Kadcyla campaign, inspiring so many others as she leads the case for this treatment. Bonnie says that her inspiration comes from wanting to have as much time as possible with her two-year-old son, Barnaby. These are her own words:

“I already feel cheated being diagnosed with secondary breast cancer at 37 with a baby, so having a drug taken away that would potentially add years to my life and give me more quality time with my son is so cruel.”

Norman Lamb: I am really grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way again. She will be aware that the Government’s accelerated access review last October recommended that NICE should review its whole health technology assessment processes and methods. Is she concerned that the review of Kadcyla and other drugs under the cancer drugs fund is happening before that review takes place? We might learn the lessons about how the review process needs to improve, but we will not benefit from them.

Siobhain McDonagh: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I am sure that he knows more about this process than I do. It clearly makes sense to consider these unique, unusual first-tier drugs in the light of that reconsideration.

I hope that we will hear the stories of the many women whose lives, having been affected by secondary breast cancer, have been enriched by Kadcyla. The drug Kadcyla matters so much to all these women for one simple reason: it works. It is effective. It has already been available on the NHS for more than two years and, compared with other treatments, its side effects are limited. Today, it is nothing short of a tragedy to know that countless women who thought that Kadcyla would be the next treatment they would receive for their breast cancer are having their lives shortened before their eyes.

I ask Members to imagine this: they are living with breast cancer; there is no cure, but there is something that could give them extra time with the people they love—the people who depend on them. It could be a year, five years or even longer. If they needed the drug today, the NHS would give it to them, but if they needed it in a few months’ time, they may have lost their chance.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. May I congratulate her on securing this debate, and say how proud I am to be a co-signatory? The phenomenon of there being drugs in the pipeline that would make a vital difference to patients, but which are being held up by conflict between NICE and pharmaceutical companies over pricing or value for money, applies not only to breast cancer but to other cancers, too. My constituent David Innes is one of 20,000 sufferers of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. He was diagnosed in 2009, when he was 39. He was in Parliament earlier this week, making the same argument, and saying that both parties need to end the logjam and come up with a deal to ensure the availability of these drugs. They need to put patients first. Life is too short not to do so.

Siobhain McDonagh: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I wish her constituent, David, all the best.

How can we withdraw a drug from the NHS that is working, especially when we are offering nothing in its place? It seems senseless to me, and it is truly devastating to those for whom it really matters. Of course, as my hon. Friend says, Kadcyla is just one drug that we need to look at. What will happen with other key breast cancer drugs now and in the future? I wish to consider just two more examples. Perjeta is currently available through the cancer drugs fund, but unlike Kadcyla it has not yet been re-appraised, although it will be soon. Perjeta is used for HER2 positive secondary breast cancer patients. In many ways it is even more effective than Kadcyla, as it enables women to live for an additional six months without their breast cancer progressing, and can extend life by an additional six months or more. However, because it is administered with two other drugs—Hereceptin and Docetaxel—it would not be considered cost-effective under NICE standards even if the drug manufacturer gave it away for free.

The other drug is Palbociclib, which is used on women with hormone receptor positive and HER2 negative breast cancer. It is a new drug, which is being assessed for the first time by NICE. It is extremely effective and enables women to live for at least 10 months without their breast cancer progressing. However, because women are living longer, robust overall survival data are not yet available. Perversely, that will count against it in
the NICE appraisal. Overall survival data are given greater weight than progression-free survival in NICE appraisals, despite the fact that the outcome is the same—a longer, more enriched life.

We are seeing effective treatment after effective treatment being rejected or facing rejection by NICE. I want to know this: is it really right that we have a health service that plans to take away those lifelines? How is the decision to take away these life-extending drugs beneficial for people living with cancer, or for any of us who might one day need access to them? Who makes these decisions, and how can we be sure that they are the right ones?

We have a drug appraisal process, which is certainly valuable and necessary, but I question the factors that constitute that process. It is too easy to assume that the experts must automatically be right. The process is: numbers in, formula used, and then a yes or no answer. Let us not forget that we are talking about people's lives. The lives of those affected and those for whom this decision is all too real are in the hands of a formula—the NICE appraisal process—and yet this life-changing formula has had little examination for many years. How many of us actually understand what factors are taken into account in these life-or-death decisions? The drug Palbociclib is proving so effective that, at present, it is available because a treatment is so effective; and secondly, for progression-free survival when overall survival is not given much more weight than progression-free survival in NICE treatment. If a treatment is end-of-life, it is allowed double the quality-adjusted life year costings of other treatments. End-of-life is considered to be two years, but why ha ve we ended up with such an arbitrary, double the quality-adjusted life year costings of other treatments? Why ha ve we ended up with such an arbitrary, ha ve we ended up with such an arbitrary, double the quality-adjusted life year costings of other treatments? Why ha ve we ended up with such an arbitrary, double the quality-adjusted life year costings of other treatments?

Consider also the criteria for determining end-of-life treatment. If a treatment is end-of-life, it is allowed double the quality-adjusted life year costings of other drugs. End-of-life is considered to be two years, but why not three? How have we ended up with such an arbitrary, fixed figure, especially when the figure in Scotland is three years? There is no cure for secondary breast cancer, but as people start to live longer it will place them at a disadvantage when accessing treatments, because it will be harder for those treatments to become approved, as they are no longer considered under the end-of-life criteria.

Therefore, how can the Minister be sure that the NICE process is still fit for purpose? Will she respond specifically on two suggestions: first, to review the weighting for progression-free survival when overall survival is not available because a treatment is so effective; and secondly, to change the criteria for end-of-life treatment to three years’ survival instead of two?

I want to return to the issue of off-patent treatments. In recent years there have been two private Members’ Bills on the topic, one of which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds). We heard many commitments from the then Minister for Life Sciences, but we have not yet seen any improvement in access, which is hugely disappointing. The Minister committed to establishing a working group to investigate what could be done to enable the routine use of such treatments. I believe that the working group is due to conclude its work next month and publish its report. Will the report introduce a clear pathway for off-patent treatments, and will the Minister write to me with the details of the pathway and state explicitly how it will work for bisphosphonate drugs for the prevention of secondary breast cancer?

Breast Cancer Now and others have been disappointed by the extremely patchy availability of this treatment for eligible women. As a result, it recently launched the “43p a day” campaign to highlight the low cost of the treatment and the fact that it would save over 1,000 lives every year in the UK if it was routinely available, not to mention millions of pounds for the NHS.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. I want to put on the record my support for the case she is making and draw the House’s attention to the case of my constituent Bonnie Fox—she is in the Gallery today—who is suffering in the way the hon. Lady has described, and whose life chances would be greatly improved if something more could be done to preserve the availability of Kadcyla. I once again express my support for the case the hon. Lady is so eloquently making.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank the hon. Gentleman. He is very lucky to have a constituent as exceptional as Bonnie Fox, who has already been mentioned because of all her work.

As a result of Breast Cancer Now’s campaign, the Minister has said that clinical commissioning groups are responsible for commissioning the treatment for bisphosphonates. What contact has been made with CCGs on the use of this treatment in these circumstances? As I understand it, the treatment presents a challenge to existing commissioning arrangements because it does not fit squarely into either specialised services, which are commissioned by NHS England, or local commissioning by CCGs. Does the Minister agree that if we want genuine progress on the availability of this treatment, we cannot take the path of least resistance and just say, “It’s up to CCGs; CCGs are independent bodies and can make their own decisions.” That is the “do nothing” option.

Treatments do not always fit into the neat categories that we create. This is an old treatment that requires a new approach. It requires our commissioning strategists at NHS England to make a considered decision about how to commission the treatment routinely. Will the Minister agree to meet Ian Dodge, the national director for commissioning strategy, to discuss this specific case with him and will she keep Members here today updated on those discussions? Will she also agree that it is indeed worrying that a treatment that could prevent over 1,000 women getting secondary breast cancer every year is not routinely available?

Finally—I think that everybody will be delighted that I am about to finish—I hope that the Minister will
consider meeting some of the women affected by the decision on Kadcyla and the women from Breast Cancer Now who are here today. I would like to thank those women in the Public Gallery for coming here to show their support for this debate en masse. I wish every single one of them well. Access to life-enhancing and life-saving drugs should be a right in the UK, not a decision based on a lottery of access to private healthcare. I sincerely hope that NICE will reverse its decision and give every woman with secondary breast cancer their future back.

2.25 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this important debate and setting out her case so powerfully. I agree with pretty much everything she said. I know that several Members wish to speak, so I will not detain the House by simply repeating all those points.

My motivation in speaking today comes from a meeting I had at my constituency surgery just a few weeks ago with my constituent Joanna Mears and her husband. Like many other sufferers, they are watching our proceedings from the Public Gallery. Mrs Mears suffers from secondary breast cancer. Although, sadly, her condition is terminal, she is responding well to her existing medication and has already had more than twice the expected benefit span. When the point comes that the medication no longer has that effect, her only remaining option will be Kadcyla. Naturally, she is very concerned about NICE’s decision.

Sir Desmond Swayne: This is essentially the same question I asked earlier. I think that we all accept that a mistake has been made and that the decision was wrong. The key question is this: what is the remedy? Does the remedy lie within NICE’s remit, and therefore it could change its procedures and considerations, or does it lie within the statutory framework that Parliament and Government have set for it to work within? We have to come to an answer on that.

Iain Stewart: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that question. My answer is pretty much the same as that of the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden. In this specific case, I hope that there is scope for NICE and Roche, the manufacturer of Kadcyla, to sit down and agree some compromise. I received a briefing note from Roche this morning stating that it was willing to do that, so I hope that NICE will respond in kind. Its consultation ended last week. As the hon. Lady said, and as my right hon. Friend rightly points out, there is a broader issue for other drugs. Perhaps it is time to look again at the appraisal system and the cost mechanisms so that we do not keep returning to this debate every time a new drug is identified and there is a question about its affordability under the cancer drugs fund.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I agree, because it is not only about the drugs we are debating today; we have had problems before in relation to NICE. In answer to the question from the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), I think that the Minister should look at the procedures and at NICE itself, because otherwise we will keep coming back to this issue time and again. The years I have spent listening to the same issues with different drugs is nobody’s business, to use an expression.

Iain Stewart: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I do not pretend to be an expert on how NICE works, but I hope to bring to the debate the personal experience of my constituent and underline the human effect of these issues. I do not necessarily have a solution, but I hope that the outcome of the debate will be that we not only consider Kadcyla, but take a fresh look at the whole process.

Mary Creagh: The NICE framework works very well for mass drugs for the entire population or where a whole vaccination is going to work, but for very small numbers of people, such as the 1,200 women who really need this drug, I do not think it is as effective a process. There are two organisations in this negotiation, NICE and Roche, and we must not have Roche seeing its new drugs Perjeta and Kadcyla as a new cash cow as Herceptin goes off-patent in 2017-18. Women’s lives should not be treated as cash cows by this drugs company.

Iain Stewart: I agree with the hon. Lady. I have not had any personal discussions with Roche; I can only refer to and take at face value the briefing note that it sent me early this morning, which seemed to represent a genuine wish to negotiate with NICE and get the drug down to an acceptable price. I hope the debate is joined in that spirit.

Perhaps it is appropriate to mention now something I was going to bring up later in my speech: one area that needs to be examined is the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, which is a five-year voluntary contract between the pharmaceutical companies and NICE. If I understand how it is intended to work, the pharmaceutical companies will underwrite any overspend for a particular drug. For various reasons that does not seem to be working in practice. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to look at that point, which has been made by some in the industry.

In the case of my constituent, Mrs Mears, when her current medication ceases to be effective, Kadcyla is the only option. Although she has responded well to the current treatment, there is every likelihood, and her consultant agrees, that she will respond in a similarly positive way to Kadcyla. There is every chance that she would enjoy the benefits of that drug for a time well in excess of the expected nine months. I would therefore argue that a blanket ban on the drug would be inappropriate. At the very least, there should be some flexibility in the system to make the drug available to people such as my constituent, for whom there is a very high probability that it would have more than the expected benefit. She has responded so well to her existing drug, and if her life could be extended considerably by Kadcyla, that would allow more research to be done on the efficacy of her existing medication, which would be an important body of evidence to add to the appraisal process.

The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden rightly said that the prescription of drugs should be based solely on clinical need and no other factor, but when I met Mrs Mears, she made one point to me that I could not really answer. Through her life, she worked professionally in the criminal justice system and has done a lot of work saving the public purse money by
innovating programmes to reduce youth offending. That value cannot be calculated, but she made the point to me, “At the one point in my life that I need something back from this country, it is being denied to me.” I really could not give an answer to that. I hope that something can be done to make the drug available.

The NICE decision is provisional. I contributed to the consultation and I hope that when NICE meets next—in, I think, early March—it will review the decision.

I know that NHS resources are finite and that there are many competing demands on its budget. The debate on the overall size of the NHS budget must be a matter for another time, but cases such as this illustrate the need to use what resources we have as efficiently as possible. Just before I met Mrs Mears the other week, I happened to see a story in the media that really made my blood boil. I do not pretend to be an expert on the story reported that the NHS wastes about £80 million per annum by prescribing simple painkillers such as paracetamol, which can be bought in a supermarket for 20p or 30p a packet. Those prescriptions go through the usual prescription system and cost £80 million a year. Surely there is a way of getting around that, perhaps by giving GP practices a stock of basic painkillers. I am not asking for people who get free prescriptions to start paying but, surely, there is a way for doctors to issue them when it is appropriate to do so, and stop this merry-go-round of paperwork that costs many millions of pounds.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a very valuable point. Does he agree that one way around this issue would be to have prescribing pharmacists who could give out medications such as those basic painkillers, without the need for the patient even to see their GP, which would also free up valuable GP time?

Iain Stewart: That sounds an eminently sensible suggestion. As I say, I do not pretend to be an expert on the system, but, surely, something like that could be done. Then the money saved could be added to the cancer drugs fund and make more drugs such as Kadcyla available to people who need them.

I will end my comments, as I know there are many Members who want to contribute. Please let us try to do everything we can in this House to encourage NICE and Roche to look at the overall system and to look in particular at this drug. It means so much to my constituent and to many others up and down the country. I hope that this debate has that effect. I conclude where I started, by congratulating the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden on securing it.

2.36 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for selecting this very important topic for debate this afternoon. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for the passionate but very thoughtful way in which she introduced the debate. I endorse everything that she said. On the drug Kadcyla, she said, quite pithily, that, first, it works and, secondly, it has far fewer side effects than many other cancer drugs. I was also very proud to have backed the “43p a day” campaign that she mentioned.

I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group on off-patent drugs and should also say that one of my first actions as a Member of this House in 2015 was to become a breast cancer ambassador. I was very proud to do that, as the person who inspired me to come into politics, my grandmother, died of the disease some years ago.

I was lucky enough in my early months in this House to be drawn in the ballot for a private Member’s Bill. I introduced the Off-patent Drugs Bill, and although it was talked out in quite controversial circumstances on 6 November 2015, I was none the less pleased after that to work on a cross-party basis to achieve legislative progress. I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) and for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), and to the former Minister for Life Sciences, the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), for the work that was done in those months to make legislative changes which were incorporated in the Access to Medical Treatments (Innovation) Bill, which received Royal Assent in March last year.

I want to come to the pledges that were made on 29 January 2016 and how things have moved forward since. I say to the Minister that in setting out a number of questions about this matter, I do not necessarily expect them all to be answered in detail in her closing remarks. If there are aspects that she feels she cannot answer in detail, I would be grateful if she wrote to me about them after the debate.

On 29 January 2016, I and others in the House tabled a package of amendments to the Access to Medical Treatments (Innovation) Bill. Some were substantial and went into the Bill. Others were probing amendments designed to extract the promises that I have talked about. The then Minister for Life Sciences said:

“Broadly, the intention of the package of amendments is to introduce off-label repurposed medicines in the Bill, and to put it four square at the heart of the agenda.”

That is precisely what we sought to do that day. He added:

“I wholeheartedly supported the intention of his Bill and its predecessor, but not the mechanism. We now have a mechanism that will work”—

we had spoken that day about the mechanism.

One of the amendments requested an action plan, but the Minister decided he did not want that on the face of the Bill. However, he said:

“let me set out my commitment and that of the Government to pursuing this agenda with time and rigour.” —[Official Report, 29 January 2016, Vol. 605, c. 543.]

Dr Huq: I remember very well my hon. Friend’s Bill and the shameful way it was talked out by the professional filibusters on the Government Benches. However, does he not agree that any action plan needs to look at these things in the round? It should look at the poor post-diagnosis support and information that patients get across other types of cancer, not just breast cancer.
It should also look at the limited availability of the effective drugs we have talked about, which do not have side effects, and at the fact that drugs have been de-listed from the Cancer Drugs Fund.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I certainly agree that the pathway has to be comprehensive, and I will come back to it in a moment.

In addition that day, the then Minister for Life Sciences said he would “explore mechanisms for ensuring NICE can look at evidence and develop evidence-based guidance on off-label medicines, so that doctors are aware of which drugs are being used in an off-label indication...NICE is now looking at ways to collect evidence on repurposed medicines.”

He spoke about the “British National Formulary”, and I am pleased about the progress that has been made on it, which I will come back to in a moment.

We proposed—would have applied to NHS England—that there should be a new system of national commissioning for repurposed drugs. Again, our amendment was not accepted, but this pledge was given: “The NHS is hungry to look at all options for promoting off-label and repurposed drug use.”—[Official Report, 29 January 2016, Vol. 605, c. 544-45.]

I hope that that pledge can be repeated by the Minister at the Dispatch Box today. There was also a commitment to consult all relevant stakeholders. Again, I would hope that that is fairly uncontroversial and can be repeated.

Let me come now to where we have got to. When I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden, I quoted the worrying statistic about bisphosphonates, which really do provide a case in point. They are used to treat osteoporosis, but they are very effective in their secondary form—the repurposed form—where someone has primary breast cancer, and they certainly help to prevent that from spreading to the bone. The statistic that only 24% of clinicians are prescribing bisphosphonates is very worrying, and it does need to be addressed, because there should be no barrier in the system to their being far more widely prescribed than they are.

Let me come to the working group. I understand that it will conclude at the end of next month. I am very grateful for the fact that I will be meeting officials from the Pharmacy and Medicines Directorate in the next few weeks to discuss this issue. However, if there is to be a pathway, I would appreciate it if the Minister was prepared to share it with me in draft form before that meeting, so that comments could be made on it, particularly going back to the pledges made last year.

The “British National Formulary” has begun work. Indeed, I looked up bisphosphonates specifically on BNF Online before I came to the debate. What makes the 24% statistic even more worrying is that BNF Online says:

“The use of bisphosphonates in patients with metastatic breast cancer may reduce pain and prevent skeletal complications of bone metastases.”

That is there already—it is in the prescriber’s bible, if you like—so the Minister really should focus on why it is not filtering through the system in the way that it should.

In addition, there is a pilot licensing scheme that brings together medical research charities and generics manufacturers to license off-patent drugs for their new purposes. If the Minister could comment on whether she is looking for that to become a fully fledged scheme, that would be helpful.

The scheme is an interesting development, because my Bill, in its original form, would actually have put a duty on the Secretary of State for Health to seek licences for drugs in their new indications, and that was the bone of contention between me and the then Minister, who thought that it was too onerous for the Secretary of State to have that duty.

Looking back at that debate, I think the other interesting thing is that a point was made about the EU’s licensing scheme. It was said that any changes could run a coach and horses through that scheme, but given that we will not be members of the European Union by the end of this Parliament, I would be interested to hear how the Minister thinks the end of the Brexit process will affect this issue. If the European licensing scheme was seen by the Minister at the time as posing something of a problem, perhaps she can tell us if she will consider whether the pilot licensing scheme can now become fully fledged and how she sees things developing here in the UK without the European scheme.

I appreciate that I have put a lot of points to the Minister. As I said, I am perfectly happy for her to write to me about them. However, we should not forget the difference that this off-patent drugs agenda can make to people’s lives. Those who face this disease show incredible bravery. For example, we have my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) in the Chamber with us, and Bonnie Fox, a constituent of the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), is in the Public Gallery. We in this House, as legislators, owe a duty to all who suffer from this terrible disease to take all possible steps to make what are extraordinarily cheap drugs as readily available throughout our country as possible.

2.46 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing it. I was really honoured to be able to back the application to the Backbench Business Committee. I also thank her for her powerful speech, which was very moving.

Fighting cancer is not just a top priority for the NHS but one of the great scientific challenges of our time. Treating our illnesses with science rather than superstition is a relatively new idea in the history of medicine. However, the acceleration of better diagnosis, better treatment and more successful outcomes is keeping more of us alive for longer, and with a better quality of life.

The motion mentions Kadcyla, a treatment that NICE is not currently able to recommend for the treatment of secondary breast cancer, and we await the result of its consultation in March. This treatment is a relative of another medicine, which, in its introduction, was also extremely controversial—Herceptin. After a lot of debate and pressure from this House, Herceptin was approved. It has helped thousands of people—men get breast cancer too—in fighting breast cancer.
Kadcyla is a treatment that could help women who have already been on an Herceptin-based treatment and whose cancer has continued to advance. We must be clear when we talk about secondary, or metastatic, cancer that we are talking about people whose lives will be massively shortened by cancer. Kadcyla gives them and their families more time and a better quality of life. It can add months to the life expectancy of patients whose remaining lives are likely to be measured in only a few months. The hon. Lady movingly talked about some of her friends and some of those in the Public Gallery.

I think we all understand that there are ultimate financial constraints on the NHS, even though spending on it has increased. I really welcome the new cancer drugs fund, which provides patients with much better access to the most promising new cancer treatments, while providing value for the taxpayer.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I was profoundly moved by the case of my constituent, Rosalie Marshall, who sadly is suffering from breast cancer. She told me that she finds it hard to understand why the NHS can spend such significant sums on conditions which, frankly, are not life-threatening and sometimes seem to verge on the cosmetic, and yet not give priority to vital drugs like Kadcyla. Surely something is wrong, and savings could be made in other parts of the NHS that would more than pay for Kadcyla.

Mrs Drummond: Yes, I also get emails on the same subject. We have to remember, though, that there are other considerations such as mental health conditions. Sometimes people do not quite understand why money is being spent on various parts of the NHS, but there are always other reasons behind it. However, I totally agree with my right hon. Friend about drugs like this which seem to make such a difference.

In the case of Kadcyla, there do seem to be questions as to why it cannot be brought into regular use. Some of those questions are for NICE and some are for the manufacturer. Kadcyla is a treatment that has been accepted by a number of European countries, despite the expense. I am reassured to see that many cancer charities accept that NICE has made every effort so far to fund it, and that NICE has been doing its best.

Another query is based on the choice of comparator treatment in assessing the quality of Kadcyla as a treatment. There have been concerns that the comparator treatment—Lapatinib and Capecitabine; I hope that Hansard will be able to report that rather better than I can say it—is no longer available on the NHS. The drug’s manufacturer carries the comparison on its own website, with the outcome of a clinical trial codenamed EMILLA. However, it does not seem realistic to base a decision on a drug on a comparison with another drug that is not available on the NHS either. It would help everyone to understand the comparison if it was made with a drug that is generally available.

Can the Minister tell us the status of Roche’s study under the name ESTHER, which is looking at Kadcyla? In the event that NICE does not revise its decision now, will it be open to it to do so when it gets the ESTHER conclusions? That trial is not scheduled to report until 2023, so the immediate concerns about availability remain. However, I recognise that research goes on constantly, and that perhaps the manufacturer will reconsider its position. It is unfortunate that NICE has been subjected to sustained attacks by the manufacturer, Roche, which has risked undermining NICE’s reputation in a most unjustified way. I call on Roche to get round the table with NICE and look again at the pricing of this drug, as it has done with others in the past.

Turning to other treatments, I know that the message is going out to clinical commissioning groups about the options available. Many Members will have had campaign emails relating to bisphosphonates, and I was reassured by the response I had from the Department of Health and the Portsmouth clinical commissioning group that they are being made available. Queen Alexandra hospital in Portsmouth has above-average performance in both treatment times and outcomes, and is becoming, if it is not already, a centre of excellence in cancer treatment.

I know that this is a difficult subject and budgets are limited, but like many others in this House, including those in the Gallery, many of my friends and family have died of breast cancer or are survivors. We need to make sure that we are keeping up with the right drugs to treat them, and that sounds like Kadcyla.

2.52 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this debate. She made an extraordinarily powerful and emotive speech. I joined her in wishing everybody who is here today in the Public Gallery and everybody who is watching this debate at home all the very best for the future. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who made a very powerful speech citing the personal testimony of his constituent, whose case he argued eloquently. My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) spoke eloquently about his grandmother being his inspiration for going into politics, and her dying of the disease. We come into politics for many different reasons, the profession of public pain being one. Nye Bevan did not create the NHS in 1948; he created it much earlier when his father died of pneumoconiosis in his arms before the time of the NHS. I hope that I can pronounce the drugs that I am going to mention just as well as the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) did.

We have heard lots of statistics today. Stats, in themselves,
Europe’s first breast cancer prevention centre—and the charity Prevent Breast Cancer. I am a Mancunian MP, so my constituency also benefits from close proximity to the Christie hospital, the largest single-site cancer centre in Europe, treating more than 44,000 patients a year.

The Nightingale centre opened at University Hospital of South Manchester—Wythenshawe hospital—in July 2007. It offers state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment services to women with breast cancer and co-ordinates the NHS breast screening programme for the entire Greater Manchester area. It also provides training facilities aimed at addressing the shortage of breast cancer specialists, and it houses many of the Prevent Breast Cancer researchers who are looking at ways to predict and prevent breast cancer.

In the Prevent Breast Cancer research unit, several drugs that are now out of patent are being repurposed for preventing cancer from coming back. Women with a family history or other factors that make them high risk are known to benefit from these drugs, which prevent the disease. But women in that position find it difficult to obtain these inexpensive, tried-and-tested drugs because they are currently not listed in the “British National Formulary” as specifically licensed for the new purpose of prevention, despite successful clinical trials. There are currently three drugs in that situation: Tamoxifen, Raloxifene and Anastrozole.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mike Kane: I would be happy to give way, having got the names of those drugs right.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I understand that a new policy is being put together by those in charge of the “British National Formulary”, which will set out how they will get more off-label drugs into the formulary. Does my hon. Friend agree that the sooner that policy is available for us to see the better?

Mike Kane: I congratulate my hon. Friend on doing so much work in this area since he came to Parliament. We can only hope that what he says is true; perhaps the Minister can give us more information on that point in her summing up.

The Prevent Breast Cancer research unit has more out-of-patent drugs under investigation for breast cancer prevention which may be even better for the future. As well as doing everything we can to extend the life of women with secondary breast cancer, we must do all we can to prevent breast cancer from occurring in the first place. As we all know, the adage is that prevention is better than cure. For those with secondary cancer, for whom cure is currently out of reach, many people will be striving to achieve that for the next generation.

At the moment, the system is standing in the way. A solution to make those drugs more widely available that would cost very little money indeed would be to ask NICE to list such drugs as approved for the new indication of prevention in the “British National Formulary” following the evaluation of relevant clinical trials, of course—so that doctors can have confidence in prescribing them. The requirement to obtain a new Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency licence for the new indication is expensive and impractical for repurposed medications, because they usually lack a sponsoring pharmaceutical company to champion the new use of the generic drug. I am sure the Minister would agree that such a small change would be transformative in the prevention of breast cancer. I hope that she will ask NICE to consider that change to the way in which drugs are listed in the “British National Formulary” to allow drugs that have been evaluated for a new purpose, such as prevention, to be listed as approved for that purpose.

When we lose someone prematurely to cancer, grief obviously follows. It has been my experience that when we lose someone to breast cancer, the grief is particularly poignant. Tonight, my thoughts and prayers will be with all my constituents who have either succumbed to the disease or are battling it, and with their families who carry the consequences. I lost my cousin Maura Kane to the disease, and my two friends Tom and Claire both lost their mothers to it. I stand in solidarity with my constituent and friend Sheila Higgins, who is battling this disease. She has been like a mother to me for the last two decades. Finally, my parliamentary assistant Suzanne Richards came back to work after Christmas with a clean bill of health. She was diagnosed with a virulent strain last year, but she had world-class treatment at the Wythenshawe and Christie hospitals. Today is her birthday, but it is a birthday that many of us feared she would never see—happy birthday, Suzanne.
as we all know in this House and beyond it, the earlier the diagnosis of cancer, whether first stage or secondary, the better the chances of successful treatment.

The treatment of secondary breast cancer is particularly relevant to my constituency. I have met representatives from Breast Cancer Care—I say “representatives”, but they are women, mums and wives—and I was incredibly moved to hear the stories of their experiences of living with secondary breast cancer. I commend the vital work that the charity has done, particularly its “Secondary, not second-rate” campaign looking at the barriers preventing the improvement of care for those with secondary breast cancer.

Breast Cancer Care highlighted to me the key point that unless our hospital trusts collect specific data on how many people have been diagnosed with secondary breast cancer, they cannot accurately plan services for those patients. I was shocked to learn that two thirds of breast cancer, they cannot accurately plan services for secondary breast cancer.

I moved to hear the stories of their experiences of living with secondary breast cancer. I commend the vital work that the charity has done, particularly its “Secondary, not second-rate” campaign looking at the barriers preventing the improvement of care for those with secondary breast cancer.

The Minister will want to tell the House about the success of the cancer drugs fund. We know that 95,000 people have received the life-extending drugs they need through the fund. However, we must always strive to look at new ways of making sure that patients have access to innovative new medicines, diagnostics and medical technologies, as is happening through the accelerated access review plans.

I also welcome the Government’s commitment to making sure that the prices charged to the NHS are fair and not inflated. I cannot be the only Member who was shocked and pretty disgusted by some of the headlines that have appeared in newspapers recently about the conduct of some companies in massively inflating the price of patent drugs. I am pleased that that loophole will be closed by the Health Service Medical Supplies (Costs) Bill, which is currently in the other place. I urge the Secretary of State to ensure, as I know he is doing, that the Competition and Markets Authority keeps a close eye on the matter. Unfair practices should not be tolerated.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has listened carefully to the concerns raised in this informative and engaging debate. I hope that a solution is reached quickly between NICE and Roche if the problem is that the price charged for the drug is simply too high. I join other Members in wishing every single woman in this country who is battling first stage or secondary cancer the very best of luck. I hope those women feel that the debate has done them proud.

3.6 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing the debate. Like other hon. Members, I am here today to represent my constituents’ concerns. I should say from the off that I join the cause to make Kadcyla more available.

When my staff and I were discussing the correspondence about the debate and particular constituency cases, we quickly agreed that this is the worst sort of correspondence that we receive—when people are terminally ill but unable to access the medicines that they need. The subject is particularly acute—I do not think that I am the first Member to struggle to keep a quaver out of my voice—because my mother-in-law died of secondary cancer. These things will stay with us all. None of us can know what ladies who are currently suffering from these diseases are going through, but when we have seen it at second hand, we all want to live in a world where the NHS does not have to practise any rationing.

I want to focus on that point because, as the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) said, the problem is intractable. I know about some of the great difficulties in bringing forward Abiraterone to help men, in a similar set of circumstances, suffering from prostate cancer. In a sense, I sympathise with the Minister and with NICE because they have an extremely difficult task. While it is easy for all of us to say that of course Kadcyla should be freely available to all those who need it without restriction, I am well aware that the problem is long-standing and applies to many innovative pharmaceuticals.

I also appreciate that it is no comfort whatever to sufferers of various cancers to know that a profit-making pharmaceutical system has a far better record of innovation than the alternative planned systems. I wish the Minister every success in her crucial task of working out how to ensure that innovative medicines come forward at a lower cost and a greater rate.

3.8 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to take part in today’s important debate and I thank the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for securing it. I am grateful to her for her contribution and the cases that she used to illustrate it. She eloquently put a human face to the problem.

The debate about access to Kadcyla and other breast cancer drugs is of immense interest to the public on both sides of the border. Breast cancer is the most common cancer, which was shown by the many individual constituency cases cited by hon. Members of all parties today.

As has been said, Kadcyla is an effective life-extending treatment, which gives some women with incurable secondary breast cancer up to nine months longer than the alternatives, and has fewer side effects and a cost of around £90,000 per patient. In Scotland, Kadcyla has never been available on the NHS.

The Scottish Medicines Consortium, which makes its decisions independently of Ministers and Parliament, decided in October 2014 not to approve Kadcyla for routine use in Scotland. After considering all the available evidence, it felt that the health benefits were not sufficient in relation to the treatment’s cost. Patients have, therefore, been able to access the drug only in exceptional circumstances through individual patient treatment requests—IPTRs. It is estimated that more than 100 women in Scotland could benefit from Kadcyla annually.

A Kadcyla discount has been offered by the pharmaceutical company Roche and it recently wrote to Scottish Government officials about a patient access

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[Victoria Atkins]
scheme. Roche has now resubmitted its application to the SMC, so that it can be considered for routine use in the NHS across Scotland. That is currently being assessed—

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Will my hon. Friend join me in hoping for a positive outcome in relation to Kadcyla for our constituents who are affected by secondary breast cancer, to whom this debate means so much?

Martyn Day: I thank my hon. Friend for that point and I join her in hoping for a positive outcome. We expect a decision to be made in March with an announcement on 10 April.

The SNP Scottish Government have substantially increased access to new medicines, particularly for cancer, with plenty of reforms and investment in recent years. The Scottish Government will build on recent reforms and make further improvements, in collaboration with patients and NHS staff, by accepting the recommendations of Dr Brian Montgomery’s review. Shona Robison, Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, has announced that the Scottish Government will take forward all 28 of the review’s recommendations. Dr Montgomery was tasked to examine how changes made to the Scottish Medicines Consortium process in 2014 affected access to medicines for rare and end-of-life conditions. His recommendations set out how the process for appraising medicines could be made more open, transparent and robust.

Among the Montgomery recommendations—the House need not worry; I will not list all 28 of them—is to give the SMC an additional decision option of an interim recommendation for use subject to ongoing evaluation, which will allow collection of more data on a medicine’s real-world effectiveness. Another is the introduction of managed access agreements, under which medicine would be provided at a discounted price for a period of time, again to collect real-world data on its effectiveness. Another recommendation is to make greater use of national procurement in NHS National Services Scotland—NSS—to lead negotiations on cost with the pharma industry to get the fairest price possible. Better capturing of patient outcome data in the real world is vital to enable us to determine whether medicines are bringing the expected level of benefits to patients.

Beyond the recommendations of the review, Ms Robison has also announced improvements to the processes for non-routine access to medicines on an individual case-by-case basis. The peer approved clinical system, or PACS, piloted in Glasgow in 2015 to handle applications for ultra-orphan medicines, has been successfully rolled out across Scotland. A second tier of PACS will now be introduced to replace and build upon the existing individual patient treatment request system. A new national appeals process will be introduced through the new tier of PACS, and that will include consideration of equity of access with other parts of the UK as a material part of its decision-making process.

In November Gregor McNie, Cancer Research UK’s senior public affairs manager in Scotland, said: “SMC does a difficult but necessary job to assess whether new cancer drugs should be made available on the NHS. Following the SMC reforms, we’ve been pleased to see a significant increase in the availability of cancer drugs in Scotland and we support the review’s recommendations to make further progress.”

Breast Cancer NOW has said that “Scottish Government reforms give fresh hope for a medicines system that will put patients and their families first.” It also said: “Scotland’s approach to reform is a useful example to the rest of the UK about ways in which the system can be improved.”

Kirsten Oswald: I thank my hon. Friend for his words about the flexibility of approach and the need to continue to keep pushing forward to ensure that we allow access to as many of these drugs as possible for the people who are in such need. Will he join me in commending the Scottish Government and the SMC for that approach, and in hoping that it will continue and make a difference?

Martyn Day: I do indeed join my hon. Friend in those comments.

A new and ambitious Scottish cancer strategy, launched in 2016, aims to stop anyone dying from breast cancer by 2050, and breast cancer is of course a priority in the Scottish Government’s Detect Cancer Early initiative. We need to do many things to move forward in that direction.

No debate seems complete these days without reference to Brexit, and this issue is no exception. The Health Secretary has stated that the UK will not be in the European Medicines Agency. If so, there could be implications for the way in which medicines are regulated, and marketing authorisations will be required from the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency for the UK. I am in no doubt that the implications will be less efficiency and possibly longer processes for obtaining authorisations, resulting—I fear—in innovative drugs taking longer to reach patients. Some industry leaders predict delays in the region of 150 days, based on the examples of Switzerland and Canada.

According to a piece that appeared last year in the Financial Times, when Sir Michael Rawlins, chair of the MHRA, was asked whether it would be able to take on all the extra work registering new drugs and medical devices currently carried out by the EMA, he said, “Certainly not”. It seems that considerable investment and recruitment will be required to re-establish it as a stand-alone national regulator. I am keen to hear from the Minister how delayed drug access for UK patients will be avoided.

Mr Baker: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and of course he raises a perfectly reasonable concern, but the campaign director of Vote Leave had, as one of his particular bugbears, the costs associated with the clinical trials directive and its prejudicial effect on innovation in medicines. I hope that the Government can find a better way through than the previous system and that, in leaving the EU, we will not only solve the problem of the EMA but have a better regulatory system afterwards.

Martyn Day: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I look forward to hearing the outcome.

In conclusion, with regards to Kadcyla, I hope the company’s resubmission to the Scottish Medicines Consortium is at a fair price to allow it to be considered for approval for use in the NHS in Scotland. It would give people across Scotland the opportunity to benefit from more treatment options and could give them precious extra time with their families and loved ones. The Scottish Government, the SMC and the NHS have
[Martyn Day]

worked hard to reform access to new medicines, but we now need pharmaceutical companies to do their bit by bringing forward much fairer prices for new medicines, so that access is as wide as possible for the people of Scotland. Cost-effectiveness is a key marker in ensuring that drugs are routinely available in the NHS, and I take the opportunity to emphasise that point to the pharmaceutical industry in general.

3.17 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for securing this debate, following the very sad news that her friend Samantha Heath, who had been receiving this life-extending treatment, had heard from NICE, that it was being taken away from her. I am pleased that she was able to secure this important debate through the Backbench Business Committee.

I also thank all colleagues who have attended the debate and made excellent speeches, sharing with us their experiences and thoughts, including the hon. Members for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) and for Wycombe (Mr Baker), my hon. Friends the Members for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) and the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), who spoke for the SNP. I am sure that the Minister has been given lots to think about, and I look forward to her response shortly. I also thank Breast Cancer Now for its work campaigning on this matter, along with Breast Cancer Care for its continued dedication and its support and advocacy for individuals with secondary breast cancer.

In my contribution, I will first briefly establish the documented and perceived benefits of Kadcyla, and then, building on that, discuss the broader issues around the provision of off-patent drugs, before moving on to present the problems with determining the funding of a drug based principally on its cost-effectiveness as judged by NICE.

Kadcyla’s continued funding through the cancer drugs fund in 2015 was a great success for patients and patient advocates. At the time, the value of the drug was recognised and the concession was made that, despite its high cost, its positive impact was worth the funding it needed. Yet just over a year later, the alterations to the cancer drugs fund have prevented the future funding of this drug, along with, potentially, that of a number of other secondary breast cancer drugs such as palbociclib and Perjeta—I hope that I pronounced those correctly—as it moves towards becoming a funding mechanism for under-researched but innovative drugs with cost and value as a principal driver, and away from its original principle, which was to finance drugs that were too expensive to be recommended by NICE but proved effective in treating cancer patients.

We can all agree that patients have benefited significantly since the introduction of the cancer drugs fund, but the progress that has been made in recent years in improving access to cancer drugs is now at risk. That is unsurprising, given the cash-strapped state of the national health service—we have discussed that in the House recently in the past few weeks—which faces pressures to provide these costly drugs that are developed by large pharmaceutical companies, and is forced to consider costs rather than clinical need. I hope that the Minister will tell us whether those concerns have been assessed, and how she plans to address them. We have heard a number of good suggestions today about how funding may be redirected.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Is not the situation made all the more poignant by the fact that since 2001, the incidence of breast cancer has been rising by 9% every year?

Mrs Hodgson: That is a very good point. It may be that more and more people are coming forward and being diagnosed, but, as my hon. Friend says, this will clearly become more of an issue, not less of an issue, in the years to come.

As we have heard today, it is estimated that Kadcyla benefits 1,200 women every year in England alone, and that on average it can increase the length of a woman’s life by six months, although reports suggest that in the case of some women that can stretch into years. Even if it is measured in months, however, the extra time is surely priceless to the women and families involved. I speak from personal experience, as I lost my mother-in-law secondary breast cancer 20 years ago this year, when my children were very small. I know that she fought for every extra week and day in the end, and that she would have given anything for an extra six months to spend with her grandchildren. We all wanted that little bit longer for her. For all those 1,200 women, that extra time is time with their families. It means seeing their children reach perhaps one more milestone: starting school or university, getting married, or even giving them a grandchild. What is the cost of such moments, such memories, which are so precious and which help families so much with what, ultimately and inevitably, will follow?

Iain Stewart: The hon. Lady has made a powerful point. In the case of the most aggressive cancers, the period between diagnosis and death can be very short. As she says, any extension of life enabling women to celebrate family events, or anything else, is incredibly important, and we should not lose sight of that.

Mrs Hodgson: I agree. What price can be put on those precious months?

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I have some investment in this. My own experience of breast cancer treatment over the last two years has left me passionate about the issue of prevention and early diagnosis. Will my hon. Friend join me in not just thanking the breast cancer charities—as she has already done—but calling on all Members to spread the word among all the women they know that they must learn how to examine their breasts? I learnt how to do it from a comic sketch in a television programme: that is how I diagnosed my lump. I want everyone to learn how to do it, and also to learn what they can do to help prevent breast cancer, because, although there is no magic prevention method, there are ways of reducing the risk.
Mrs Hodgson: Although we have not so far touched on prevention or early diagnosis, they are vital issues. We have discussed them in the House on many occasions, but they can never be discussed too often, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising them. Let me add that I am happy every day to see her back in this place, and doing so well.

What also stands out with Kadcyla is the reduced side effects, as we have heard, as opposed to alternative breast cancer treatments, the side effects of which can include the inducement of osteoporosis and an increased risk of blood clots. As some colleagues will, sadly, know first-hand or through experiences of family and friends or constituents, the side effects of some cancer treatments can be truly awful, and in some cases are daunting enough to prevent the acceptance of further treatment entirely.

It is a common perception that women make the decision to end their treatment much earlier than planned, despite it prolonging their life sometimes. That is because they feel the suffering they are enduring as a result of the treatment is not worth the additional life it is providing to them, because it is all about the quality of that life.

Research conducted by Genentech in the United States on the side effects of Kadcyla found that less than 5% of women taking the treatment suffered any hair loss. Through my work as co-chair of the all-party group on breast cancer, I know that hair loss can be a highly traumatic experience for women undergoing cancer treatment and is one of the most discussed side effects of cancer treatment in general. Given that in this debate we are discussing the treatment of secondary breast cancer, which is ultimately a terminal disease, the best outcome we can offer through treatment is both the extension of life and the preservation of the quality of life enjoyed pre-diagnosis. Therefore, because Kadcyla causes fewer side effects, it represents a treatment that can effectively achieve not only an extension of life, but the preservation of some of that quality of life enjoyed by these women pre-diagnosis. So I look forward to hearing from the Minister about what she is doing to ensure women will benefit from this vital treatment in the future.

I will now move on to how we can better support off-patent drugs, especially for breast cancer. Drug patents typically last for 20 years—although sometimes only 10 years—and at the end of that patent there is very little incentive for the drugs to be licensed for use in another indication. These drugs are still clinically effective in many cases and can be a low-cost effective treatment, but currently the NHS has no method for making them routinely available.

Bisphosphonates are one such example of an off-patent drug that is not being made universally available to patients, despite evidence showing its effectiveness. It is estimated that, if given to the entire eligible population, this drug could prevent one in 10 breast cancer deaths. It is therefore concerning that research conducted by the UK Breast Cancer Group found that only 24% of breast cancer clinicians were offering bisphosphonates to patients. Solving this issue therefore provides an opportunity to improve breast cancer survival rates, and it is something that I hope the Minister will consider carefully.

I want to finish by discussing the cost-effectiveness of drugs. Currently NICE measures cost-effectiveness using quality-adjusted life years—QALY—and one QALY is equal to one year of life in perfect health. As I am sure colleagues will agree, it is almost impossible to objectively measure someone’s quality of life, and there are questions surrounding the morality of drug treatments. Given as raised in NICE’s “Social value judgements” paper on the moral evaluation of drugs.

As is so often the case in these debates, a clear cause of the problem lies with how NICE approves drugs. At the last general election, Labour proposed a top-to-bottom reform of NICE, ensuring that drug acceptance and funding is determined solely by clinical need, not with cost or value considerations. This debate shows there is clearly a need to re-address these issues.

As I have already mentioned, Kadcyla patients tend to experience considerably fewer side effects, and this can potentially have a positive impact on their ability to enjoy a higher quality of life post-diagnosis. Because of practicality and cost implications, it is almost impossible for NICE to comprehensively and effectively measure this exact quality of life. However, what we can say, without a doubt, is that these individuals would suffer a lower quality of life without Kadcyla, and this, I believe, deserves more attention and value in the process of drug approval and funding.

The current funding of drugs is being based on the cost-effectiveness of a drug, rather than clinical need, yet, as this debate has shown, it should not be the final deciding factor as it disregards very personal reasons for many people who rely upon drug treatments. Kadcyla has benefited many women during their time living with a terminal disease, and has now been pulled, devastatingly, out of their reach.

It is the Minister who has the levers of power to address the problems in the system which is letting these women down. Members from across this Chamber have eloquently made their case to the Minister. I hope she has listened—I am sure she has—and will give these women and their families some reassurances today.

3.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood): A large number of important and technical points have been raised today, and I will do my best to respond to as many of them as possible, but where I am unable to do so, I hope that colleagues will allow me to write to them. I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this important debate, and I join Members across the House in paying tribute to the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer for all its advocacy on behalf of patients and families. The hon. Lady has campaigned tirelessly to improve access to breast cancer drugs on behalf of her constituents, and I share her commitment to ensuring that patients are able to benefit from the latest effective and often cutting-edge cancer drugs and technologies.

Cancer is a truly terrible disease, and as has been made clear by the many moving personal contributions that we have heard today, there are few of us who have not been touched by it. That is why the availability of effective drugs to treat cancer is of such importance to all of us and to so many of our constituents. I particularly want to thank all those who have allowed their personal stories to be shared today, and all who are here in the
Public Gallery. These stories remind us powerfully of why we are all here, and their importance cannot be overestimated.

Sir Desmond Swayne: There is an all-party group for almost every disease known to man, with the possible exception of rigor mortis. If patients and campaigners are to have confidence in clinical decision makers, there will have to be profound changes. At the moment, people lobby their MPs, who are uniquely unqualified to make these decisions. May I suggest to my hon. Friend that one of the changes might need to involve a thorough review of the framework and guidance under which the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence operates?

Nicola Blackwood: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. It has been made by a number of colleagues today, and I shall address it later in my speech if he will allow me.

We want the UK to lead the world in fighting cancer. Survival rates in this country have never been higher; but we must go further. Medicines are a vital weapon in the battle against cancer, but we must not forget the bigger picture. More than half of people receiving a cancer diagnosis will now live 10 years or more; 96% of women diagnosed with breast cancer in England will live for a year after their diagnosis; 86% will live for five years; and 81% are predicted to live for at least 10 years. Improving outcomes for all cancers remains a priority for this Government.

Our mandate to the NHS sets out an ambition to make England one of the most successful countries in Europe at preventing premature deaths from all cancers, and we are working to achieve this through the implementation of the most recent England cancer strategy. As the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) said, early diagnosis and prevention are essential to achieving that aim. The new faster diagnosis standard will speed up the diagnosis of all cancers. The new standard aims to ensure that every patient referred with a suspicion of cancer is diagnosed within 28 days. It is also important that we support further clinical research, as this can have a considerable impact on cancer survival rates, and that is exactly why the National Institute for Health Research spent £142 million on cancer research in 2015-16. And of course we must not forget the vital research carried out by the cancer charities, supported by the millions of pounds donated by members of the public each year.

The Government fully understand how important it is that people affected by cancer are able to access new and promising drug treatments, and we firmly believe that clinically appropriate drugs that are established as cost-effective should be routinely available to NHS patients. We all know that these decisions, which can be fiendishly complex, are never easy. We also know from long experience in this place that they should not be made by the arbitrary interventions of politicians. They must be clinically led and made on the basis of the best available evidence. They must also be frequently reviewed when new evidence comes forward. That is why it is right for NICE to play that role in providing independent, evidence-based guidance for the NHS on whether significant new drugs represent a clinically effective and cost-effective use of NHS resources.

If a drug is recommended by NICE, the NHS is legally required to fund it, and over the years many thousands of people in England have benefited from the cancer drugs that NICE has recommended. Those include transformative drugs for cancer, such as Herceptin for breast cancer, pembrolizumab for skin cancer and Zytiga for prostate cancer. Unfortunately, although we would all wish it were not the case, there are cancer drugs that NICE is not able to recommend as clinically effective and cost-effective on the basis of the available evidence, which is exactly why the Government established the cancer drugs fund in England. Since October 2010, we have invested more than £1.2 billion in the CDF, which has helped more than 95,000 people in England to access life-extending cancer drugs that would not otherwise have been available to them.

In July 2016, as colleagues will know, NHS England and NICE introduced a new operating model for the CDF that builds on that and ensures that it is placed on a more sustainable footing for the future. The new operating model is designed to achieve three key objectives: to make sure that patients have faster access to the most promising new treatments; to make sure that taxpayers get good value for money on drug expenditure; and to make sure that pharmaceutical companies are willing to price their products responsibly and can access a new fast-track route to NHS funding for the best and most promising drugs.

As part of the transition to the new operating model, NICE is looking at whether drugs that were previously available through the fund should be funded through baseline funding in the future. NICE has recently been able to recommend two of these drugs for breast cancer, Halaven and Afinitor, as well as a further breast cancer drug, Perjeta. These drugs will now be routinely available to patients. NICE was able to recommend each of these products by taking into account patient access schemes, a mechanism by which companies can improve the cost of drugs to the NHS.

As we are discussing today, NICE also reappraised Kadcyla. As the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden rightly explained, NICE consulted on the draft guidance but was not able to recommend the drug for routine use because it is too expensive for its benefits. As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) rightly said, it is important to stress that NICE has not yet issued its final guidance on Kadcyla and will take stakeholders’ responses to the recent consultation fully into account in developing its final recommendations, which allows time for further negotiation between NICE and Roche. That is why today’s debate has been of value.

I fully appreciate that this is an anxious time for women with breast cancer, but I hope that all here today will appreciate that these are difficult decisions and that NICE must be able to make them free from political interference. I assure the House that, regardless of the appraisal’s outcome, NHS England will continue to fund Kadcyla through the CDF for all patients who have already begun treatment.

The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden and others raised the importance of access to bisphosphonates for breast cancer patients, as well as the general use of off-patent treatments. The use of off-label and off-patent drugs is common in clinical practice, and there is no regulatory barrier to their prescription. NICE often
considers off-label and off-patent drugs in guidance and issues advice to clinicians on new off-label uses of drugs.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) made an important and informed speech on the issue that proved, in just over 10 minutes, exactly why he is the chair of the APPG. He is right that progress needs to be made in this area. The working group is about to review its latest progress in the next month, and I will certainly take up the issues that he raised with my colleague, the noble Lord O'Shaughnessy, who is responsible for this policy area. I will ask him to respond, especially on sharing the working group’s progress and providing an update regarding the publication of the “British National Formulary”, which the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) also mentioned.

The hon. Member for Torfaen would perhaps like to know that the Association of Medical Research Charities is also working with the Department of Health to facilitate and improve take-up of new robust research findings on repurposed drugs, where appropriate for the patient. I suspect he already knows that, however, given the nature of his speech.

For other colleagues who intervened on this point, bisphosphonates are medicines that are primarily used to prevent or treat osteoporosis. As colleagues clearly know, they are also used for a number of other medical conditions, including reducing the risk of primary breast cancer. That is based on the research in The Lancet in 2015, which found that bisphosphonates can be used to help women who are being treated for early breast cancer after the menopause by reducing the risk of the breast cancer spreading to the bone by 28%.

Bisphosphonates are not licensed for the treatment of breast cancer, but because there is good research evidence that supports their use, they can be prescribed to patients for that purpose when prescribers consider that that meets their clinical needs. There are concerns that access to bisphosphonates and their prescription is variable and that there may be some confusion at a local level as to who is responsible for commissioning them for such use, so I am happy to share NHS England’s advice on these points. While NHS England is, of course, responsible for commissioning specialised services, the manual for specialised services makes it clear that the decision to prescribe bisphosphonates for breast cancer rests firmly with the clinician and patient, subject to funding from the relevant clinical commissioning group.

Members may also be aware that NICE is updating its guideline on the diagnosis and management of early and locally advanced breast cancer. The use of bisphosphonates will be considered as part of the update. The revised guidance is due in 2018. Given the concerns about prescription, my officials have spoken to NICE about the timescale for the guideline, and I am pleased to say that NICE is looking at the feasibility of bringing forward the recommendations on the adjuvant use of bisphosphonates. It will of course be important to consider what the implications might be for the timescale for the remainder of the guideline. I am happy to keep the House updated on that decision.

The Government are not complacent about the availability of breast cancer drugs, and we continually look for measures to drive greater access to innovative new technologies. That is why the Government commissioned the independent accelerated access review, as mentioned by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). Its final report in October set out how the UK can accelerate access to innovative cost-effective drugs, devices and diagnostics for NHS patients and create a more attractive environment for innovators and investors. The Government will respond to the review in the spring, but I acknowledge that NICE must continue to evolve to adapt to changes both in the development of new drugs and in the health and care system. Given the time, and if it is all right, I will respond on some of the details in writing to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden. We will continue to work with NICE to ensure that its methods remain fit for purpose.

We must remember that improving outcomes for cancer patients is not just about drugs. That is why we accepted all 96 recommendations in the independent cancer taskforce’s “Achieving world-class cancer outcomes” report. The recommendations represent a consensus of the whole cancer community on what is necessary to transform cancer care across the whole cancer patient pathway, from prevention and early diagnosis to living with and beyond cancer, including dealing with side effects, as was mentioned so movingly by the shadow Minister. We are implementing that through a strategy that was published in May and we hope to see great progress as it is delivered. As was made clear in the speeches of so many in the Chamber, breast cancer affects many people in this country today. We continue to invest so much in cancer services so that more people survive cancer and more people live better with cancer. To do that, they need rapid access to more effective treatment, be it surgery, radiotherapy or drugs. That is what I want to see and that is what this Government will deliver.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in congratulating all who have fought and survived breast cancer. We want to stand alongside everyone who is living with a breast cancer diagnosis, battling treatment and living with the sometimes hidden day-to-day impacts of breast cancer. We remember all those who fought valiantly but lost the battle with breast cancer. We have made much progress in improving care, providing drugs and funding research, but there is much more that we can and must do to fight this disease. I hope that each and every Member here will do what they have been doing today and hold the Government to account as we move on and try to do just that.

3.43 pm

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank all the Members who contributed to this debate and thank the Minister for her detailed response. Most importantly, I thank the women in the Public Gallery for coming here en masse to show their support for this debate. I wish every single one of them well, and I hope that they will join me for tea afterwards. Perhaps unconventionally, I also invite any hon. or right hon. Members here to join me and those women for tea to thank them for their campaigning efforts and to understand more about their case. I expressly invite Suzanne from the office of my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane)—there is a cake in the Pugin Room with her name on it. Happy birthday, Suzanne.

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,

That this House notes the provisional decision not to provide the breast cancer drug Kadcyla for use in the NHS on 29 December 2016; and calls on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and pharmaceutical company Roche to come together and re-assess this decision to ensure Kadcyla is kept available for patients, and consider how access to both innovative new breast cancer drugs and off-patent drugs used for breast cancer, such as bisphosphonates, can be improved.

Business of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, in respect of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—(Mr Lidington.)

3.45 pm

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I was hoping that the Leader of the House might at least explain to the House and those watching proceedings what the effect of his motion would be. In fact, it is the very first step, perhaps not necessarily an entirely bad one, in the concertinaing of the debate process—of making shorter the process for the House to consider the European Union withdrawal Bill, as it ought to be called. The motion seeks to allow Members the opportunity to table amendments to the Bill in Committee at this point, or after it is passed, rather than under the usual procedure, which is that amendments for Committee are not normally allowed to be tabled until the Bill’s Second Reading has been debated and voted on. I understand that there are good reasons for that convention, which I suppose relate to the fact that Members would normally want to hear the thoughts of Ministers and other Members on the principle of the legislation so that they can reflect on what has been said and the Government’s policy. At that point, they would draft and table their amendments.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Does it strike my hon. Friend as somewhat odd that the motion assumes that the Bill is going to pass Second Reading and that reasoned amendments might not be made? We can all make our judgments about calculations on votes in this House, but on a point of principle it is odd that we seem to be assuming that the Bill will automatically have its Second Reading before we have even reached that stage.

Chris Leslie: Indeed, my hon. Friend is entirely correct. The Government seem to make a lot of assumptions; it is part of their general instinct to railroad legislation through. Particularly for this piece of legislation, though, they are assuming that the House will have nothing much of any consequence to say about one of the most important issues in a generation: the fact that the UK will be withdrawing from the European Union. I suspect that Members will want to table very many amendments under the motion, should it be passed.

I say to the Leader of the House that it is massively regrettable that the Government are taking this approach. They could have taken a far more relaxed, open-palmed approach to dialogue and debate and listened to the issues raised by Members on both sides of the House. When amendments are tabled in the normal course of events, they can reflect on them and rebut them, if they so wish. Instead, they are taking an approach that speaks volumes of Ministers’ frailty and their fear of ordinary debate and discussion in the House of Commons.

Members have a lot to say about the Bill in question. I do not believe that we can ignore the outcome of the referendum, but withdrawing from the European Union will have phenomenal consequences, so the amendments we may wish to table have to cover all the issues surrounding
the triggering of article 50. I understand that, in moving the motion, the Leader of the House is seeking to allow and afford Members the opportunity to table amendments in advance of the weekend and before Second Reading, but it would be regrettable if we were to lose that space between Second Reading and Committee for people to reflect on some very important things, one of which is the matter of the White Paper. The Prime Minister has conceded that we are going to have one, but as yet we still do not know when it is going to be published. If we had the White Paper today, it might help to inform the amendments that, in an hour’s time, we might be able to table.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. This is a very narrow motion about the tabling of amendments. The hon. Gentleman is now moving in the direction of White Papers. I will be very strict about keeping to the wording of the motion. If he comes back to that, I will allow him to continue, otherwise I will cut him short.

Chris Leslie: Madam Deputy Speaker, you are entirely right to focus on the narrow nature of this particular motion, but I believe that the motion should have made reference to the White Paper. Although it allows Members to table amendments before Second Reading, it does not necessarily mean that we can table amendments with the White Paper having been published. We are tabling amendments for discussion after Second Reading, when the White Paper that has been promised may not be available.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab) rose—

Stephen Doughty rose—

Chris Leslie: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) first.

Paul Farrelly: Clearly, this Bill has been tabled with great speed following the Supreme Court decision. We are, I understand, not being given that long a time to debate it. Is my hon. Friend certain that, given the complexity of this matter, this Bill is fully compliant with the judgment of the Supreme Court, particularly as the triggering of article 50 is irrevocable?

Chris Leslie: I do not want to stray beyond the precise terms of the motion, which I appreciate is very much about the timing of the tabling of amendments. My hon. Friend may not only bring up that point in debate on Second Reading, but consider addressing it by tabling an amendment to the legislation.

Stephen Doughty: May I help my hon. Friend? The point he makes about the White Paper and its relation to possible amendments is a good one, because Members may wish to table amendments, new clauses and new schedules that relate to issues that they are not happy with in the White Paper, but we have not yet seen that White Paper. There is a very practical concern here, which is that we can table amendments before we have actually had a proper presentation of the facts by the Government—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I make a helpful suggestion? Members should put their names down to speak in the debate on Tuesday, at which point this would all be very relevant, but it is not relevant to what we are debating now.

Chris Leslie: I appreciate that, Madam Deputy Speaker, but this motion today, about the timing of the tabling of amendments, is a symptom of the Government’s strategy and approach to the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate that the House spots that and recognises what is going on. This is the very first step in the compression of this process, where normally Members would have, for very good historic reasons that are long-established by convention, the right to listen to Ministers on Second Reading, reflect on those thoughts and then table amendments. What Ministers are intent on doing is ramming this Bill through the House of Commons without thinking of the consequences. They are giving Members the opportunity to table amendments now before we have even heard Government policy properly on Second Reading—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This really is my last warning to the hon. Gentleman. He is talking about the Bill, which is coming up next week. That is not what we are debating here. This is entirely about the amendments that are being accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a Second time. It is a very, very narrow motion. If he keeps to that, he may continue, but he is really testing my patience.

Chris Leslie: I do appreciate that it is a very narrowly drafted motion. It does indeed say that, in respect of this particular Bill, “notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.” That in itself begs a number of questions. You may have noticed, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a queue has already formed beside your Chair of hon. Members who may wish to table amendments. I understand that if we wish to table amendments at the passing of this motion, we should approach the Table and hand them over to the Clerks. I suspect that there will be a great deal of demand for the Clerks’ time and attention. Indeed, one issue that I wish to raise—perhaps the Minister can respond to this—is to do with the pressure that will be on the Clerks over the coming days because of the demands of Members wanting to table amendments. [Interruption.] There is sympathy, I hear, from my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), who is known for his close affinity with the Clerks and his appreciation of procedure. It is a serious point. The Second Reading debate is on Tuesday and Wednesday, and the Committee stage is the following week, ridiculously gagging Parliament in its ability to scrutinise the legislation properly, given that the Maastricht treaty had 23 days of consideration and the Lisbon treaty had 11 days.

With regard to the motion and the timings for tabling amendments—I hear your entreaties, Madam Deputy Speaker—I would like the Minister to consider whether there are any precedents for this sort of motion, for example when legislation relating to other EU treaty revisions was considered. Did we have this for the Maastricht treaty, the Amsterdam treaty, the Nice treaty or the Single European Act? Does the Minister have something to say about the timing of the White Paper that could inform our ability to table amendments?
[Chris Leslie]

I have managed to scribble down—not on velum, but on the paper available in my office—22 amendments that I think are appropriate for this legislation. Perhaps I have shot myself in the foot by catching your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I have missed my place in the queue that is forming by your Chair to table said amendments; that is the lot that I will have to live with by making these points about the motion.

I would also like to know whether the Procedure Committee has been consulted on the motion, because, as I understand it, this is a highly unusual change. It is not necessarily unwelcome, but it is symptomatic of the Government’s intention to override the procedures and conventions of the House that would normally allow us to reflect on something before tabling amendments.

It is important that Members of the House exercise their right to reflect on the consequences of this legislation. It is one of the most important decisions that we will make, certainly this year, definitely in this Parliament, and perhaps in my time in the House. I think all Members should think about amendments that might be pertinent to the legislation. Yes, the Bill might be narrowly drawn, as some have said—how could we possibly want to amend a Bill that is just one clause long?—but a short sentence can have a vast effect on public policy and on our constituents. It is our duty to think about the amendments that might be relevant and table them when the motion is passed. I hope that all hon. Members will think about their responsibilities.

It looks as though the Clerks are going to have a very busy weekend trying to ensure that the drafting of amendments is in order. Some people say that there are a lot of lawyers in the House—I am not a lawyer, but I know many who are—but we still sometimes need assistance in the phraseology and terminology of amendments.

The Minister should at least do us the courtesy of explaining why he has tabled the motion and set out the fact that this is the beginning of the concertinaing of the parliamentary consideration of the European Union withdrawal Bill. For him not to do so, and simply to stand and say, “I beg to move”, is yet another sign of the Government’s arrogance. Perhaps they have not properly reflected on the judgment of the Supreme Court, which insisted that Parliament has the duty to legislate on these matters and that it is not something for the Crown prerogative. It is for us to amend the Bill and ensure, if we have to table amendments before Second Reading, that we have those particular rights.

Paul Farrelly: I totally agree with my hon. Friend about this very unusual motion. I would simply like to know what precedents there are for this on major or minor legislation. It is entirely unclear to me what the deadline will be for tabling amendments. Presumably, “before the Bill has been read a second time” means that we could hand in our amendments right up to the deadline, but unless they are printed for consideration, how can the House properly consider them?

Chris Leslie: That is a good point. I presume a notice of amendments sheet will be published tomorrow morning, as of course the House is sitting, and then again on Monday, and that it will list the amendments that begin to accrue before we get to Second Reading next week. I wonder whether hon. Members might like a wager on how many amendments we will have on the amendment paper before we even get to Second Reading. It could be a record for the House.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): On the point about the number of amendments, the hon. Gentleman will recall that when the Scotland Act 2016 was debated, there were 147 amendments, but I think only 20 of those were put to a vote, purely because of the system of this Parliament and the time it takes to vote. The public will be looking on, watching the process and wondering how we can have so little time and so little debate on such an important issue.

Chris Leslie: The hon. Lady is correct, of course. People watching the proceedings may say, “This is just a simple measure. What are hon. Members talking about here?” We are talking about one of the most significant policy changes affecting our constituents in a generation. I certainly believe that I would not be doing my job as a Member of Parliament if I did not think about all the consequences that could arise from leaving the European Union. I regard the decision as having been made in the referendum, but it is for this Parliament to enact that and put that legislation into effect. To do so without amendment and without thinking of the consequences and all the ramifications for industry, trade, social policy—you name it, Madam Deputy Speaker—would mean we were not doing our duty. I have much more to say, but I think I would be testing the patience of the House if I were to do so, so I will keep my remarks short and conclude at this point.

4.1 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I will also try to stick to the narrow remit of the motion. At the outset, I say that we welcome the opportunity to table amendments in advance of Second Reading. Whether they are tabled today or on Monday, a substantial number will be tabled. If I do not stretch your patience too far, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I make one small observation on the explanatory notes to the Bill? Paragraph 22 says:

“The Bill is not expected to have any financial implications.”

I suspect that is very far from what will happen.

It is on matters financial that many of the amendments that we wish to table, and will table in advance, will be drafted. The difficulty is, as has already been suggested, that the White Paper that is to accompany the Bill has not yet been published. That brings us to the rather vexed question of how the Clerks, in advance of Second Reading, will deal with amendments as they are tabled. I do not mean to debate the policy by any means, but if I may, I will give just two small examples of why this is profoundly problematic.

We know there is a demand in the financial services sector for financial passporting. We know that there is a demand in many sectors for significant and long transitional arrangements. Unless and until the Clerks know what the White Paper may say about that and whether the Government may indeed have accepted some sense on it, it will be extremely difficult to know the nature of any amendments that may be tabled, notwithstanding the welcome extra time in which to do so.
The Bill is also very narrow. Again, although we welcome the opportunity to table amendments, we need to know what may or may not be in range and acceptable—not just tableable, but selectable and votable. I am sure some colleagues in the House would think it sensible, for example, to try to avoid a £1,000 levy on every EU employee. Although we could table such an amendment, we do not know whether it would be accepted or how the Clerks may choose to deal with such an amendment.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it will be perhaps disadvantageous to the Government if amendments are tabled without knowledge of either the White Paper or what Ministers may say to clarify points raised by hon. Members on Second Reading? We may have a range of amendments tabled that could have been completely averted if the process had been conducted in appropriate order.

Stewart Hosie: The hon. Lady makes a very important point. I want to stick to the process, and the point is precisely that if all the information required were available—notwithstanding the generous additional time—that eventuality could absolutely be avoided. And there is another issue: this motion—do we welcome it—might be seen by the public in the future as problematic, rather than beneficial, for precisely the reasons the hon. Lady suggested.

Stephen Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has raised some very strong points. Does he agree that there is a procedural issue—for those who are not familiar with the proceedings of the House—in that some people may now feel rushed into tabling amendments, because those can now be tabled, rather than taking time to consider them and to craft them in such a way that they might be selectable, votable and, indeed, endorsed on both sides of the House? That is a very real issue, which may affect our ability to debate this subject.

Stewart Hosie: I am not going to reject the opportunity offered by the time to table amendments in advance, but the possibility that amendments will be badly drafted or rushed precisely because of this motion is a very real one. It would not be the first time that, having got to the later stages of legislation, the Government tabled substantial numbers of amendments because the draft legislation and other amendments were not drafted adequately or correctly in the first place.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Now that the Supreme Court has given its judgment and empowered Parliament to take a vote on this issue, is there not an argument for saying that the Government, by pushing this process forward with such haste and not allowing hon. Members to wait to see what is discussed on Second Reading, are holding the Supreme Court judgment in contempt? The judgment is about making sure that Parliament does its job on behalf of the people of all the United Kingdom, and that has been denied by the Government’s sheer and utter haste in driving things through at the pace they are doing.

Stewart Hosie: I think my hon. Friend is fundamentally right. Having the time to table amendments early is welcome, of course, and the Government will rightly argue that this is Parliament deciding. Nevertheless, the consequences are absolutely as my hon. Friend has described, and as was described previously.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman gave the example of the potential £1,000 levy for incoming non-UK EU citizens. Equally, in the absence of information from the Government, we may face amendments on employers who already have employees from other EU countries. I met employers from the London hotel sector yesterday, who are very worried because about 80% of employees in some of their hotels are non-UK EU citizens. We may seek to have amendments on that issue, but in the absence of Government information, that is unclear at this stage.

Stewart Hosie: Indeed. This point is oft repeated, but one could—again, without stretching your patience too much, Madam Deputy Speaker—add the Scottish fish processing sector to the hospitality sector, for precisely the same reason. Given that the Clerks will not, I assume, have had access to the White Paper to identify what may or may not have been accepted by way of clarity or change, that makes these things extremely difficult.

Paul Farrelly: I was just reading the explanatory notes to the Bill, explaining why the fast-tracking is being adopted and therefore we are considering this motion now. The House agreed in December—I did not; I voted against the motion, as the hon. Gentleman did—to authorise the invoking of article 50 by the end of March. But at that stage we did not know what the Supreme Court judgment would be, neither in respect of the role of this House nor in respect of the role of the other legislatures. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, now that circumstances have changed, it is right that the House reconsiders, and that therefore the explanatory reason for the fast-tracking really does not hold water?

Stewart Hosie: I think, on balance, that that is probably correct. The additional time for the amendments is welcome, but the fast-tracking of what is a very small measure, when the Government would appear to have an in-built majority, seems like unnecessary haste, which is intended only to meet arbitrary timetables rather than to allow proper, detailed and timeous scrutiny.

We will not oppose the motion—as I say, the opportunity to table amendments in advance of Second Reading is welcome—but I am sure that no one will be left in any doubt that it is not without some significant and substantial problems.

4.9 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I fully appreciate that this is a very narrow motion, and I also will do my best to stick to the point, but I think the fact that it is so narrow is a point of principle in itself. When the public look on at this process they will want to have confidence in it, and people did not have confidence in the process in the run-up to the EU referendum.

In October 2012, power was conferred from the UK Government to the Scottish Government for Scotland to hold a referendum on Scottish independence, and power is now being conferred, as the Bill says, to the Prime Minister. It strikes me that there are two major
[Hannah Bardell]

differences between the two processes. There is a significant difference between what is happening now and the timescale when power was conferred to the Scottish Parliament before we had our referendum in 2014.

We went through a nearly two-year process of public engagement. We actually wrote things down. We had a White Paper—650 pages of a White Paper. I have it with me—this is what it looks like. The Minister is not paying attention; I wonder whether he read it. For the avoidance of doubt—for him and for any other member of the public—this is what a White Paper looks like. This is what putting blood, sweat and tears, and plans, into your constitutional future looks like—something that this Government have not bothered to do. The people of the United Kingdom deserve better. People in Scotland got the gold standard of referendum. They had a proper consultation process. In the run-up to the referendum in Scotland, over 90% of people registered to vote voluntarily, and over 80%—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Could the hon. Lady mention amendments? She might say, Madam Deputy Speaker, but you know that—

Hannah Bardell: I absolutely take on board what you say, Madam Deputy Speaker, but you know that—

Neil Coyle: The hon. Lady will be very much aware that 16 and 17-year-olds did have a vote in the Scottish referendum. Would she welcome amendments to this Bill to ensure that in future, across the UK, 16 and 17-year-olds are guaranteed a right to vote on any change to constitutional arrangements?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not about any amendments, but a very specific motion. We are not amending the Bill now.

Hannah Bardell: I will seek to close shortly and keep away from the theoretical. However, these are the options that we are left with. I am a Member of Parliament who represents a Scottish constituency, and since we have arrived here we have sought to share the positive and constructive experiences that we had in Scotland during the referendum. Unfortunately, at every turn, on matters such as 16 and 17-year-olds, this Government have sought to ignore them.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): This is a procedural motion. This debate is suddenly taking place, even though the Order Paper says that there would have been no debate if the motion had been moved after 5 pm. Does that not speak to something else we have tried to do since we were elected here, which is to reform the procedures and make them more transparent? There is much that can be learned from the Scottish Parliament experience in that regard.

Hannah Bardell: I could not agree more. That brings me to the crux of my point. Many amendments will be tabled, and the timescale to do that is short. The timescale for debate and for voting will be short.

Ian Blackford: We are discussing amendments to what is euphemistically called a Bill, but in the spirit of respect, this process has to happen within all the nations of this United Kingdom. One has to ask, have the Government, before we get to the stage of considering these amendments, consulted the other legislatures in the United Kingdom? Have the Scottish Government, as part of the whole process of respect, had the opportunity to take part in the debate with this Government before the Bill is debated in this Parliament?

Hannah Bardell: Once again, I find myself agreeing with one of my hon. Friends. The bottom line is that people will be watching this process. I do not think that people had faith in the run-up to the EU referendum. They now are looking on—the whole world is looking on, and our international reputation is at stake. It is so important that our process is seen to be fair.

Kate Green: Does the hon. Lady agree that something of such momentous significance as this type of change to our constitution deserves scrupulous and regularised parliamentary process, and that chopping and changing and playing games with our usual processes on a Bill of this significance will undermine public confidence in this House and its processes?

Hannah Bardell: I could not agree more. Many things have brought down public confidence in politics, and we have an opportunity to change that, but I fear that we are going in the wrong direction.

I finish by quoting Adlai Stevenson, who said: “Public confidence in the integrity of the Government is indispensable to faith in democracy; and when we lose faith in the system, we have lost faith in everything we fight and spend for.” I hope this Government think very carefully about that, and about the process that they are embarking on, and do a decent job.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is unusual to have a debate on this sort of procedural motion, but it is important—it is a matter of principle—for our constituents to understand the processes of this House, given that we are about to embark on the enterprise of debating and amending the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill and of voting on it. It is a matter of generational significance. This is not just any other piece of legislation; it will affect the prospects of people in my constituency, as well as businesses, organisations and people up and down Wales, for many years to come.

It is only right that the public understand the processes of this place, which can often seem labyrinthine. I support the agenda, which the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) just spoke about, of simplifying and straightening out some of our procedures. I wonder whether the Procedure Committee has looked at the matter. I have not seen such a motion before, except perhaps on emergency anti-terrorism legislation or things of that sort. It is an unusual motion.
Although having more time to table amendments is welcome, this is an odd direction for the Government to take. We will not have been through the Second Reading debate, we will not have seen the White Paper, and we will not have been able properly to think through the structure of the amendments, new clauses and new schedules that we might wish to table. We will not have had a chance to consider who we might wish to table them with, or who we might want to ask to support them, to show the confidence of the House. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, those matters have great significance in determining which amendments are selected and which can be voted on.

I went through a frustrating experience recently on a similarly short Bill, the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill, to which I and many others tabled amendments on several important issues. Because of the nature of the debate and the rules set by the usual channels and others, only a certain number of votes could be taken. An amendment that I had tabled, which had cross-party support from the SNP, the Lib Dems, the Greens and others from across the House, was not taken. An amendment that I had tabled, which could be taken. An amendment that I had tabled, which had cross-party support from the SNP, the Lib Dems, the Greens and others from across the House, was not voted on because we were told that there could be only two votes as a consequence of the limitations on time and process.

I was deeply concerned when I heard confirmation in the business statement this morning that there would be only three days of debate on the Bill in Committee. We do not know how much time there will be for debate on Report, or, crucially, what knives will be inserted into the debate.

Paul Farrelly: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a strange day on which to table a motion that effectively starts the exit process? No votes are expected, and therefore most Members—just look around—are back in their constituencies. Many are campaigning in two by-elections. Does he agree that the way in which the motion has been tabled today brings the House into disrepute? It would have been quite easy for the Government to have tabled a similar motion on Monday to give people a week to consider it, and then to start Second Reading the following week? [Interruption.] [J] [B]

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is typical of this Government to table things at the last minute on a Thursday when they think that people have gone home, when nobody is watching and when they expect business to have concluded. It is important that my constituents and the public understand how procedural devices in this House are often used to frustrate debate and discussion, and to frustrate the reasonable scrutiny of Parliament; fundamentally, the Supreme Court has said that such scrutiny is crucial on a matter as important as this. I was disappointed to hear the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons chuntering “time wasting” during my hon. Friend’s intervention. This is about Parliament having a say, and it is about having proper scrutiny and proper process on something so fundamental, which will affect generations to come.

I do not normally like to get into big procedural debates in this place; I normally like to talk about issues of substance. But when we are about to embark on a debate on such an important matter, it is absolutely crucial that we have the most transparent, accessible and open processes for the tabling of amendments, new clauses and new schedules, and for debating and voting on them.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am sure the hon. Gentleman understands that these are exceptional circumstances. The people have agreed through the referendum that they want to leave the European Union, and the Government understand and acknowledge that the people want the process for that to be out by 31 March. As that is the case, the logistical issues in relation to new clauses and amendments must be resolved in a way that allows the will of the people to be heard in this Parliament. We cannot ignore that, and with great respect to the hon. Gentleman and to other hon. Members on the Opposition Benches, the prerogative of Parliament is not to ignore the view of the people but to acknowledge the voice given to them through the referendum.

Stephen Doughty: I do not necessarily disagree with the spirit of what the hon. Gentleman says. I know that he, as an assiduous contributor to debates in this House, including on amendments and parliamentary procedure, would welcome proper scrutiny. Whether or not we agree on the result of the referendum or about how to take the process forward, he would agree with me about the importance of this place, its processes and the way in which we debate such matters.

It is important to understand that the order in which amendments are tabled in this place can significantly affect the ability to speak on them, particularly when the time to debate them is curtailed; it also affects which amendments we can vote on. I would be deeply concerned if we started to see procedural chicanery by the Government—by the Whips and others—and attempts to curtail debate and to prevent the reasonable discussion of matters in this House. [Interruption.] A Government Whip is chuntering already.

We all understand the result of the referendum and we all have different views on it, but we have many concerns about how the process is being undertaken. I believe that the Prime Minister has already shown a great deal of contempt for this House by not turning up to explain herself and answer questions. The Government have been forced into a corner about publishing a White Paper. They now appear to be tinkering with the proceedings of this place, and to be rushing headlong into the process without allowing proper and adequate scrutiny.

I raise these issues not as an attempt to frustrate or stop the process—I will not oppose the motion—but because I want the public, including my constituents, to understand that there are those in the House who often abuse its procedures to prevent reasonable scrutiny and to prevent votes. I would be deeply concerned if that were to continue during the next few weeks. We have already seen a habit formed by this Government and we have already seen their direction of travel, but I sincerely hope it stops right now, so that we can have proper debate and scrutiny.

Paul Farrelly: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Stephen Doughty: I will give way briefly before I sit down.

Paul Farrelly: I have caught my hon. Friend in the nick of time. I certainly hope that my latest intervention is not “time wasting”. Does he agree that it would be a very sad day if the procedures meant that the time provided for debate in this House on such an important decision was less than the time provided in the unelected other place?
Stephen Doughty: I absolutely agree. This comparison has already been made, but I also find it difficult to understand how we can spend less time on this matter than was spent on the Lisbon treaty or the Maastricht treaty, when all sorts of procedural devices were exploited. This is a matter of generational significance, and whatever we feel, whichever way our constituencies voted—to leave or to remain—and whatever our views about the type and nature of the arrangements we will be moving to, it is important that this is done properly, with transparency, care and consideration because my concern is that the decisions we make will last for decades to come.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP) rose—


4.23 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I accept your apology, Madam Deputy Speaker, as always, but you will remember that next time I try to catch your eye, won’t you?

I would be interested to know why the Government have taken this welcome but unusual step with the Bill. It is almost as though we will have more time to table amendments than we will to discuss them. It might be because they know a huge amount of amendments will be tabled, because there is a massive number of specific issues on which Members will want very clear decisions. We only have to think about all the questions that have been asked of the Leader of the House, the Prime Minister and the Brexit Secretary about what will happen to EU nationals in this country, to UK nationals over in the EU, to universities, to farming and fishing, and so on, to see that they might all lead to several different amendments. If, in the haste to get to the cliff edge, only to amend to correct what appear to me to be mistakes in the drafting? The Bill is being rushed through because there is a massive number of specific amendments, what days of the week Bills are debated and so on, to see that they might all lead to several different amendments. If, in the haste to get to the cliff edge, only a tiny percentage of those amendments are voted on, we will end up with bad legislation. For possibly the most important decision that Parliament has taken since the Chamber was rebuilt, we cannot afford bad legislation.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me, as somebody who campaigned fiercely for us to remain in the European Union, that the most important decision was made when the House decided—whether we were wrong or right, given the result—to have a referendum and to be true to the result, whatever it was?

Peter Grant: My recollection of the Act, apart from the fact that it was deeply flawed and that is why we are now in this mess, is that it did not say that Parliament had to abide by the decision. It did not say that the decision was binding. It did not say anything about it. It just said that there would be a referendum. Perhaps the Government need time to draft an amendment to the Bill to make the European Union Referendum Act retrospectively binding.

If the Government intend this Bill to be binding, will they use the additional time that they have given themselves to correct what appear to me to be mistakes in the drafting? The Bill is being rushed through because there is a political—not a legal—imperative for article 50 to be triggered by 31 March, yet it does not require the Prime Minister to do anything by 31 March. It does not require her to do anything—it permits her to do something. Is one of the amendments being cued up now a Government amendment to correct that mistake?

Five days is not enough, although it is more than many Bills get, but the advice in the Government’s summary, which is 15 times longer than the Bill, is that its impact will be both clear and limited. Limited? It is the most important Bill that this House has ever considered. Given that it is so limited, why do the Government need to allow so much additional time for all the amendments—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that he is talking about the Bill, which is different from the motion that we are debating. If he gets back to the tabling of amendments, I would be grateful.

Peter Grant: I was referring not so much to the content of the Bill, but to its extent and limited impact and wondering why we needed so much additional time to table amendments.

I concur with a lot of what has been said. Generally, the public are not interested in procedure, the timing of amendments, what days of the week Bills are debated and so on. This time, it is important because the procedures of the House are clearly being used to get the result that the Government want.

Neil Coyle: Let us not forget that the Government are here today only because the Supreme Court made them follow this procedure. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the two other legal cases that are already under way—one on European economic area membership and one on whether article 50 is retractable—could result in the Government’s requiring new clauses and new schedules?

Peter Grant: I am grateful for that point. It is never a good idea to speculate about court cases here, especially if people have as little legal training as me, but those factors may well come back to haunt the Government in a big way.

The Prime Minister has given herself a political imperative to implement article 50 by 31 March.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle), will my hon. Friend join me in taking the opportunity to thank the democracy campaigners, particularly Gina Miller? Their actions and the interventions of the courts have meant that a Prime Minister who sought to ignore Parliament and treat the powers entrusted to her as an absolute privilege has been brought back into some sort of line. The campaigners’ contribution will have long-lasting effects on this issue and others.

Peter Grant: I concur with my hon. Friend’s comments. It is in extremely bad taste for anyone to bad-mouth the motivation of someone who has just won a court case. Someone who has won a case in the High Court and the Supreme Court was by definition right to bring it. The treatment that Gina Miller got after the High Court case was utterly shameful and I hope that there will be no repetition of it.
To come back to the matter in hand, I would like the Government to explain why they have taken this unusual procedural step today. Why is the Bill, possibly the shortest Bill we will consider during the Session, expected to attract so many amendments that the Clerks need extra time to collect them all?

Stephen Doughty rose—

Peter Grant: I will not take any more interventions because I want to hear what the Minister has to say in the half-hour or so that is left.

4.30 pm

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): I am grateful to be called to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. I commend your patience, but sadly I think this will not be the end of the need for patience on the part of those who sit in that august Chair. We are discussing a motion to allow extra time for tabling amendments and new clauses, which I will be glad to support—we are certainly discussing the business of the house, not the content of next week’s Bill and debate. The charge is that the Government have begun, very consciously, to politicise the procedures and business of the House. That is why, now we have a little time, we have to hold the Government to account for that politicisation of the business of the House.

Stephen Doughty: The hon. Gentleman is making a strong point. I wonder whether, like me, he has noticed the Government Chief Whip and other Whips scuttling back and forth, which suggests that they are worried about this place having its say on motions and procedures. Throughout the process, the Government have presumed that they can do whatever they like without reference back to this Parliament.

George Kerevan: I take that point. I am not saying this to chide the Government, but I am trying to bring out into the open in this Chamber what we all know: the Government have been introducing a new parliamentary convention that flows on from the fact that we had a referendum that went against the Government. In panic and shock, the Government, whose Back Benchers are divided, decided on a new convention, which was to use the Crown prerogative to ram through whatever they wanted, based on the decision for Brexit in the referendum. That is in stark contrast to the whole history of this Chamber.

Neil Coyle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

George Kerevan: I want to make a few points; we are running out of time and we want to hear the Minister.

I want to say clearly that in a panic the Government chose to attempt to use the royal prerogative, but that has been struck down this week by the Supreme Court in a momentous and historic decision. One would have thought that in the light of that, the Government would have more regard to the procedures of the House and how its business is formulated, to give the House a proper say in the historic decision on Brexit. Did the Government learn that lesson? No, they came back with a one-line Bill to be fast-tracked. That is why, in the Government’s attempt to make some amends, we are discussing a way of getting some extra time, over the weekend, to draft amendments and new clauses to go with that fast-track procedure.

Hon. Members have every right to worry that the Government still have not got the point that we are now to have proper parliamentary scrutiny, including control over how the debate is conducted in the House. To underline that, let us look at what the explanatory notes say about the need for fast-tracking. First, we are told that there was an “unexpected” step in the process required by the Supreme Court. It is no fault of this House that the Government do not understand what is happening in the real world. It is no fault of Members on either side of the House if the Government were caught by surprise—the rest of us were not—and it is not an excuse for fast-tracking.

The second explanation for the fast-tracking is that this step “would cause considerable delay to commencing the formal exit process”, but the triggering of article 50 by the end of March is a random, arbitrary decision by the Government. That is not this House’s decision. The Executive are saying we have to fast-track the Bill because they have decided when they want to do it by. If that becomes a principle of how we do business—if the Government can say, “We want to do something next week, so we are going to fast-track everything”—it will be an abrogation of democracy, and we cannot have that.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): It strikes me that the need for this fast-track process and the lack of parliamentary scrutiny shows up the fact that the Government are aware that their case is not strong or water tight and that it would be very easy for Members across the House to pick holes in it—because there are so many holes.

George Kerevan: Indeed, I fear that that might be the case, but actually the Government have nothing to fear from democracy. If the people of England and Wales have voted to leave the EU, that is up to them—I will not oppose that—but the people of Scotland have voted to remain, and that is what we will do.

The Government are politicising the procedures of the House. We have been here before—I say that humbly to the Chair, because it is why this is a major issue. We saw it in the 1880s and 1890s, when the then Government thwarted the legitimate desire for Home Rule in Ireland, and that led to major debates in Parliament that became focused through the procedures of this Parliament. Again in the 1970s, when devolution was first being discussed for Scotland, it became intertwined with major issues around the business of the House. In both cases, that happened largely because the Executive set their face against Parliament having a proper democratic discussion.

In the end, the business will go through this afternoon, but unless the Government learn this basic lesson—that every time they try to thwart democratic discussion in the House, Members will face them down—and open up the debate, we will be in for an awful lot of procedural discussion over the next year.

4.37 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): The motion before the House has one purpose, as set out in its own terms—to suspend the normal rule that amendments may be tabled by hon. Members only
once Second Reading has been achieved. The Government’s motive in tabling the motion is to make it easier for hon. Members on both sides of the House to consider and then table any amendment they wish. If they choose not to avail themselves of that opportunity, either by blocking the motion or through simply waiting until the end of Second Reading, they are perfectly entitled to take that course of action. We are not, through the motion, limiting the continued right of hon. Members to table additional amendments once Second Reading has been completed, in line with the normal procedures of the House.

As hon. Members have said, the Government are seeking to respond to the unusual fact that we are proceeding with the article 50 Bill through expedited process. In my time here, this process has been used by Governments of all political colours, often in response to High Court or Supreme Court decisions that have interpreted the law differently from how the law had previously been assumed to stand. It is usual for the Government to move this kind of motion when such an expedited process is applied. Our purpose in using the process is to enable us to comply promptly with the judgment of the Supreme Court, while also respecting the vote of this House that the Prime Minister should trigger the article 50 process by the end of March this year. The aim is to ensure that we can comply both with the ruling of the Supreme Court and with the clear and overwhelming view expressed in a vote in the House of Commons.

I am afraid that the speeches that we have heard this afternoon are indicative of the shambolic state of some of the arguments being presented by Opposition Members. I am disappointed that there seems to be an obsession with debating the process of each and every stage, rather than focusing on what are the key objectives in a negotiation which will deliver the best deal for people in every part of the United Kingdom following the outcome of the United Kingdom referendum last year. That is what is at the forefront of the Government’s mind, and that, I submit, is what is in the minds of our constituents who send us here, rather than the detail of perhaps unusual and arcane procedure.

We accepted the judges’ ruling on the steps of the Supreme Court, and we immediately complied with that ruling by introducing a Bill. Opposition Members have nothing whatever to complain about. The Government could not have been more prompt, efficient or responsible in complying with that Supreme Court judgment.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That, in respect of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

4.41 pm

House adjourned.
House of Commons

Friday 27 January 2017

The House met at half-past Nine o’clock

PRAYERS

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means took the Chair as Deputy Speaker (Standing Order No. 3).

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163), and negatived.

Homelessness Reduction Bill


Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

DUTY TO UNDERTAKE A REVIEW OF THE ACT

The Secretary of State must undertake a review of this Act, including its impact on reducing homelessness and on local authority finances. Such review must start no earlier than the first anniversary of the commencement of the Act and no later than the second anniversary. It must consider, in particular, whether the funding for the provisions in this Act is adequate and whether additional monies should be provided.”—(Andy Slaughter.)

This new clause requires the Secretary of State to undertake a review of this Act, in terms of its impact and its funding, no earlier than the first anniversary of the commencement of the Act and no later than the second anniversary.

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.34 am

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—Restriction on the termination of assured shorthold tenancies—


“Section 19B long term tenancies

Any assured shorthold tenancy (other than one where the landlord is a private registered provider of social housing) granted on or after April 1, 2018 cannot be terminated by the landlord within thirty six months of being granted other than for the breach of a an express or implied term of the tenancy if the termination would result in the tenant becoming homeless. It is an implied term of such a tenancy that the tenant may terminate the tenancy by giving two months’ written notice to the landlord.”

(2) In Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 (Recovery of possession on expiry or termination of assured shorthold tenancy) insert—

“(4ZAA) In the case of a dwelling-house in England no notice under subsection (4) may be given for thirty six months after the beginning of the tenancy.”

The new clause is an amendment to section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 which would prevent landlords from using the “notice only” grounds for possession for the first three years of the tenancy by private sector landlords where the tenant would become homeless.

New clause 3—Controls on rent increases within a tenancy—

‘(1) After section 23 of the Housing Act 1988 insert—

“Section 23A: rent increase

(1) This section applies to any assured shorthold tenancy granted on or after 1 April 2018 in respect of any property in England other than one granted by a private registered provider of social housing.

(2) It is an implied term of all such tenancies that the rent may only increase in any year on the anniversary of the commencement of the tenancy and that the rent may increase by no more than the percentage specified by the Office for National Statistics as the Consumer Prices Index figure for the month immediately preceding the proposed increase if there is a significant risk that that tenant would become homeless.

(3) Any term of the tenancy (or any other agreement, whether between the landlord and tenant or any third party) which is inconsistent with subsection (2) is of no effect.

(4) The landlord must serve written notice of the new rent on the tenant and any other party who is responsible for the payment of the rent.

(5) The notice must be in a prescribed form (or substantially to the same effect) and must specify—

(a) the present rent;
(b) the percentage increase proposed; and
(c) the proposed new rent, together with any other matters or information which may be prescribed.

(6) A person served with such a notice may, within 28 days of being so served, refer it to the appropriate tribunal for a determination as to the validity of the notice and, if necessary, to examine the risk of the tenant becoming homeless.

(7) Should a court or tribunal in any proceedings find that the landlord has received rent in excess of that permitted by this section, it must either—

(a) order that the excess rent be repaid to the tenant (including to any former tenant if the tenancy has come to an end),
(b) order that it stands to the credit of the tenant in respect of future rent which will fall due; or,
(c) set it off against other sums which the tenant owes to the landlord under the tenancy.

(8) The Secretary of State has power to prescribe a form for the purposes of this section and may make different provision for Greater London and the rest of England. The power must be exercised within a reasonable period and, in relation to Greater London if the Mayor of London makes a written request that it be exercised and provides a draft form, must be in the form proposed by the Mayor.

(9) The Secretary of State has power to modify subsection (2) by order and may make different provision for Greater London and the rest of England. Any modification is limited to substituting an increase which is lower than the Consumer Prices Index. That power must be exercised within a reasonable period and, in relation to Greater London if the Mayor of London makes a written request that it be exercised and specifies a particular substitution, must be the substitution specified by the Mayor.

(10) In this section—

“Greater London” shall have the same meaning as in the London Government Act 1963 (c.33)

“Mayor of London” shall have the same meaning as in the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (s.29)”
This new clause concerns rent increases. It provides that it is an implied term of all assured shorthold tenancies granted on or after 1 April 2018, that the rent can only go up once a year and by no more than CPI if there is a significant risk of the tenant as a result of the increase becoming homeless. It requires a notice to be given to the tenant, giving them details of the increase and for a right to appeal that notice to the First Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber). The Secretary of State has a power to prescribe a lower increase and must do so in respect of London if the Mayor of London requests it.

Andy Slaughter: It is a pleasure to open today’s proceedings on this important Bill that, if passed, will mark a sea change in the way in which homelessness is treated in this country. This is a rare creature—a private Member’s Bill with a hope of success. I should not tempt fate this early in proceedings, but I cannot see the usual suspects sitting behind the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), the promoter of the Bill, so I am already encouraged.

I think that the Bill has support from all parties. Importantly it has the support of the Government; otherwise, I suspect that we would not have got this far. We should not forget the good work that the Communities and Local Government Committee and its Chair have done in support of the Bill. I also pay tribute to the promoter of the Bill, who now knows more about the intricacies of homelessness law than he perhaps ever wanted to.

There are matters still to be resolved but—and I say this advisedly—I hope that, as far as this House is concerned, they can all be resolved this morning. For my part, I do not intend to go on at length. Although certain important matters need to be covered, I hope that in the time we have available today, the Bill will be able to complete all its stages.

Let me be clear from the outset that I do not intend to press new clauses 2 and 3 to a Division. I am hopeful that when the Minister speaks, I will hear words that will encourage me not to press new clause 1. One interesting feature of the Bill has been that we have had constructive discussions about it—outside the Committee, of course: not in it, as that would not be at all appropriate. My last email to the Minister was sent at about 11 pm last night. I appreciate that that might have been past his bedtime and he has not had time to respond, but we are getting where we want to go.

New clause 1 deals with perhaps the central unresolved issue, which relates not to the content of the Bill—we will come to that when we consider the Government’s amendments—but to its implementation and, in particular, whether the resources that the Government have set aside are sufficient. New clauses 2 and 3 are also important because they address what stands behind the Bill—the fact that legislation of itself will not tackle the homelessness crisis. To be fair to the promoter of the Bill, he has at all stages said that that is the case, and he repeated it in his article that has been published on PoliticsHome.com this morning. I appreciate that, but we cannot look at the Bill in a vacuum; we have to look at the surrounding circumstances. Nothing illustrates that better than the figures on rough sleeping that were released two days ago, which revealed a shocking 16% increase year on year. More than 4,000 people are now sleeping rough on the streets of the UK. One rough sleeper is one too many, and what should alarm the House in particular is the fact this is a crisis that does not need to exist.

Under the previous Labour Government, rough sleeping fell by three quarters, because of direct Government intervention and co-ordination with not only local authorities, but the many fine homelessness charities, which also stand behind the Bill. This crisis is solvable, but the fact that street homelessness has gone up by more than 130% since 2010—under the coalition Government and now under this Government—really should shame the Government. We are here to pass an important Bill, but that does not get them off the hook.

I must strike one small note of discord: we do not want this to become a battle about who is more in favour of the Bill. The promoter’s article mentioned the danger of the Bill being delayed because of our new clauses. There must be a lot of confused pots and kettles out there, given that the Government have tabled 21 complicated amendments that no one would wish to consider on Report—they should have been taken in Committee. I am hopeful that we can deal with them, but the point is that it is not unreasonable or irrational for the Opposition to take a little time to debate important principles.

In Committee, Government Members spoke for two and a half times as long as Opposition Members. I realise that there were one or two more of them, unfortunately—

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy Slaughter: In a moment.

We all—even I—must sometimes curb our prolixity, and we were very disciplined in Committee. We withdrew many new clauses and amendments before the Christmas break to speed the passage of the Bill. Even though my colleagues in Committee had huge expertise and a lot to say, we were very disciplined. I wish that I could say the same for the Minister and Government Back Benchers, including the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson).

Michael Tomlinson: It was a great pleasure to serve in Committee with the hon. Gentleman. I am delighted to hear that he is still in favour of the Bill and that it still attracts cross-party support. Today he can rely on my discipline and, I am sure, that of all colleagues to ensure that the Bill goes through.

Andy Slaughter: Excellent. I am sure that those rousing words will be followed by action. That might even be the last we hear from the hon. Gentleman today.

I do not want to labour the point, but we should have been able to get through the Bill in less time, notwithstanding the fact that it is an important and, for a private Member’s Bill, quite long Bill. It is considerably longer than the Bill that we will debate next week, although I suspect our consideration of that one will take rather longer.

It is regrettable that this Bill spent so long in Committee, but we know why it did: the Government were filibustering in order to keep the parliamentary boundaries Bill, which is promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass), out of Committee. I am not saying that we do not all play these tricks from time to time; I am just saying that we should not start pointing the finger over who is to blame for delaying the Bill, and instead get on with this now.
I want to deal with the point about money. Right at the beginning of our Committee stage, the Minister said, “I hope to tell you before the end of Committee how much money there will be.” The Government gave a welcome commitment to fund the additional costs fully—there will be substantial additional costs on local authorities, and under the new burdens doctrine, the money has to come from central Government—but we waited week after week with bated breath to find out what money there would be. He kept his promise—just—and at the last moment, some money came forward. It was not a negligible sum: about £48 million over two years. However, that amount must be compared with the sensible estimates from individual local authorities and their collective bodies, such as the Local Government Association and London Councils. For example, while £37 million or £38 million has been set aside for the first year of the Bill’s implementation, London Councils estimates that the cost will be about £160 million. There is therefore a massive disparity in the figures.

9.45 am

The Bill takes us into new territory, and no one really knows what the full cost will be, so the solution lighted upon is to have an early review of whether the amounts allocated for those two years are sufficient and—perhaps more controversially—of the truth of the Government’s assertion that no additional funding will be necessary after two years because the Bill will be self-financing. There is huge scepticism about that.

I disagree with another thing the promoter said in his article. He said that there was no support for our new clauses, but there is total support for them. There is, however, an issue about timing and ensuring that the Bill completes its stages here and in the other place. The scepticism about the financing of the Bill is shared not just by local government, but by the charities that support the Bill.

It is only fair, reasonable and right that local government is properly funded, as the new burdens doctrine says, but the crucial point is that if there is not enough money, the Bill will not work—it will simply be words on a piece of paper. If that is the case, we will not see the necessary sea change in how we address homelessness or, in particular, the extension of duties around prevention and cure, which apply to those in priority need, to single homeless people and everybody else who presents as homeless. If we are sincere about the Bill, that is what we should all want.

New clause 1 would simply set out in the Bill that the review must be held. It provides that, following the Bill’s implementation, we must judge whether there is sufficient money—the Government say there is; everybody else says there is not—for the purposes set out in it. The Minister has raised one or two procedural points about when the Bill’s provisions will take effect and the appropriate time for a review. I am open to debating those matters but, on the principle of the review, I hope to hear him say that it must take place in a reasonable time while money is still available to local authorities, and, in particular, that it will cover not just whether the Bill is succeeding, but whether the money available is sufficient to cover the full costs. I suspect that all Members on both sides of the House would want that, because they will not want their local authorities to be the ones that fail. Against a background of local authorities experiencing cuts to their budgets of 40% or 50% over the past few years, it would not just be unfair to expect local authorities to cover those substantial costs; it would be impossible for them to do so.

The Minister says that, apart from clause 13, the substantive clauses in the Bill will not take effect until regulations have passed—I appreciate that. Indeed, that is entirely reasonable, given that local authorities will need a substantial period in which to gear up to their new responsibilities, as they will need to recruit and train staff, and to put procedures in place. As is often the case, however, the devil will be in the detail of the guidance. The Minister can speak for himself, but I think that his view is that full implementation could take up to a year.

Clearly, until it is implemented, we do not know what the costs are likely to be. It is a question of what is a reasonable period, and new clause 1 suggests that a reasonable period is between one and two years. I propose that we should go to the end of the two-year period, but that we should also ensure that we are then in a position to establish whether the money has been sufficient, because that is when the money will run out.

There is a slight disconnect between the funding announcement in last week’s written statement, which dealt with the financial years 2017-18 and 2018-19, and what the Minister is now saying, which is that the Bill is unlikely to be implemented until 2018. Either the Government are giving local authorities money upfront, which would be slightly unusual in my experience, or that needs to be corrected. In any event, it is clear that there is only two years’ worth of money, that the money may be insufficient, and that at the end of that two-year period it will run out.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Newham Council has looked into the cost of implementation, and thinks that it will be £2.5 million in the first year alone. I am delighted that the Bill has been introduced, but does my hon. Friend honestly believe that the Government will fully compensate councils for the money that they will need to spend?

Andy Slaughter: I am one of nature’s optimists. The Minister is such a reasonable fellow, and so kind-hearted, that I am sure that if he says he wishes to provide the full amount, he means it. Unfortunately, however, the record of the Government as a whole is not one of being particularly kind-hearted, particularly to local government. They have a habit of passing the buck by cutting the budget of the Department for Communities and Local Government, as is clear from the fact that local government cuts have been the biggest of all.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) is absolutely right to be sceptical. That is indeed what we want to hear. There are many figures floating around, but Newham Council knows what it is talking about, because it has one of the most pressing housing needs in the country, some of the poorest communities in the country, and, I am afraid, some of the worst housing in the country, especially in the private rented sector.

These are matters of real concern. All we are asking for is a commitment from the Minister not just to a review, but to a review that will be undertaken at the right time and will be all-encompassing. As I said
earlier, the Select Committee has played a key role—its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), is an acknowledged expert, and he has also benefited from the able assistance of Members on both sides—and it, as well as local authorities themselves, should be involved in any review process.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Enfield, like Newham, contains some of the poorest people in the country with the greatest housing need, and obviously we want the Bill to be implemented, but good councils throughout the country are already embarking on the prevention measures specified in the Bill under the current funding settlement, and will welcome the provision of more money to enable them to continue those measures.

Andy Slaughter: I think the best thing to say is that there is a mixed economy among local authorities. Some do very well—some have to do very well because of the pressures on them—and others do less well. Part of the Bill’s purpose is to bring them all up to the same standard. However, the hon. Gentleman’s point cuts both ways. If it is true that Camden Council, for example, is already preventing 80% of those who present themselves from becoming homeless, the savings that are likely to be made—most of which, I understand, will result from an increase in prevention work, which will avoid the need to find alternative accommodation or fund the costs of homelessness in other ways—will be less. The Government rather piously hope that after two years there will be no need for funding, but I do not think anyone believes that, including the Government.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): This is not just a problem in London. In 2015-16, there were more than 1,000 homelessness prevention and relief cases in Wirral as a result of the council’s actions. Does my hon. Friend agree that any new duties that councils will have to take on should be fully funded, both now and in the future?

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. However, the problem is clearly greater in some areas than in others. The precedent for the Bill is legislation passed by the Labour-run Government of Wales, which has already been successful: there have been substantial falls in homelessness. Of course there are parts of Wales where there is a real crisis, as there are in the rest of the United Kingdom, but there are also hotspots, and the big cities, particularly London, are hotspots.

We cannot rely on the example of Wales. It is still possible in many Welsh authorities for accommodation to be made available to people including those who are not in priority need. In London boroughs—and, I suspect, in my hon. Friend’s constituency and many others—that opportunity disappeared years ago, and the reverse is now the case. We spent some time in Committee talking about the disgraceful attitude of Westminster Council, which is sending its homeless people quite literally to Coventry, and I fear that other boroughs are doing exactly the same. That is the difficulty with which we are grappling.

I am not going to labour the point. We want assurances, which we believe new clause 1 would deliver, that the full funding of the Bill’s implementation by local authorities for which my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) has rightly asked will be provided. Yes, the Government have made a start, and, yes, I think that we shall hear more about money today, given that some of the Government amendments will involve additional costs. We are pleased with what has been done so far, but we must have that funding, because otherwise the Bill will fail, and local authorities will be in an even more parlous state.

Let me now deal briefly with new clauses 2 and 3. We could have tabled a great many more new clauses illustrating the same point, which is that the Bill’s provisions cannot be seen in a vacuum. We all welcome the greater concentration on prevention to which the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrows) referred, and we also welcome the new relief duties requiring local authorities to assist homeless people who are not in priority need. However, the pattern of homelessness is utterly bleak, and that is a perfect storm which, I am afraid, derives from the Government’s own actions or inactions.

The first problem, as the new clauses make clear, is the crisis in the private rented sector. The huge inflation in rents over the past few years has meant that many private landlords take advantage of the “no fault” eviction process for which the Housing Act 1988 provides. They say to people, “You are on benefit, and I can get a higher rent from someone else”, or they simply say, “I want a different tenant and I do not have to give any reason, so off you go.” Provided that the payments are in order, the consequence of that swift process, with no argument to the contrary, is that many thousands of people present themselves to local authorities as homeless. I believe that more than 40% of homelessness cases are caused by private sector evictions, with all the misery that they bring.

Again, however, the problem is not insoluble. The inclusion of new clauses 2 and 3 would make a significant difference. This is a modest proposal. I am suggesting that if there were longer tenancies—three-year tenancies—and if, within the period of those tenancies, there were controls over the levels of rent increases, we would end the present chaotic market in evictions in which landlords bid against each other.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for highlighting this point. I will pass over the typo in line four of his new clause 2 and simply ask: does he remember from the Bill Committee that the average length of tenancies was in fact four years, yet in his new clause 2 he refers merely to three years? Does he not accept that there also needs to be a balance, to encourage sufficient landlords?

10 am

Andy Slaughter: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman does when he is not passing over typos, but I am afraid his argument works both ways. If, as the Residential Landlords Association says—this is, I think, the point the hon. Gentleman is making—tenancies are already on average longer than three years, what is the problem with ensuring that that is the case? Good practice suggests that a good landlord wants to keep a tenant for a period of time; that gives stability and continuity; and there are no breaks in tenancy and no additional fees involved. But not all landlords are good landlords, and some are playing this lottery game where they think they can get more money. Unfortunately, we have even
had the spectacle of local authorities outbidding each other for tenancies, so desperate are they in this regard. All the hon. Gentleman’s intervention illustrates is how modestly and reasonably this proposal is. When the Minister replies, he might want to say what the Government’s thinking on this matter is at the moment.

This is an issue in itself. It is not just an issue about homelessness, but these specific new clauses relate to the risk of homelessness and state that we would achieve the purposes of this Bill—put less pressure on local authorities, and have less need to prevent homelessness—if some landlords were not acting in the manner that they are. That is the purpose of the new clauses. I think they are quite reasonable. I appreciate that, given the time constraints, unless the Government suddenly decide to accept them this morning, it is unlikely that we are going to make progress on them in the course of this Bill, but we will return to this subject time and again until it is resolved.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): There is an extremely high rate of homelessness in Tooting among those aged over 60. I know that Wandsworth Council battles with this greatly day in, day out. Do you agree that it is absolutely unacceptable that we are failing the older members of our society, and that people over 60 need to be taken into account?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Just for good order, would the hon. Lady mind asking the hon. Gentleman to agree, rather than asking the Chair? She should ask whether he agrees, because she does not care whether I agree or not.

Dr Allin-Khan: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely outrageous that residents aged 60 and over have to suffer in this way and that he must do all he can to ensure the Government address this issue?

Andy Slaughter: Absolutely, and I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, also care about homelessness in Tooting. What my hon. Friend illustrates is how deep this goes in society now that we are in new territory. Even though there were big problems, particularly in the private rented sector, 20 or 30 years ago, I doubt that we would then have been talking about homelessness among people of pensionable age. It illustrates how deep this goes in society now that we are worried not just about groups that were at risk in the days of “Cathy Come Home”, but about people who are at a time in their life when they deserve, and should have, stability and security.

I am not keeping to my promise, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I will conclude now, but let me just say this. Yes, new clauses 2 and 3 illustrate a clear point, but this is only part of the problem. Alongside that is the issue of housing supply and the terrible record, I am afraid to say, that this Government have on genuinely affordable housing, on allowing councils to build and ensuring that there is specialist housing.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy Slaughter: Can the Minister not make the point in his own comments? [Interruption.] Very well, I will give way if he wants to intervene.

Mr Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his forbearance in taking my intervention. Does he not welcome the record amount of £3.15 billion that this Government are providing to the Greater London Authority to provide affordable housing in London, which has been welcomed by the London Mayor?

Andy Slaughter: As the shadow London Minister, I welcome everything the London Mayor welcomes. I do not want us to go off on a tangent, but I will just say that we were beginning to make progress; we were beginning to make progress towards the end of the last Labour Government, and the best illustration of that is that under the coalition Government eight out of 10 council homes completed were started under the previous Labour Government. I do not mind the Minister taking credit and talking about the building of additional affordable and social homes, but his Government need to have their own record, not leach off ours.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andy Slaughter: For the last time, I will.

Ms Buck: I am extremely grateful. While we are on this topic, is my hon. Friend also aware that the Chartered Institute of Housing estimates that 250,000 social homes will be lost as a result of right to buy and other measures between now and 2020, so whatever assurances the Government are giving us about the construction of new affordable housing, they are the equivalent of turning on the taps while leaving the plug out?

Andy Slaughter: Absolutely, and when I mentioned the quality of members on the Committee from my side, I was of course particularly thinking of my hon. Friend—as well as the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East, and my other hon. Friend on the Committee. I am afraid that they put my feeble efforts to shame, but there it is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) is absolutely right. We have a crisis in housing supply, we have a crisis in the private rented sector, and we also have—which the Government are directly responsible for through the benefit caps, the freezing of local housing allowance, and the cuts in Supporting People—a manufactured homelessness crisis which we are now seeing reflected in the figures I quoted earlier.

I pay tribute to the Minister for the work he has done on this Bill, as well as to the sponsor, the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), and the sincere comments made by Conservative Back Benchers during the course of this Bill, but they cannot put their heads in the sand and look at this Bill in isolation from everything else that is happening—and when they have looked at that, they have to change their policy. I am sure we are going to get the housing White Paper, possibly even this year, but when it comes, we will be looking for those matters to be dealt with, and that is the purpose of these new clauses. Their purpose is to make sure that this Bill functions and that Government policy as a whole functions in relation to homelessness. That is why I would like to hear from the Minister, if not warm support and acceptance of the new clauses, at least what he intends to do in relation to them.
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, as always, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). Before I start, may I draw the House’s attention to my entry in the register of Members’ interests?

We should get back to the fact that this Bill is about reducing homelessness and is entitled the Homelessness Reduction Bill. At some stages during the hon. Gentleman’s rather lengthy speech, I began to wonder whether we were moving on to the whole policy of housing. I think we should confine ourselves to this Bill, rather than broadening out to the wider aspects. I accept absolutely that one person sleeping rough on our streets at any one time is a disgrace; I have regularly gone on record to say that that is a national disgrace, as, equally, is the fact that we do not know the exact level of homelessness in this country. I start from that principle.

It is of course fair to say that the level of rough sleeping has increased. It is also fair to say that the level of homelessness has increased. However, as the hon. Gentleman will know well, the level of homelessness in this country peaked in 2002-03, when I suspect another party was in government. There was a reduction, which took place as a result of both Government intervention and local authorities taking appropriate action, but, actually, no change in legislation; we should remember that, effectively, legislation on this subject has not changed for 40 years. So we must get back to that particular issue.

Hopefully, we will have more details about the Bill by the time we get to Third Reading, but I will just gently mention that we spent some 15 hours in Committee debating the 13 clauses in this Bill. There were opportunities for amendments. The hon. Gentleman did table amendments, but then withdrew them before we could even debate them. The difference between the amendments that my hon. Friend the Minister will move later and the proposals from the hon. Gentleman is that the Government amendments are a direct consequence of the discussions that we had in Committee. They are designed to improve the Bill and to achieve the outcomes of discussions with housing charities, local government representative bodies, local government generally and the landlords associations. There is therefore a marked difference between those amendments—I accept that there are 21 of them—and the hon. Gentleman’s proposals.

I commend my hon. Friends across the House who served on the Bill Committee for their service. They will be aware that, at the last sitting, the Government made a firm commitment to reviewing the Bill at an appropriate point after implementation. I suggest to the Minister that it would be helpful if he were to repeat that commitment today and to clarify it further, so that no one can be in any doubt of the Government’s willingness to accept the fact that, as we have funding of £48 million over two years—I thank the Minister for that—we hope that that will lead to the provision of all the funding that local authorities will need to carry out their duties under the Bill, which we hope will become an Act in the not too distant future.

As I have said, however, we do not know what level of demand local authorities will experience as a result of the new burdens they will face. We do know that many local authorities are already accepting a prevention duty, and the funding will clearly be welcome to those authorities that are acting in a good and positive way. We could look at the stats from every local authority to see how many people are turning up for help, but we also know that the vast majority of single homeless people will be turned away by their local authority without any help or advice. Now, because of the massive change in the law and in the culture of local authorities, the numbers of people are likely to increase, especially during the first year.

Mr Burrowes: We also know that the Government are wholeheartedly committed to fulfilling the responsibilities outlined in the Bill, including the financial responsibility to provide funding of £48 million. If, beyond the current spending round, additional finances were needed in order to fulfil the duties in the Bill, having taken account of savings, does my hon. Friend agree that wholehearted commitment should continue and that we would expect the money to be available for that?

Bob Blackman: I think the whole House would expect the Government to recognise that there will be extra cost pressures on local authorities and, given the commitment that they have made, to continue to fund these measures in the years to come.

One of the problems with new clause 1 is that it proposes a review after a fixed period of time, and then that would be it. That is not an acceptable way forward. I want the Government to keep this matter continually under review, and I am sure that the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee and the rest of its members, who are joint sponsors of the Bill, will ensure that the Minister—or whoever is the Minister at the time—continues to have their feet held to the fire.

Michael Tomlinson: Long may he reign.

Bob Blackman: Indeed, but this Minister cannot commit his successor to maintaining a particular position. However, we on the Select Committee will keep this matter under review. We will scrutinise the level of activity and the funding that follows.

10.15 am

The hon. Member for Hammersmith pointed out that a whole range of activities will be carried out by local authorities, many of which will result in additional funds being raised and costs being reduced. One of the stats from London Councils shows that, in 2014-15, the total expenditure on temporary accommodation was £611 million. Reducing that figure by just 5% would pay for the cost of the Bill. One problem is that, because local authorities are not yet implementing their prevention duties early enough, families and other people in crisis end up in temporary accommodation at the last minute, which is very expensive. If we can reduce that expenditure just marginally—5% is not a huge amount—it would pay for the cost of the Bill. If councils across the country can achieve their prevention duty, that would prevent anyone from becoming homeless at all, and the cost reduction to local authorities would be enormous. I accept that there will be a peak in the first year; we should all understand that.

The Bill Committee and, prior to that, the Select Committee spent some considerable time discussing how long it would take for councils to prepare for the extra duties that the Bill will require of them. Obviously,
they will need to recruit and train staff. They will also need to completely change the culture that exists within housing departments. Because of that, the Bill has been drafted to allow the substantive clauses to be commenced only when those preparations have been completed. New clause 1, as drafted, would provide a commitment to review the Act before we had the necessary data and before some of its provisions had even commenced. I am sure that that is not what the hon. Member for Hammersmith intended, and on that basis, I urge him to reconsider his new clause. I trust that we are going to get a commitment from the Minister on reviews, and we will hold him to account if that is not the case. However, I am sure that we will get such a commitment later this morning.

Turning to new clauses 2 and 3, I commend the hon. Member for Hammersmith for his ingenuity in getting them into the scope of the Bill. They relate to the operation of the private rented sector, rather than to the homelessness duty of local housing authorities, and the Minister will no doubt respond to them in detail. I would point out, however, that we intervene in markets at our peril, often with unintended consequences. I want to direct the House’s attention to some of these problems in the market right now. I am a great supporter of longer tenancies, and the Communities and Local Government Committee has regularly campaigned for such tenancies. One problem in the market is that mortgage lenders are very reluctant indeed to offer mortgages to landlords who offer tenancies of longer than six months. I understand that some mortgage lenders have recently relaxed their rules on that, to allow for 12-month tenancies. That is a welcome move, and I hope that the Committee will look at that with a view to encouraging the process. However, to have such a provision in the Bill would run the risk of reducing the supply of private rented sector accommodation and of putting up the rents of the people we are trying to help. These proposals would therefore be completely counterproductive.

Another issue is that mortgage lenders are now insisting on deposits of between 25% and 40% from landlords, and then insisting that the rent level is at least 1.4 times the amount of the mortgage repayment. The reality is that lenders are forcing up the rents of private sector landlords. That does not make sense and Government policy must intervene. Rent controls have been tried, but they have failed. If rent controls are imposed, rents are artificially forced up to start with, the market becomes overburdened with red tape and the supply of rented housing goes down. The consequence of that is more homelessness, not a reduction.

The new clauses would lead to more homelessness, not a solution. I urge the hon. Member for Hammersmith to withdraw the motion—although the new clauses clearly relate to a policy matter that should be debated. I have made it plain from the beginning that my Bill will not actually increase the supply of housing—the number of units—in this country, but that is a matter for the Government and something that needs to be achieved. However, my Bill will ensure that homeless people, particularly those who are homeless for the first time, get help and advice. I am worried that the hon. Gentleman’s new clauses would reduce the supply of housing and penalise the very people whom we aim to help. I look forward to the Minister’s response and invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his new clause.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I rise to support new clause 1. This is my first speech on this important Bill, so I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on introducing it. He has done so with great persuasion and has performed an important service for us all. I also congratulate both Front-Bench teams on working constructively to bring the Bill to this point.

I support the Bill but, as good as it goes, we will be kidding ourselves today if we leave this House, pat ourselves on the back and believe that the House has done everything that it could to tackle an emergency that is unfolding before our eyes. I chose to speak in today’s debate to reflect the rising concern among my constituents in Leigh—a concern that is shared widely in Greater Manchester—that an increasing number of people can be seen huddling in doorways across the region. People will not just walk on by; they do not accept that things have to be like this. Homelessness and rough sleeping are not inevitable facts of life in 2017. Our society is wealthy enough to ensure that nobody should spend a night without a roof over their head. We need new urgency on both sides of the House to bring forward appropriate action to address the situation.

If there is a problem with the Bill, it is that it goes nowhere near far enough to tackle the scale of the problem. It does not address the wider cross-governmental work that is necessary to provide an appropriate response. Let us take a reality check. The Minister will be aware of the figures that came out this week showing a 16% rise in rough sleeping over the past year—my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) referenced that in his opening remarks. Since 2010, rough sleeping has doubled across England and is increasing at an alarming rate. The problem is even worse in Greater Manchester, with a 41% increase in the past year across the 10 boroughs. According to local officials, that figure does not reflect the full picture. They believe that at least 300 people across Greater Manchester will spend tonight out on the streets. That is simply unacceptable, and I have not heard from the Government what they are doing about that. What are they doing now to help people find warmth and shelter?

As I said, the number of people rough sleeping has doubled, but the Bill will not reverse that trend and our eyes need to be open to that. I support new clause 1, because urgency is crucial in this debate. We need a clear commitment to review what is happening. I take the point of the hon. Member for Harrow East, but we all know that timetables shift after a Minister at the Dispatch Box commits to review something. The civil service will say, “We will review it in the autumn,” and that becomes the winter and then the spring. That is what happens, but it is not good enough. The problem is bigger than that. We need clarity and certainty. There should be a commitment to review how the legislation is working—both whether it is reducing homelessness and whether the Government are giving councils adequate funding.

For the reasons outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) a moment ago, I do not believe that the funding is adequate. I differ from my Front-Bench team here in that I think the review should take place within one year. We need more urgency. Although I expect the Bill to have a modest but welcome impact on homelessness, I believe that an annual review would reveal that it goes nowhere near addressing the
scale of the problem and that Government funding for councils is inadequate. We must remember that most of the funding comes next year and then reduces sharply in the year after. In the third year, there is nothing at all. I do not want to wait until the third year to find out whether the legislation is working. The review should be conducted within 12 months.

We need to hear much more from the Government. If they want to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, there must be a cross-Government response. When Labour was in government, we established a rough sleepers unit, bringing together all the Departments with a role to play. I do not see that level of cross-Government working here. In addition to that commitment to work across Government, we need a clear ambition. What is the Government’s ambition on rough sleeping? I am not aware of one. Rough sleeping is increasing at an alarming rate, so what are they going to do about it? Will they reverse that trend? Will they make the same commitment that I have made in Greater Manchester that we should work to eradicate rough sleeping by 2020? [Interruption.] It is all very well the Minister looking the other way and talking to his colleagues, but what is he going to do about rough sleeping now and in the next few years? What is the Government’s ambition? Are they committed to reversing the increase? Will they go further and eliminate rough sleeping? We need to hear about that from the Minister today. I do not want to inject a partisan note into this debate, but we will be doing nobody any favours if we sit here today and think that the Bill, as good as it is, is enough. The Bill will not reverse the looming cuts to housing benefit.

Michael Tomlinson: The right hon. Gentleman admits that he did not sit on the Bill Committee and that he did not contribute on Second Reading. Had he done so, he would have seen the cross-party nature of proceedings. While I am sure that his points are relevant to new clauses 1, 2 and 3, they will not attract the same cross-party support that has to date been the nature of the Bill.

Andy Burnham: I hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying. There is cross-party support. I support the Bill—the hon. Member for Harrow East and the Government have my support today—but I am entitled to speak for the people who will be on the streets of Greater Manchester and the hon. Gentleman’s constituency tonight. I am entitled to give them a voice in this House. The Bill will not change their situation or reduce rough sleeping anytime soon, so who is speaking for them? It is unacceptable for the House to debate homelessness in the wider context in which homelessness and rough sleeping exist, from universal credit to housing benefit cuts and housing supply, is going in reverse. It is absolutely right that we should direct attention to that.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): The briefing note from Crisis, the housing charity, says:

“Whilst we understand the intention behind these amendments we are very worried that, if pushed to a vote and passed, there would be further amendments in the Houses of Lords, leading to ‘Ping-pong’ between the two Houses. This could result in the Bill failing to receive Royal Assent before the end of the parliamentary session, thus killing the Bill.”

My reading of the briefing note is that Crisis would like the Bill to go through without these new clauses. Does the right hon. Gentleman have a view on that?

Andy Burnham: I have also read the briefing note from Crisis, and the hon. Lady will have seen that Crisis does not believe that the funding allocated to the Bill is adequate to meet the obligations that are being placed on local authorities, nor does it believe that the Bill will do anything to address the wider issue of housing benefits.

However, I accept the hon. Lady’s point. I have not come here today to do anything to disrupt the passage of the Bill. It would help everybody if the Bill contained a commitment to a review so that we all know where we stand and so that there is a degree of urgency about how the House is addressing this issue.

Ms Buck: I urge my right hon. Friend to pay little regard to the comments of the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) because, although he is absolutely correct that there was and is cross-party consensus on the provisions and the culture underpinning the Bill, which we want to see implemented, in Committee and on Second Reading virtually all the comments from Opposition Members have been that the wider context in which homelessness and rough sleeping exist, from universal credit to housing benefit cuts and housing supply, is going in reverse. It is absolutely right that we should direct attention to that.

10.30 am

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Bill focuses solely on the duties of local authorities, and we must remember that those local authorities are operating in the context of massive cuts to their budgets. We need to be honest with ourselves about whether they are going to be able to rise to the extra pressures that the Bill places on them.

As my hon. Friend says, the Bill will do nothing to reverse the cuts to housing benefits that are coming down the line, which many experts believe will make homelessness and rough sleeping worse. The Bill does nothing to reverse cuts to mental health services that are pushing more people out on to the street. The Bill does nothing to reverse the cuts to social care, which are having the same effect. The Bill does nothing to build more affordable housing.

I am sorry if that injects a note that the Minister does not quite like, but tough. I am here to say it because he needs a better response than the Bill. If he thinks this is it, it is simply not good enough. The Bill is a step in the right direction, but I am afraid that that is all it is. In Greater Manchester, working with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) and Councillor Beth Knowles from Manchester City Council, we are committing ourselves and our councils to trying to end rough sleeping. If we can do that at our level, the Government should at least do something at their level.
the important issue of rough sleeping in Manchester. We have already announced more than £600,0001 for a social impact bond in Greater Manchester to support entrenched rough sleepers who have the most complex needs. Does he not welcome the work that will be done by the Government and the Greater Manchester combined authority?

**Andy Burnham:** I will welcome every single thing the Minister does to address this problem and, yes, I welcome that funding. What I do not welcome is the alarming rise in rough sleeping on the streets of Greater Manchester. I am sorry if it is inconvenient for the Minister to hear this, but it is clearly right to put those concerns to him.

**Lyn Brown:** I was not going to say another word because I want the Bill to go through, but I am amazed by the Minister’s chutzpah in moaning about an excellent speech that is relevant and pertinent to the Bill, given that Government Members, week after week after week, talk out excellent Bills. If the Minister does not mind, I would like to listen to what my right hon. Friend has to say because it is actually pertinent, unlike the drivel we normally hear from Government Members week after week after week.

**Andy Burnham:** The Minister mentioned time. If the Government were making the Bill a priority, perhaps they would make time to debate these issues and to propose their own initiative. Instead, we have a debate on a Friday as a result of a private Member’s Bill. I will welcome anything the Minister does to address the issue, but I do not accept a cosy cross-party debate today when the number of people sleeping rough on our streets is increasing every single week. It is a bigger issue than just patting ourselves on the back. More needs to be done, and the Government need to set out today their ambition to cut rough sleeping in the next few years. That is why I am here today. I fully support the Bill, but let us be honest about what it is: a modest first step.

**Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It was interesting to listen to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). If I did not know that he represents Leigh, I might have thought that he was standing for some position in Manchester.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on the effective way in which he has secured progress on such a sympathetic Bill on this compelling subject. One would hope that every debate in this place is worthwhile, but few issues are more significant than this Bill, which endeavours to ensure that no one has to endure sleeping rough on the streets of England, that no one has to face the frightening prospect of the lack of a roof over their head if nobody can put them up, and that no one has to be subject to the appalling mental and physical degradation that accompanies homelessness.

It is important to note that homelessness is not the same as rough sleeping, which the right hon. Member for Leigh perhaps misunderstands. We must not dismiss the plight of those who, although they might not be sleeping on the street, are plagued by anxiety and disquiet at that very real possibility. Britain is a developed nation with a strong economy, and I would be so bold as to say that I speak for everyone in this place when I say that it is shameful that so many people in our country are homeless. We must do all that we can to help them.

It is, of course, agonising to see somebody sleeping on the street, and it is even more concerning when we have freezing weather at this time of year, as we have faced in London this week, because a night out on the streets becomes even more unbearable than it is at the best of times. It is not possible to scrutinise the Bill effectively without understanding the complex nature of homelessness and just how extensive the problem is across the country. Quantifying homelessness is, in itself, an extremely difficult task. The way in which homelessness is recorded varies and, even if a unanimous method were both agreed and employed, the number might still be underestimated, as many people often sleep out of sight, moving from place to place.

Indeed, because of the appalling physical abuse to which rough sleepers, particularly women, are subjected, many actively try to leave places where they can be spotted. Despite that difficulty, Government statistics show that 4,134 people slept rough on any one night across England in 2016. Shockingly, that is more than double the number recorded in 2010. In London alone, local agencies report that 8,096 people slept rough in 2015-16, a 6% rise on the previous year.

**Andy Burnham:** The figures showing the rise since 2010 are shocking. Does the hon. Lady think that her Government are doing enough to tackle rough sleeping?

**Pauline Latham:** The Government are trying to tackle rough sleeping, which is not an easy subject to address. The fact that they are allowing the Bill to go through shows that they are taking it seriously.

**David Mackintosh** (Northampton South) (Con): Members on both sides of the House need to be aware that many people who are sleeping rough, even if they present to a local authority, will find that local authorities do not currently have the power to help them—it is not a question of money. Does my hon. Friend agree that the powers in the Bill will give local authorities the ability to intervene?

**Pauline Latham:** I am pleased that my hon. Friend made that point, which I can clearly illustrate with a case I dealt with over Christmas. I had to ring a helpline for a family whose rented house had burned down. They had four children. Derbyshire County Council was not interested in the fact that they were homeless and would have to come back from family to homelessness after Christmas, although the parents would have to continue with their jobs and get the children back into school. It was interested only in whether the children were vulnerable and were being abused. That is a clear example of a local authority not being interested in the fact of homelessness. Even when I phoned on Christmas day and several days after that, we could not get Derbyshire County Council to put anything in place for these people because its view was, “Well, they are not homeless. They are staying with friends in Bournemouth,”—or wherever it was—and not that the parents had to come back to Borrowash to get the children back into school and go back to their jobs. There are therefore problems at the moment.

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1.[Official Report, 1 February 2017, Vol. 620, c. 3MC.]
The problem of homelessness is getting worse and the Bill could not be more necessary. Breaking the numbers down, certain groups are at particular risk. In England, women make up 26% of the clients of homelessness services, but as a group they are often much more vulnerable. There are high levels of vulnerability within the female homeless population. Mental ill health, drug and alcohol dependency, a childhood spent in care, experiences of sexual abuse and other traumatic life experiences are all commonplace.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that organisations such as Crisis back the Bill shows that the Government and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) have got this right?

Pauline Latham: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government are getting it right. They are acting for the benefit of homeless people in this country.

Interviews with homeless women that have been conducted by the fantastic homelessness alleviation charity Crisis, which was cited a few moments ago, show that more than 20% became homeless to escape violence from someone they knew, with 70% of them fleeing violence from a partner. That shows that the Government need the cross-party support that they are getting—or were getting; it seems that that is perhaps not as strong as it was. We need to move forward with the Bill so that it can go successfully to its next stage and become law.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): I am sure that new clauses 2 and 3, which were tabled by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), are well intentioned. New clause 2 would give tenants assurances on their length of tenure and new clause 3 would give assurances on rent increases. However, I am concerned that, rather than helping vulnerable homeless people, they would hinder some of the best work in the Bill.

We know that private landlords are increasingly reluctant to accept benefit claimants— that is certainly the experience of Portsmouth City Council. The Bill represents an effort to change that situation, but new clauses 2 and 3 would frustrate it. Tenants are currently encouraged to remain in occupation until they are evicted by a court order so that they cannot be considered to be voluntarily homeless. That is a stressful and debilitating practice for the tenant, and a disincentive for landlords to take on cases from local authorities. That would be especially true under new clause 2 because it would lock landlords into an unbreakable three-year tenancy agreement if the result of giving notice would be to make the tenant homeless.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the reality is that only around 50% of mortgage lenders lend to buy-to-lets with tenancies of more than one year? The measures might restrict the market even further, so they could cause many more problems than they would fix.

Mrs Drummond: That point was discussed earlier. It would be good if mortgage lenders could extend their offer to three years or even beyond, because we do want long-term tenancies.

New clause 2 would make landlords reluctant to take on anyone who might need local authority help, most of whom would be vulnerable people in receipt of benefits or on low incomes. As Portsmouth and District Private Landlords Association has stressed to me, landlords do not usually evict good and responsible tenants, nor do they want to risk finding bad replacement tenants or to bear the costs of eviction and establishing a new tenancy. But nor do they want their hands to be tied. What if they wanted to sell the rental property or occupy it themselves? New clause 2 makes no provision for that. As a result, it would be a strong disincentive for landlords to take on any tenant who might call on the local authority’s duty to house, if they were given notice.

10.45 am

New clause 3, which would cap rent increases, would have a similar effect. Landlords do not want to give notice unnecessarily and this month’s National Audit Office report shows that private landlords are not profiteering. Since 2001-02, social housing rents have increased faster than earnings. By contrast, in all regions outside London, median full-time weekly earnings have risen by more than private rental prices, or are within 1% or 2% since 2006. New clause 3 would allow special provision to be made for London rents, but only by setting a lower cap. The motivation for that is presumably that, in London, rents have gone up by 32%—twice as much as earnings. That means that there would be even more of a disincentive for landlords in London to take tenants in receipt of housing benefit.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith would cap private rent increases at the consumer prices index level, yet CPI will almost always be lower than the retail prices index plus 0.5% cap that the previous Labour Government thought reasonable for housing associations. The combination of fixed three-year tenancies and the inability to determine their own rent would mean that landlords would either refuse to take on social tenants, or be obliged to give them notice to get reasonable rent increases by starting a new tenancy. As it stands, the Bill will work with landlords to ease the burdens on tenants and local authorities. New clauses 2 and 3, despite their best intentions, would undo that good work, so I hope that they will not be pressed.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I will be brief because I recognise that we want to get to the final stages of this excellent Bill by the end of the sitting.

In terms of wider reach, the Bill is of course only a partial solution. The report of the Communities and Local Government Committee on homelessness drew attention to wider issues that need to be addressed. We need to build more homes in this country, particularly more affordable homes, and we need to build more affordable homes to rent. The Committee recognised that housing needs vary in different parts of the country. Different housing markets need a different response, particularly in terms of tenure mix.

We look forward to the housing White Paper, which we understand is coming soon. We hope that it will be published before the end of February, when Ministers will be coming before our Committee to give evidence as part of our inquiry into the capacity of the housebuilding industry. We will be able to pursue further some of the points about the ability to provide the homes that are needed at that time. I hope that, as the Minister for
Housing and Planning seems to be indicating, we will see a move away from the idea that starter homes and shared ownership are the total answer to the country’s housing needs.

A lot has been said about longer-term tenancies in the private rented sector. The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) is absolutely right. When the Select Committee looked at that in the previous Parliament, we supported longer-term tenancies. We want to encourage everyone to move towards them. Within those tenancies, people can get the certainty of an agreed annual rent increase, which is different from having an artificially imposed rent control from outside.

In the here and now, money is absolutely crucial to the Bill’s success. We are getting a little confused about the timings of reviews. From the Select Committee’s point of view, two years on from implementation seems to be a good time to review whether the legislation is working and whether the money available had enabled it to work over the previous two years. I hope that the Minister sees the commitment to a review as a helpful proposal. Alongside the Government, we will review the working of the legislation and the position regarding money. Although there is money in the first year to help local government with start-up costs, after the regulations have been put in place, the Act will probably not be implemented for about a year. We then have a second year with limited funding, and then no funding in the third year, which is probably the second year of operation. I have concerns about that.

I cannot see that there will not be costs to local councils, so I think there is a need for a more immediate review after the Bill is passed, with regard to that third year. If Ministers are looking at a quicker, more immediate review of the finances as soon as the Bill is passed, that would be helpful. The Select Committee would be ready to do an immediate review on that very limited basis, if it would assist the process.

Mr Marcus Jones: It is a pleasure to follow the Chairman of the Communities and Local Government Committee, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts).

Right hon. and hon. Members have spoken quite a lot about the whys and wherefores of process, and about who tabled which amendments where and when—which side is more sanctimonious than the other almost springs to mind. I am not going to get into that because the Bill is very much about outcomes for people who are at risk of homelessness and people who have unfortunately become homeless.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to the new clauses tabled by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). New clause 1 would put on the face of the Bill a statutory requirement for the Secretary of State to review the legislation no earlier than one year and no later than two years after commencement, and would require the review to consider the funding of the provisions. The hon. Gentleman will recall that the question of reviewing the costs of the legislation was raised and discussed at length in Committee, but for the benefit of those who were not there I shall state my commitment very clearly.

I will review the implementation of the legislation, including its resourcing and how it is working in practice, concluding no later than two years after the commencement of its substantive clauses. I will also carry out, in the same timeframe, a post-implementation review of the new burdens to review the robustness of our assessment of the estimated cost to local authorities and the underlying assumptions. As part of both reviews, I would welcome the input and expertise of the Select Committee, and I am happy to discuss how it could be involved. The resources and funding requirements related to the duties I have outlined will also be considered alongside all the other responsibilities of local authorities as part of future spending reviews.

It is important to bear it in mind that the Bill’s provisions will not be implemented on the day it receives Royal Assent, as the hon. Member for Hammersmith acknowledged. We were clear in Committee that the Bill’s successful implementation will depend on working with local government to ensure that resources, guidance and training are in place before its provisions are enacted. For that reason, each measure in the Bill can be commenced independently, once local authorities are ready. Given that fact, a statutory requirement to review, tied to the commencement date of the eventual Act, is unworkable, because the substantive clauses will be commenced at a later date. I also argue that such a statutory requirement is unnecessary given the commitments already in place and the long-standing new burdens assessment procedures.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): First, will my hon. Friend make sure, as he always does, that his civil servants are completely aligned with his objectives? Secondly, I welcome his commitment to work with local authorities; I know that my local authority, Broxbourne, would welcome the chance to discuss these matters with him to ensure that the Bill is successful, as I know it will be. Finally, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for his excellent work over the past few months to make sure that today’s proceedings happened and that new legislation comes into effect.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes an important point about working with local authorities, which we are absolutely determined to do during the Bill’s implementation. He knows that I have already met Broxbourne Borough Council to discuss these important issues, and I would certainly be keen to do that again. He also mentioned making sure that my civil servants’ intention is aligned with my own; I can tell him that the civil servants working on the Bill have done an absolutely excellent job in very testing circumstances. Although the Government wanted to introduce legislation, we must acknowledge the fact that the process for this Bill has been different, in that it is a private Member’s Bill that has also been worked on by the Select Committee, and then had input from local government, the Local Government Association and the housing charities. Our civil servants have done a magnificent job of helping us to bring all those groups together to come out with a product that has broad support.

Ms Buck: On the issue of working with local authorities, the Minister will know my concerns, which I raised in Committee, about Westminster City Council’s recent decision to discharge its duty to homeless people mainly outside the local authority, and in some cases as far away as the midlands. His colleague, the Minister for Housing and Planning, told me on “Sunday Politics”...
Mr Jones: We discussed that issue in some detail in Committee, so I am not going to go into great detail today, but the law is clear on placements out of borough. The Government are absolutely certain that we want that law to be observed, particularly in relation to making sure that councils look at people’s circumstances—such as where children go to school and where people work—before they make any decisions that may affect a particular family.

Andy Burnham: The Minister spoke a moment ago about successful implementation and a review to check that it has been achieved. Part of that success is about the bureaucracy—the successful implementation of the powers and provision of the money required so that local authorities can discharge their functions—but, as new clause 1 says, it is also about the effect the legislation has on actually reducing homelessness. Before he moves on, will he tell us what the Government’s objective is and what test they are setting themselves with respect to reducing both rough sleeping and homelessness by 2020? We can judge then whether they have been successful.

Mr Jones: We have set out a significant determination to reduce both rough sleeping and homelessness in general. Nobody should ever have to spend the night on the street, and it is regrettable that that is currently the case, but the Government are absolutely determined to ensure that nobody has to sleep rough. It is a complex matter, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman is well aware. Some of the things we are doing will have a significant impact. For example, there is a challenge in getting people moved from hostel accommodation into an intermediate position, before they are able to go into accommodation of their own. We are bringing forward £100 million for move-on accommodation, for which a bidding process will open very shortly. I hope that, in the spirit of the Bill, the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that the Government are not resting on their laurels and do not see the Bill as the be all and end all to deal with homelessness and rough sleeping, which we take very seriously. We are doing a whole package of things to try to improve the situation for people.

If accepted, under new clause 2 private sector landlords would not be able to rely on the no fault ground for possession, known as section 21, within the first three years of a tenancy, if the termination of a tenancy would result in a tenant becoming homeless. Landlords, and in many cases tenants, welcome the flexibility of the current assured shorthold tenancy regime, which does not lock the parties into long-term commitments, and promotes mobility. Without the certainty that landlords can seek repossession of their property when required, perhaps for their own family to live in, many would be reluctant to let their properties. The unwanted outcome would be landlords withdrawing from the market, which would not help landlords or indeed tenants.

Before assured shorthold tenancies were introduced under the Housing Act 1988, the private rental market was in decline. Regulated rents made being a landlord simply not commercially viable for many property owners, but since 1988 the private rented sector has increased steadily, growing from just over 9% of the market in 1988 to 19% today. The current framework strikes the right balance between the rights of landlords and tenants, and our efforts should be focused on encouraging a voluntary approach to longer tenancies for those who want them.

With those points in mind, I hope that the hon. Member for Hammersmith will follow through on the comments that he made at the start of the debate and withdraw new clause 2.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): It is true that, recently, the liberalisation of permitted development rights has released many more properties for rent, which is a very good thing, but does my hon. Friend agree that changes in fiscal policy, buy-to-let, and, in my own area, selective licensing are encouraging more landlords to resist letting properties? This proposal from the Opposition will exacerbate that trend.

Mr Jones: I agree with my hon. Friend. Friend. Layering more regulation on to residential landlords will have the net effect of reducing supply. Many of our constituents rely on renting private properties, so we need to be very careful that the balance is right.

Finally, if new clause 3 is enacted, it will introduce rent controls in the private rented sector by compelling landlords to limit rent rises to no more than once a year and by no more than inflation in cases where there is a risk of the tenant becoming homeless as a result of a rent rise. Although I understand the spirit in which this amendment has been tabled, introducing rent controls is fundamentally the wrong approach and is not borne out by evidence. Experience from Britain and around the world shows that rent controls lead to fewer properties on the market and less choice for tenants. Returning to the situation in the 1980s when the private rented sector was in decline will not help landlords or tenants.

The key to improving affordability and choice for tenants is to build more homes rather than impose rent controls. Our build-to-rent fund has now contracted investment worth £630 million to deliver more than 5,600 high-quality homes specifically for private rent. Our £3.5 billion private rented sector housing guarantee scheme will increase the stream of investment in new private rented sector housing.

We have also established the private rented sector affordability and security working group to explore options to reduce the cost for tenants who access and move within the sector. This group is expected to submit its report to Ministers next month.

I therefore urge the House to agree that new clause 3 is not desirable, and, given the commitment I have made to Opposition Front Benchers, I hope that new clauses 1, 2 and 3 will now be withdrawn.

Andy Slaughter: I thank everyone who has spoken in this debate. I appreciate all the comments that have been made. I particularly thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) for speaking so passionately about the situation in Manchester and the issues of rough sleeping, reminding us that these problems go around the country.
I said in my opening remarks that I would not press new clauses 2 and 3 to a vote, and that is still the case. Their purpose was to try to elicit some positive comments from the Minister, but I think I have failed in that respect. We will return to those matters at an early date. Eviction by private sector landlords is the single greatest immediate cause of homelessness, and it does need to be tackled. We are living not in the world of 1988, but in a very different and less stable climate. I was disappointed by the Minister’s rather wholesale rejection of that issue today, but I hope that we will return to it on a future occasion.

On a more positive note, I said that I hoped not to press new clause 1 to a vote. I am greatly encouraged by what the Minister said, and I thank him both for entering into the spirit of the discussion and the specific words he used. He gave us the comfort that we were looking for in relation to a proper, timely and comprehensive review of the finances behind the Bill. I am particularly pleased that he said that the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), and the Select Committee itself will be engaged in that process as well as local government. That is extremely helpful, especially given the time pressures we are under to get these matters sorted out here rather than in the other place. I am sure that the other place will be watching and listening to what the Minister and I have said. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the new clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 4

DUTY IN CASES OF THREATENED HOMELESSNESS

Mr Marcus Jones: I beg to move amendment 1, page 5, line 32, at end insert—

“( ) But the authority may not give notice to the applicant under subsection (5) on the basis that the circumstances in subsection (7)(b) apply if a valid notice has been given to the applicant under section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 (orders for possession on expiry or termination of assured shorthold tenancy) that—

(a) will expire within 56 days or has expired, and

(b) is in respect of the only accommodation that is available for the applicant’s occupation.”

This amendment prevents a local housing authority from bringing the duty in section 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 4) to an end after 56 days if the applicant has been given a notice under section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 that has expired or will expire within 56 days, and which is in respect of the only accommodation that is available for the applicant’s occupation.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government amendment 3, page 6, line 22, at end insert—

“(9) The duty under subsection (2) can also be brought to an end under section 193A and 193B (notices in cases of applicant’s deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate).”

This amendment inserts, into section 195 of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 4), a reference to sections 193A and 193B of that Act (inserted by clause 7) under which the duty in section 195(2) can be brought to an end.

Government amendment 4, in clause 5, page 7, line 45, after “accommodation” insert—

“and, on the date of refusal, there was a reasonable prospect that suitable accommodation would be available for occupation by the applicant for at least 6 months or such longer period not exceeding 12 months as may be prescribed.”

This amendment provides that a local housing authority can only bring the duty in section 189B(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 5) to an end on the basis that the applicant has refused an offer of suitable accommodation, if on the date of the refusal there was a reasonable prospect that suitable accommodation would be available for 6 months or such longer period not exceeding 12 months as may be prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State.

Government amendment 5, page 8, line 9, at end insert—

“(9) The duty under subsection (2) can also be brought to an end under—

(a) section 193ZA (consequences of refusal of final accommodation offer or final Part 6 offer at the initial relief stage), or

(b) sections 193A and 193B (notices in cases of applicant’s deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate).”

This amendment inserts, into section 189B of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 5), references to section 193ZA (inserted by amendment 10), and sections 193A and 193B of that Act (inserted by clause 7), under which the duty in section 189B(2) can be brought to an end.

Government amendment 6, page 8, line 18, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

“(a) for subsection (1) substitute—

(1) If the local housing authority have reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need, they must secure that accommodation is available for the applicant’s occupation.

(1ZA) In a case in which the local housing authority conclude their inquiries under section 184 and decide that the applicant does not have a priority need—

(a) where the authority decide that they do not owe the applicant a duty under section 189B(2), the duty under subsection (1) comes to an end when the authority notify the applicant of that decision, or

(b) otherwise, the duty under subsection (1) comes to an end upon the authority notifying the applicant of their decision that, upon the duty under section 189B(2) coming to an end, they do not owe the applicant any duty under section 190 or 193.

(1ZB) In any other case, the duty under subsection (1) comes to an end upon the later of—

(a) the duty owed to the applicant under section 189B(2) coming to an end or the authority notifying the applicant that they have decided that they do not owe the applicant a duty under that section, and

(b) the authority notifying the applicant of their decision as to what other duty (if any) they owe to the applicant under the following provisions of this Part upon the duty under section 189B(2) coming to an end.”

See amendment 8. This amendment also makes the circumstances in which the interim duty to provide accommodation under section 188(1) of the Housing Act 1996 comes to an end where the local housing authority decide that the applicant does not have a priority need.
Government amendment 7, page 8, line 26, leave out from “for” to end of line 27 and insert—

“pending a decision of the kind referred to in subsection (1)” substitute “until the later of paragraph (a) or (b) of subsection (1ZB).”

See amendments 6 and 8.

Government amendment 8, page 8, line 27, at end insert—

“(2A) For the purposes of this section, where the applicant requests a review under section 202(1)(h) of the authority’s decision as to the suitability of accommodation offered to the applicant by way of a final accommodation offer or a final Part 6 offer (within the meaning of section 193ZA), the authority’s duty to the applicant under section 198B(2) is not to be taken to have come to an end under section 193ZA(2) until the decision on the review has been notified to the applicant.

(3) Otherwise, the duty under this section comes to an end in accordance with subsections (1ZA) to (1A), regardless of any review requested by the applicant under section 202.

But the authority may secure that accommodation is available for the applicant’s occupation pending a decision on review.”

This amendment, together with amendments 6 and 7, ensure that any interim duty of a local housing authority under section 188 of the Housing Act 1996 to accommodate an applicant continues pending the conclusion of a review of the suitability of accommodation offered in a final accommodation offer or a final Part 6 offer under section 193ZA of that Act (inserted by amendment 10).

Government amendment 9, in clause 6, page 11, leave out lines 14 to 16 and insert—

“(3) For the purposes of this section, a local housing authority’s duty under section 198B(2) or 195(2) is a function of the authority to secure that accommodation is available for the occupation of a person only if the authority decide to discharge the duty by securing that accommodation is so available.”

This amendment ensures that where a local housing authority decides to discharge their duty under section 198B(2) or 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clauses 5 and 4, respectively) by actually securing that accommodation is available for occupation by the applicant, sections 206 to 209 of that Act apply. Those sections contain various provisions about how a local housing authority’s housing functions are to be discharged.

Mr Jones: I shall start with amendment 1. At our last Committee sitting on 18 January, I committed to tabling an amendment to clause 4 to ensure that tenants at risk of becoming homeless were sufficiently protected and had access to the required help and support. The Committee agreed amendments to clause 1, so that it now extends the period an applicant is “threatened with homelessness” from 28 to 56 days and clarifies that an applicant is “threatened with homelessness” if they have a valid section 21 eviction notice that expires in 56 days or fewer.

Amendment 1 to clause 4 extends the prevention duty to cover instances where a household that has been served with a valid section 21 notice still remains in the property after receiving 56 days of help from the local housing authority under the prevention duty, and is still at risk of becoming homeless. Specifically, it covers instances where a valid section 21 notice has already expired or will expire in relation to the only accommodation the household has available. The amendment ensures that, in such instances, the prevention duty will continue to operate until such time as the local housing authority brings it to an end for one of the other reasons set out in clause 4, even if the 56 days have passed.
who have provided their expertise and support. We will discuss the core amendments to clause 7 in the next group: they are amendments consequential to amendments made to clauses 4, 5 and 6.

Amendments 2 and 4 clarify the circumstances in which the new prevention and relief duties can be brought to an end by a local housing authority. They would require not only that a suitable accommodation offer had been turned down but that accommodation would have been available for at least six months. Clauses 4 and 5 insert new sections 195 and 189B respectively into the Housing Act 1996. Those set out the duties owed to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Both clauses have provisions allowing those duties to be brought to an end if a number of circumstances apply.

Amendments 2 and 4 would change new sections 189B and 195 to require that the grounds for giving notice would not only be the refusal of an offer of suitable accommodation but that, on the date when the accommodation was refused, there was a reasonable prospect that it would be available for at least six months or a longer period, not exceeding 12 months, as may be prescribed in regulations. The amendments are relatively simple and ensure consistency with provisions elsewhere in the Bill.

11.15 am

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I do not want to take up much time. In the cross-party spirit of the debate, I give credit to my council and all councillors in the borough of Richmond upon Thames for all the work that is done.

I have a concern about these clauses. Every single homelessness case in my constituency of Twickenham is absolutely unique. I have come across a very small number of cases in which the homeless person has refused suitable accommodation for reasons of their individual situation: they are not sectionable, but the issue is to do with mental health. Will the final accommodation not be a full stop? Will the homeless person be able to come back to ask again for the accommodation?

Mr Jones: I certainly agree that many local authorities across the country work very hard to help homeless people. We hope that the Bill will improve the situation further. On the circumstances that my hon. Friend mentions, I should say that a person could go back to the local authority for a review; there is a safeguard for people in that sense.

Will Quince: Will the Minister confirm my understanding that the Bill incorporates a particular and special safeguard—a full written warning—before any duty is withdrawn? That is an extra protection to ensure that those facing a termination of duty know exactly what they are getting themselves into.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend has been a diligent member of the Bill Committee, and I thank him for his intervention. He is correct: the Bill provides for a final written warning. Obviously, we want to make sure that people have an incentive to do the right thing and accept an offer of suitable accommodation, but we also need to consider people who present challenges and need a final warning, in some circumstances, to make them think again and take up the offer the local authority has made.

Amendments 3 and 5 insert helpful signposts into clauses 4 and 5 to ensure that they are appropriately cross-referenced with clause 7. Specifically, they insert references to the provisions in clause 7 about ending the prevention and relief duties when an applicant has deliberately and unreasonably refused to co-operate, and to the provisions about ending the relief duty when an applicant has refused a final accommodation offer or a final part 6 offer. That simply means that the ways in which the prevention and relief duties can be ended are easier to see and understand for those reading the clauses.

Amendment 8, along with amendments 6 and 7, deal with the provision of interim accommodation while a local housing authority is helping an applicant to secure accommodation under clause 5. Amendment 6 sets out that, if a local housing authority has reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need, it must secure interim accommodation. It also sets out how that duty comes to an end.

In cases where the local housing authority has concluded its inquiries under the homelessness legislation and decides that the applicant does not have a priority need, the duty comes to an end in two circumstances: first, if the local housing authority notifies the applicant that the relief duty is not owed; and secondly, if the local housing authority notifies the applicant that, once the relief duty ends, they will not be owed any further duty to accommodate.

Amendment 7 is a technical amendment to the Housing Act 1996 required as a result of amendments 6 and 8. Where an applicant has been provided with interim accommodation and refuses a final offer, they may request a review of the suitability of that offer. Amendment 8 ensures that the duty to secure interim accommodation continues until any review has been concluded and the decision has been notified to the applicant.

Finally in this group, I turn to amendment 9. The duties to applicants under clauses 4 and 5—the prevention and relief duties—are to help the applicant to secure accommodation. In some cases, this will entail the local housing authority securing this accommodation directly, rather than helping the applicant by, for example, providing a deposit guarantee. Amendment 9 provides that, where that is the case, the provisions of sections 206 to 209 of the Housing Act 1996 apply in the same way they would if the local housing authority secured accommodation under the main homelessness duty.

Those sections contain various provisions about how a local housing authority’s housing functions are to be discharged—for example, about how authorities may secure that accommodation is available and how they can require an applicant to pay a reasonable charge for the accommodation. Provisions also cover the requirements relating to placements in and out of district, including notifications to the hosting local housing authority.

I will leave it at that on amendments 1 to 9. I hope that the House will look favourably on them, in the spirit in which proceedings on the Bill have been conducted, and support them.

Andy Slaughter: I must say that, after the 14 hours and seven sittings in Committee that we have heard about, I was somewhat alarmed when the Government tabled 21 amendments on over six pages last week.
I have to say that, on my first reading of them, I was not much the wiser as to what was happening. However, one perseveres, as one always does with legislation.

I must say two things. First, I do appreciate the difficulties the Minister and the promoter have had in squaring the circle so that local government, landlords and homelessness charities are all happy about the way the Bill works, rather than about the principles of the Bill, which I think have been agreed. I am also grateful to the Minister for giving us time with his officials to go through in some detail the implication of the amendments and why they are necessary, and I think I speak for my hon. Friends in saying that. It is regrettable that things could not have been done differently, but we are where we are, and the Opposition regard these amendments and the next set, which we will come to in due course, as either necessary or improving of the Bill, so we will not oppose any of them today, and I can be fairly brief in responding.

I have only two concerns to raise. I think we have all struggled with clause 1. When you start debating clause 1 in the sixth session of a Committee, you know that something is awry. There have been real difficulties with getting this operative clause of the Bill correct, and it is still not perfect. Much of the original clause 1 had to be omitted because it created more problems than it resolved. The key point—about extending the duty from 28 to 56 days—is still there, but there are concerns that, notwithstanding that, and notwithstanding the further amendments before us, which will extend that duty beyond the 56 days where necessary, local authorities will be able to continue to drag their feet in some cases. However, everything that has been said on all sides, and the refinements before us, which add to what is in clause 1, certainly show that the spirit of the Bill—I hope the same is true of the letter of the Bill when we come to the codes of guidance—really does require all local authorities to act at an early stage and to deal, particularly in the case of section 21 notices, with homelessness and threatened homelessness at an early stage.

The other point—the Minister may address this when we deal with the subsequent provisions—is what additional costs there are likely to be. There will undoubtedly be cost implications in relation to continuing prevention assistance beyond 56 days and—this is quite proper—to being clear about when interim duties come to an end and continuing them while reviews continue. I would like to hear from the Government not only whether those costs will be fully funded but whether the funds have been calculated. Will we hear about that today? We certainly need to before the Bill leaves both Houses. However, with those two caveats, I can be commendably brief and end my comments there.

Bob Blackman: I am pleased to support these amendments and to follow the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter).

It is fair to say that the amendments have been some time in coming. I commend my hon. Friend the Minister, his officials, the homelessness charities and the landlord associations on assisting us in reaching an appropriate compromise. The hon. Member for Hammersmith pointed out that clause 1 was debated some way into the Committee settings, as, indeed, was clause 7. By that time, we had passed clauses 4, 5 and 6, and these amendments relate to those clauses.

Clearly, the amendments we made to clause 1 in Committee had consequential impacts, which needed to be reflected in clauses 4, 5 and 6. Those clauses refer to the duty in cases of threatened homelessness, the duties owed to those who are homeless and the duties to help to secure accommodation. So the amendments before us are largely technical and follow up the changes made by the Bill Committee.

The most important aspect of this is that the prevention duty cannot end after 56 days with the individual or family still sitting in their home facing eviction under a section 21 notice under the Housing Act 1988, and with nowhere else to go.

Clause 1 of the original draft Bill was substantially changed before Second Reading, after pre-legislative scrutiny, and was substantially changed again in Committee. That had a consequential, knock-on effect on the other clauses in the Bill, and that is why the amendments are essential.

We have now got to a position with these clauses where we can help to make sure that local housing authorities act at an early stage. We do not want—I think this is true right across the House—a single individual or family to be told by their local housing authority, “Yes, you may be threatened with homelessness. Go back to your home, stay put and wait until the court action follows and the bailiffs arrive.” That is completely against the spirit of the Bill and is against what everyone wants to see. If we get to a point where landlords are taking tenants to court, gaining possession orders and getting bailiffs and county court judgments against tenants, those tenants, who will then be evicted and face huge costs, will be extremely unlikely to get accommodation in the private rented sector ever again.

In correcting this position, we have to end the bad practice followed by some local authorities—by no means all—of telling tenants to go back and stay put. It is important, above all else, that individuals who are faced with homelessness can get help and advice from the word go, once they approach the local housing authority. The clarifications proposed by my hon. Friend the Minister ensure that the local authority is not allowed to end its duty on reaching the technical position where the 56 days has expired. That is a very positive move.

The rest of the amendments in this group reflect the changes that we made to clause 7 in Committee. Once again, they ensure that protections are in place for applicants.

11.30 am

Andy Burnham: The hon. Gentleman says that the protections are in place for applicants. Amendment 2 guarantees a tenancy of at least six months. As I understand it, that is a reduction in the current level, which is at least 12 months. I am not saying that this is necessarily wrong, but I would like him to comment on it. Often, because of the complexity in their life, people at least need security in their tenancy so that they can sort out other problems that they may have. Is six months really...
long enough? Might it not lead to repeat homelessness as people do not have that longer-term security behind them?

Bob Blackman: This has been discussed during the Select Committee’s homelessness inquiry, in the Bill Committee, and during our debates not only in this place but outside it with the various organisations involved. I am very keen that tenancies should be longer than six months, but I am also mindful of the fact that we do not want to get to a point whereby we reduce the amount of accommodation that could be available for people in this vulnerable group. I am equally certain that we do not want to get to a point, as we could have done during some of the debates, where we have an unrighteous circle, as it were, of people becoming homeless, being put in accommodation by a local authority, their tenancy coming to an end, and back they go to being homeless—it just becomes a repeat cycle. We are all committed to wanting to end that cycle. We do not get the opportunity to change legislation on homelessness very often. As I said, it has been 40 years since such legislation was introduced. We therefore want to put in the minimum standards so that, if necessary, the law can be changed by regulation to increase the period. We want a bare minimum to start with.

Andy Burnham: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I accept that we would see six months as a minimum, but why cap it at 12 months in the amendment? If we want a minimum standard, that is fine, but why put an upper limit on it?

Bob Blackman: The Minister will explain that when he winds up. In certain clauses, there is provision for 12-month tenancies, and during our debates we reduced the position to six months with a cap of 12 months. The right hon. Gentleman should remember, though, that a variety of duties are addressed in the Bill: the relief duty, the prevent duty, and the duty owed to priority-need applicants. The predominant aim has always been not to place priority-need families in a worse position than applicants. The predominant aim has always been not to place priority-need families in a worse position than applicants. The predominant aim has always been not to place priority-need families in a worse position than applicants.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for introducing this Bill. The predominant aim has always been not to place priority-need families in a worse position than applicants. The predominant aim has always been not to place priority-need families in a worse position than applicants.

Bob Blackman: If my hon. Friend would like to go through the 18 pages of the Bill, he will find that people leaving the armed forces are specifically mentioned as being owed a duty under it. Under the armed forces covenant, they should already be provided with accommodation and with help and assistance from their relevant local authority, but there is a new duty on the armed forces to refer people who are leaving to the relevant local authority so that they get help and assistance early on rather than having to seek advice separately. Someone who is leaving the armed forces, as a planned move, should be referred to their relevant local authority, which of course may not be where they are currently based as a member of the armed forces.

I am particularly pleased that the Minister has proposed in his amendments that the requirement for interim accommodation is continued until any reviews are completed. One of the key aspects of the Bill, from my perspective, is to make sure that applicants who are facing an absolute crisis point in their lives, many of whom are becoming homeless for the first time ever, are not put in a position whereby they are told by a local authority, “This is what you’re going to have—take it or leave it.” It is absolutely imperative that there is an agreement between the applicant and the local authority. If the local housing authority acts in an unfair way from the perspective of the applicant, there must also be a process whereby they can seek external help or assistance from appropriate charities in order to get a review to make sure that they are given the proper help and advice and end up being in a position to be offered accommodation.

I welcome these amendments and hope the whole House will support them.

Mr Betts: When we discuss a Bill on Report, there are times when we find ourselves dealing with an awful lot of Government amendments and suspect that Ministers are trying, at the last minute, to slide one or two contentious issues past the House under the radar, thinking that people might miss them due to the great complexity of our discussions—[ Interruption. ] I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) never did that when he was a Minister, as he has just indicated. This, however, is not one of those occasions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said, there has been a great deal of discussion not only in the House, by Members on both sides, but outside it with the charities arguing the case for homeless people, the Local Government Association and landlards, among others, to try to get this right. It is important that we do get it right, even though the process has taken a bit longer than some of us would have wished.

Once again, I pay tribute to the diligence and forbearance of the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) in trying to get us moving forward in a consensual manner on these issues. As he said, it took us a long time to get to this version of clause 1, which has appeared in many formats. It goes to the heart of the concerns that many of us have about the workings of existing legislation. One of the worst aspects of the way in which homeless families are currently treated—even those who are acknowledged to have a priority need—is that they are told to go away, sit at home and wait for the court to hear their case, and that then the authority may act, once a court order has been made, to deal with their situation. In the very worst cases, they are told, “Wait until the bailiff has arrived and while you are out on the street, we might decide to deal with you as a homeless family.” That situation is not acceptable, so it is important that it changes as a result of this Bill. The hon. Gentleman said that, importantly, the 56-day provision will not end responsibility—the prevention duty continues beyond that time if a family does not yet have settled circumstances.

I had concerns that the specific requirement to deal with homelessness once a section 21 notice had been served, rather than allowing the matter to get to court,
[Mr Betts]

which was in a previous version of clause 1, had been taken out. I accept that the requirement for local authorities to exercise the prevention duty means that as soon as a section 21 notice is served and the family provide the local authority with that information, the duty kicks in and the local authority immediately has to seek to resolve the family’s homelessness and look for alternative accommodation for them.

The code of guidance, which was discussed at length in the Bill Committee—I had a discussion about it with the Minister outside the room and then we referred to it in Committee—will be important to make it clear to local authorities how they should treat a family who are subject to a section 21 notice and in priority need. They will need to make sure that they do not get to the court stage before action is taken. It is also important for making sure that an offer acknowledges, as far as possible, an individual family’s circumstances with regard to the schooling of children, the employment of family members, caring responsibilities and so on. Moreover, if a family have to be offered accommodation outside the borough, the receiving borough has to be notified that they are coming. Many of those important issues are in the existing code of guidance, but authorities have not implemented the code or addressed them.

We all hope that the Bill will be enacted before long. The Minister said helpfully in Committee that he will present the code of guidance to Parliament for approval, which is welcome. Our Select Committee has said that we will quickly arrange an evidence session on the code because we want to make sure that it is right. Getting the Act right but having a code of guidance that does not work will leave us no better off; getting both of them right will make the situation much better so that local authorities are able to address the issue of homeless families. I hope that Ministers will welcome that as another way in which the Select Committee can play a constructive role in this private Member’s Bill process by ensuring that the legislation has cross-party support and really works for homeless people.

Bob Blackman: I thank the hon. Gentleman—I shall call him my hon. Friend—for giving way. We look forward to the publication of the code of guidance once the Bill is enacted. The Bill also makes provision for issuing statutory codes of practice, so if local authorities fail to live up to both the spirit and the letter of the law, the Secretary of State will have the opportunity to impose on them a requirement to do what we expect them to do.

Mr Betts: That is very helpful. The Select Committee might well want to extend its remit and look at those codes of practice as well to make sure that everything is working. Indeed, the Minister has gone further by saying that he wants local authorities to indicate to the Government how they intend to implement the Bill. Ministers want to work with the LGA to get templates for how elements of the Bill, including giving advice to individuals who are not in priority need, should be implemented. Those are welcome measures and the LGA will want to be thoroughly involved in the process. With those comments about the issues that will need to be addressed once the Bill becomes an Act, I am happy to support the Government amendments.

Mr Marcus Jones: I will start by responding to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). Significant concerns were raised on Second Reading, particularly with regard to the views of the Residential Landlords Association. In keeping with the spirit of the way in which this legislation has been developed, significant work took place to try to resolve that issue so that the Bill would not be put at risk during the parliamentary process. That work was done in conjunction with not just the RLA, but a number of charities and the LGA.

We want to get the registration right. I acknowledge that it would have been desirable to consider these amendments in Committee. Unfortunately, however, due to the challenges—some of them have been outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman)—in getting to a position in which the Bill works across the housing sector, it has taken some time to get where we are today, but I think we now have a good product, so to speak.

I thank not only the RLA and the LGA, but the various charities that have made a contribution. I also thank my hon. Friend for his patience and my officials for working tirelessly and at all hours to tie things up with various organisations and to achieve a good outcome.

Andy Burnham: On Government amendment 2, which I asked the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) about, why cap the tenancy at 12 months? That seems to encourage local authorities to offer shorter-term tenancies, rather than making standard offers of longer-term tenancies. The Select Committee did not recommend a 12-month cap, so why have the Government inserted such a provision?

Mr Jones: If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will make the points that I was going to make and then I will directly address his point.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith mentioned Shelter’s concerns about clause 1. I assure him that we reached agreement with Shelter and other organisations that the clause would be acceptable before it was drafted and before the amendments were tabled. He also mentioned costs, about which we had a long debate in Committee. I note that he has been reassured by comments today, given his willingness to withdraw new clause 1. I undertook to consider further amendments and, once the Bill has been amended, I will be more than willing to share with the House what the additional costs will be.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) will be reassured that there is no upper limit. The reference to 12 months means that the minimum length of tenancy can be increased to 12 months through regulations. Basically, if the rental market changed and we were in a position to change legislation to reflect a 12-month rather than six-month tenancy, that provision would give us the flexibility to do so. It does not put a maximum cap on the tenancy that can be secured. If a local authority is able to secure a three-year tenancy because that is what a landlord is offering, people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness would be able to take up that offer of a longer tenancy. I hope that that reassures him.

I thank my hon. Friend—I nearly went too far. I am not sure that “hon. Friend” would be the right term, bearing in mind that I have another appearance before the Select Committee on Monday, but I thank the hon.
Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) for the part that he has played on the Committee. I thank him and the hon. Member for Harrow East, as well as other Members, especially the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), for the work that they have been willing to do behind the scenes to get the Bill to this point.

The hon. Member for Sheffield South East talked about the code of guidance, and it is critical that we get that right. As he knows, the code of guidance will be updated. The Bill includes a commitment to put that before the House, and we will work with the LGA on that code to ensure that we get it as right as we can. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East pointed out, the Bill contains powers to put in place a code of practice, so the Secretary of State can reinforce any part that he has played on the Committee. I thank him and the hon. Member for Hammersmith, as well as the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) for the work that they have been willing to do behind the scenes to get the Bill to this point.

Amendment 1 agreed to.

Amendments made: 2, page 6, line 11, after “accommodation” insert “and, on the date of refusal, there was a reasonable prospect that suitable accommodation would be available for occupation by the applicant for at least 6 months or such longer period not exceeding 12 months as may be prescribed”.

This amendment provides that a local housing authority can only bring the duty in section 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 4) to an end on the basis that the applicant has refused an offer of suitable accommodation, if on the date of the refusal there was a reasonable prospect that suitable accommodation would be available for 6 months or such longer period not exceeding 12 months as may be prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State.

Amendment 3, page 6, line 22, at end insert—

“(9) The duty under subsection (2) can also be brought to an end under sections 193A and 193B (notices in cases of applicant’s deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate),”.

(Mr Marcus Jones.)

This amendment inserts, into section 195 of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 4), a reference to sections 193A and 193B of that Act (inserted by clause 7) under which the duty in section 195(2) can be brought to an end.

Clause 5

DUTIES OWED TO THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS

Amendments made: 4, page 7, line 45, after “accommodation” insert “and, on the date of refusal, there was a reasonable prospect that suitable accommodation would be available for occupation by the applicant for at least 6 months or such longer period not exceeding 12 months as may be prescribed”.

This amendment provides that a local housing authority can only bring the duty in section 198B(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 5) to an end on the basis that the applicant has refused an offer of suitable accommodation, if on the date of the refusal there was a reasonable prospect that suitable accommodation would be available for 6 months or such longer period not exceeding 12 months as may be prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State.

Amendment 5, page 8, line 9, at end insert—

“(a) section 193ZA (consequences of refusal of final accommodation offer or final Part 6 offer at the initial relief stage), or

(b) sections 193A and 193B (notices in cases of applicant’s deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate).”

This amendment inserts, into section 189B of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 5), a reference to section 193ZA (inserted by amendment 10), and sections 193A and 193B of that Act (inserted by clause 7), under which the duty in section 189B(2) can be brought to an end.

Amendment 6, page 8, line 18, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

“(a) for subsection (1) substitute—

(1) If the local housing authority have reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need, they must secure that accommodation is available for the applicant’s occupation.

(1ZA) In a case in which the local housing authority conclude their inquiries under section 184 and decide that the applicant does not have a priority need

(a) where the authority decide that they do not owe the applicant a duty under section 189B(2), the duty under subsection (1) comes to an end when the authority notify the applicant of that decision, or

(b) otherwise, the duty under subsection (1) comes to an end upon the authority notifying the applicant of their decision that, upon the duty under section 189B(2) coming to an end, they do not owe the applicant any duty under section 190 or 193.

(1ZB) In any other case, the duty under subsection (1) comes to an end upon the later of—

(a) the duty owed to the applicant under section 189B(2) coming to an end or the authority notifying the applicant that they have decided that they do not owe the applicant a duty under that section, and

(b) the authority notifying the applicant of their decision as to whether they owe the applicant any duty under the following provisions of this Part upon the duty under section 189B(2) coming to an end.”;

See amendment 8. This amendment also makes the circumstances in which the interim duty to provide accommodation under section 188(1) of the Housing Act 1996 comes to an end where the local housing authority decide that the applicant does not have a priority need.

Amendment 7, page 8, line 26, leave out “for” to end of line 27 and insert

“pending a decision of the kind referred to in subsection (1)” substitute “until the later of paragraph (a) or (b) of subsection (1ZB).”

See amendments 6 and 8.

Amendment 8, page 8, line 27, at end insert “;

(2A) For the purposes of this section, where the applicant requests a review under section 2021(1)(b) of the authority’s decision as to the suitability of accommodation offered to the applicant by way of a final accommodation offer or a final Part 6 offer (within the meaning of section 193ZA), the authority’s duty to the applicant under section 189B(2) is not to be taken to have come to an end under section 193ZA(2) until the decision on the review has been notified to the applicant.

(3) Otherwise, the duty under this section comes to an end in accordance with subsections (1ZA) to (1A), regardless of any review requested by the applicant under section 202.

But the authority may secure that accommodation is available for the applicant’s occupation pending a decision on review.”;”

(Mr Marcus Jones.)

This amendment, together with amendments 6 and 7, ensure that any interim duty of a local housing authority under section 188 of the Housing Act 1996 to accommodate an applicant continues pending the conclusion of a review of the suitability of accommodation offered in a final accommodation offer or a final Part 6 offer under section 193ZA of that Act (inserted by amendment 10).
Clause 6

DUTIES TO HELP TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION

Amendment made: 9, page 11, leave out lines 14 to 16 and insert—

'(3) For the purposes of this section, a local housing authority’s duty under section 189B(2) or 195(2) is a function of the authority to secure that accommodation is available for the occupation of a person only if the authority decide to discharge the duty by securing that accommodation is so available.”. —(Mr Marcus Jones.)

This amendment ensures that where a local housing authority decides to discharge their duty under section 189B(2) or 195(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clauses 5 and 4, respectively) by actually securing that accommodation is available for occupation by the applicant, sections 206 to 209 of that Act apply. Those sections contain various provisions about how a local housing authority’s housing functions are to be discharged.

Clause 7

DELIBERATE AND UNREASONABLE REFUSAL TO CO-OPERATE: DUTY UPON GIVING OF NOTICE

Mr Marcus Jones: I beg to move amendment 10, page 11, line 19, at end insert—

193ZA Consequences of refusal of final accommodation offer or final Part 6 offer at the initial relief stage

(1) Subsections (2) and (3) apply where—

(a) a local housing authority owe a duty to an applicant under section 189B(2), and

(b) the applicant, having been informed of the consequences of refusal and of the applicant’s right to request a review of the suitability of the accommodation, refuses—

(i) a final accommodation offer, or

(ii) a final Part 6 offer.

(2) The authority’s duty to the applicant under section 189B(2) comes to an end.

(3) Section 193 (the main housing duty) does not apply.

(4) An offer is a “final accommodation offer” if—

(a) it is an offer of an assured shorthold tenancy made by a private landlord to the applicant in relation to any accommodation which is, or may become, available for the applicant’s occupation,

(b) it is made, with the approval of the authority, in pursuance of arrangements made by the authority in the discharge of their duty under section 189B(2), and

(c) the tenancy being offered is a fixed term tenancy (within the meaning of Part 1 of the Housing Act 1988) for a period of at least 6 months.

(5) A “final Part 6 offer” is an offer of accommodation under Part 6 (allocation of housing) that—

(a) is made in writing by the authority in the discharge of their duty under section 189B(2), and

(b) states that it is a final offer for the purposes of this section.

(6) The authority may not approve a final accommodation offer, or make a final Part 6 offer, unless they are satisfied that the accommodation is suitable for the applicant and that subsection (7) does not apply.

(7) This subsection applies to an applicant if—

(a) the applicant is under contractual or other obligations in respect of the applicant’s existing accommodation, and

(b) the applicant is not able to bring those obligations to an end before being required to take up the offer.”

This amendment provides that a local housing authority’s duty to an applicant under section 189B(2) of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 5) comes to an end, and the applicant does not proceed to the main duty under section 193 of that Act, if the applicant refuses a final offer of an assured shorthold tenancy of at least 6 months or an offer of social housing under Part 6 of that Act. In either case, the offer would have to be of accommodation that is suitable for the applicant.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government Amendment 11, page 11, leave out lines 29 and 30

This amendment, and amendments 12 and 13, limit the grounds on which a notice can be given under new section 193A of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 7), so that it can only be given if the applicant deliberately and unreasonably refuses to take a step that the applicant agreed to take, or that was recorded, under new section 189A of that Act (inserted by clause 3).

Government Amendment 12, page 12, leave out lines 9 to 11

See amendment 11.

Government Amendment 13, page 12, line 16, leave out from “refuse” to “after” in line 17 and insert “to take any such step”

See amendment 11.

Government Amendment 14, page 13, line 16, after “made” insert “by a private landlord”

This amendment, and amendments 15 and 16, make it clear that a final offer of an assured shorthold tenancy would not be made by the local housing authority itself, but rather be made by a private landlord and approved by the authority. A local housing authority cannot grant an assured shorthold tenancy - see sections 1 and 19A of, and paragraph 12 of Schedule 1 to, the Housing Act 1988.

Government Amendment 15, page 13, line 19, leave out “by or”

See amendment 14.

Government Amendment 16, page 13, line 29, leave out from “not” to “unless” in line 30 and insert “approve a final accommodation offer, or make a final Part 6 offer,”

See amendment 14.

Amendment 17, page 13, line 39, after “if” insert “—

(a) section 193ZA(3) disapplies this section, or

(b) “

This amendment inserts, into section 193 of the Housing Act 1996, a reference to section 193ZA of that Act (inserted by amendment 10), under which section 193 can be disapplied.

Government Amendment 18, in clause 9, page 15, line 6, after “section” insert “193ZA or”

This amendment allows an applicant to request a review of a local housing authority’s decision as to the suitability of accommodation offered to the applicant by way of a final accommodation offer or a final Part 6 offer under section 193ZA of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by amendment 10).

Government Amendment 19, in clause 12, page 17, line 22, after “section” insert “193ZA(6) or”

This amendment applies the provision in article 3 of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 (S.I. 2012/2601), about when accommodation is to be regarded as unsuitable, to a decision by a local housing authority as to whether they should approve a final accommodation offer by a private landlord for the purposes of section 193ZA of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by amendment 10).
Government Amendment 20, in clause 12, page 17, line 26, leave out “vulnerable person” and insert “person who has a priority need”

This amendment applies the provision in article 3 of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 ([S.I. 2012]2601), about when accommodation is to be regarded as unsuitable, to accommodation secured by a local housing authority, in discharge of their duty under section 189B(2) or 195(2) (inserted by clauses 5 and 4, respectively), for all persons who have a priority need rather than just “vulnerable persons”.

Government Amendment 21, in clause 12, page 17, leave out lines 32 to 37 See amendment 20. This amendment removes the definition of “vulnerable person”.

Mr Jones: This is the last set of Government amendments and I am grateful for the forbearance of the House. As I explained on the last group, we identified a number of issues with clause 7 that we were unfortunately unable to resolve in Committee. This group contains the core corrections to clause 7. We have already discussed the related amendments to clauses 4, 5 and 6, and this group also contains related amendments to clauses 9 and 12.

Amendment 10 delivers an important change, and has been laid following extensive discussion with the local government sector and with Crisis and Shelter. It deals with the consequences for applicants of refusing offers of accommodation made by the local housing authority during the relief duty. The Bill already provides that the local housing authority can bring the relief duty to an end if an applicant refuses an offer of suitable accommodation. The applicant can then go on to the main homelessness duty under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996, if they are owed it. We believe it is right that where an applicant is made a suitable offer under the relief duty, they should not be able to move into the main duty by refusing that offer. That is an important part of the balance between rights and responsibilities for applicants. However, it is also essential that, if the offer is intended to be the applicant’s final offer, appropriate safeguards are in place.

Amendment 10 provides that where an applicant refuses an offer and the relief duty is ended, the applicant will not proceed to the main duty, but that will apply only if the offer reaches a particular standard. The offer must be either a final accommodation offer or a final part 6 offer, and the applicant must be informed of the consequences of refusing and of their right to request a review of the suitability of the accommodation. A final part 6 offer is a suitable offer of social housing. A final accommodation offer is an offer of an assured shorthold tenancy with a term of at least six months in the private rented sector.

Amendments 14, 15 and 16 clarify that a final offer of an assured shorthold tenancy made to an applicant who has refused to co-operate will be made by a private landlord. This clarification brings the clause in line with other provisions relating to private rented sector offers in the homelessness legislation.

Amendments 17, 18 and 19 reflect the relevant changes introduced by clause 10 to the relevant parts of the Bill, including providing that the applicant can request a review of the suitability of the accommodation and that appropriate suitability requirements apply.

The last set of amendments to clause 7 relate to another issue we identified during Committee stage. At the moment, clause 7 is drafted in a way that means that the definition of deliberate and unreasonable co-operation is drawn more widely than we intended, covering co-operation with the local housing authority in the exercise of its functions under the prevention and relief duties. Amendments 11, 12 and 13 make it clear that the provisions apply only when the applicant’s refusal to co-operate relates specifically to the steps set out in their personalised plan.

Finally, on amendments 20 and 21, clause 12 amends article 3 of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012. Article 3 currently requires that when a local housing authority approves an offer in the private rented sector for those in priority need under the main homelessness duty, additional checks are required to ensure the property is in reasonable physical condition, is safe and is a well-managed property. Those additional checks are extended by clause 12 to those defined as vulnerable persons and to secured accommodation in the private rented sector under the new homelessness prevention and relief duties.

Hon. Members on both sides of the Committee were concerned that the protection did not go wider. In particular, the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) suggested that other types of applicant should be afforded this protection, including families with children and pregnant women. These concerns were echoed by my hon. Friends the Members for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), for Colchester (Will Quince), for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) and for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan). I have listened carefully, and I am pleased to bring forward amendments 20 and 21 to provide that these additional checks be made in respect of all those with a priority need where the local housing authority secures private rented sector property under the new prevention and relief duties.

In conclusion, this is an unusually long list of amendments for the Report stage of a private Member’s Bill, but I have worked closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), the local government sector and homelessness charities to ensure that the Bill is fit for purpose, and I want again to thank them all for their efforts in putting together what is now a very strong package.

12 pm

Andy Slaughter: The purpose of the amendments is to clarify and give certainty, where required, to certain provisions in the Bill and, in some cases, to correct drafting or extend the ambit of clauses. We have no problem with any of the amendments, and I am pleased to say, having just reread the briefing from the local government and charities sides, that although one side supports them more than the other, as one would expect, both agree that they should go forward as a package.

Amendment 10 makes it clear when the interim duty comes to an end, about which the LGA and others have been anxious for certainty. Amendments 20 and 21, which the Minister just referred to, were particularly called for by Shelter and in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), who led for the Opposition on that part of the Bill. I am pleased the Government have tabled the amendments
because they address a key point by providing that all priority need households be included, rather than just those that are vulnerable, which clears up an important omission. One side, in particular, favoured the amendments, but all sides are at least content with them.

Another thing the amendments, particularly amendments 10, 20 and 21, have in common is that they incur costs. The Minister said, slightly coyly, that when the amendments passed, he would return to the matter of costs. I hope that means on Third Reading, because, from what I have heard, I assume the amendments will pass in a few moments. The costs will not be negligible. Obviously, he goes into this with his eyes open, but it would be helpful if we had an update today or at least were told when we will have it. We need to be certain not only about what the Bill means—that it addresses the key points—but that it will be fully funded.

With those comments, I need not prolong the debate, because we have gone through the amendments with the Minister and the officials, and I think we have a pretty keen understanding of why they are necessary and should form part of the Bill.

Bob Blackman: I am delighted to rise for the last time on Report in support of a group of amendments. My hon. Friend the Minister introduced them at length, so I will keep my remarks to the pertinent points. I thank him and the officials for all their work in getting us to the point of these detailed amendments. I am sure that all would agree that it has been a long and almost tortuous journey to identify the different issues with clause 7, but we have worked patiently and appropriately with the LGA, Crisis and, in particular, Shelter to resolve the issues such that everyone now supports the amended clause 7, as the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) pointed out.

As I said earlier, we did not want a change in the law to put priority-need families in an even worse position than they were already in. We wanted to enable single homeless people, and others who were not currently owed a statutory duty, to be given help and advice and an offer of suitable accommodation. At present, that accommodation will almost certainly be in the private sector, but it is up to local authorities to establish whether they can find a social rented property to provide for such people.

I particularly welcome amendments 20 and 21. As we heard from the Minister, in Committee there were representations—not least from the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), who kicked off on the issue—about the scope of what is now clause 12 in relation to the suitability of offers in the private sector. Ideally, local authorities would inspect and approve every single offer to every potential tenant, but during the pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill we decided that the cost to them would be beyond what was reasonable. We therefore focused on priority need, and, indeed, vulnerable people. I am delighted that the Minister has found a way of extending the provision to all those people, not least pregnant women.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): We have all managed to make this part of the Bill sound very technical, but it seems to me that what it basically means is that the quality of private rented homes offered to families will improve, which is something that a great many people want to happen. Is that the hon. Gentleman’s understanding as well?

Bob Blackman: Obviously, we do not want families or individuals who are reaching a crisis point in their lives, having become homeless, to be placed in completely unsuitable accommodation, or with rogue landlords who are unsuitable people to be offering accommodation in the first place, and it should be the duty of local authorities to ensure that that does not happen. The amendments will ensure that the current position is corrected for the benefit of society. Ideally, no one would ever be offered unsuitable accommodation, but, as I think we all recognise, that is sometimes the case.

Clause 7 deals with “an applicant’s deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate”. A balance needed to be struck. As the Bill’s promoter, I must make it abundantly clear that homeless people will not be able to just turn up to their local housing authority and say, “You have a duty to find me somewhere to live”, and then fold their arms and wait for it to happen. They will have a duty to co-operate with the plan and carry out the actions required under it, and if they fail to do so, the housing authority will be able to terminate its duty. So there are duties on both sides, which must be right.

Equally, however, I do not want applicants to be unfairly penalised for some minor discrepancy. For example, if an applicant missed an appointment because of a need to visit a doctor or hospital, or as a result of some other commitment, it would be unfair and unreasonable for a local authority to penalise that individual. As the Minister has explained, the review process will be tightened to ensure that people receive written notices and are given an opportunity to review any unfair decision. That strikes the right balance, ensuring that applicants can receive a service—help and advice, and an offer in the private or socially rented sector—while also requiring them to take actions themselves.

I am grateful to the Minister for his time and forbearance, particularly in respect of that issue, which has occupied a substantial amount of time for all concerned. The compromise that has been reached will improve the Bill yet further and ensure that all people who have a priority need, and indeed those who do not, are secured private rented accommodation under these new homelessness relief duties. It will also ensure that those additional suitability checks will be carried out by the local housing authority to ensure that the property is safe and well managed. On that basis, I trust that all hon. Members will support these and the other amendments that the Minister has brought forward, so that we have a suitable package of measures to present to the other place, it will see the wisdom of our lengthy debates and close scrutiny of these proposals, and view them as a package of measures that together improve the lot of those people who are homeless.

Mr Marcus Jones: I would like to respond to several of the matters raised by colleagues.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) mentioned the work with the LGA around amendment 10. He is correct on that, as he is on amendments 20 and 21,
in relation to the concerns of the charities, particularly Shelter. He showed that he is extremely sharp when he raised the point about costs and the comments I made earlier about when I would bring forward further details of the additional cost incurred due to amendments that have been made to the Bill this morning. Indeed, my intention was to bring those costs to the House once the Bill had been amended. I will not tease the hon. Gentleman any further. In a few minutes, I hope to be giving further detail on the cost.

Before I conclude, I want to correct one point I made this morning when we dealt with the second group of amendments and I was responding to the points made by the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). He raised the issue of the code of guidance and it being put before the House. I inadvertently said that the code of guidance would be put before the House. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recall from all those long Committee sittings that it is in the legislation that the code of practice will come before the House, rather than the code of guidance. However, I will seek to reassure my hon. Friend, or rather the hon. Gentleman—I was straying into risky territory again, there. I want to reassure him by saying that we would certainly welcome his Committee’s involvement in relation to the consultation on the revised code of guidance that will come out of the provisions in the Bill.

Mr Betts: I thank the Minister for that helpful clarification. The Committee will try to play a constructive role in that. We welcome the code of guidance coming to us, and we will as quickly as possible take a look at it and get comments back to him. Equally, if the code of practice is coming to the House, we will probably want to play a role as part of that formal process as well.

Mr Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. As ever during this process, he has sought to use a very constructive tone in the debate and has shown pragmatism. We have been able to all work together; that goes for the Opposition Front-Bench team, too. It has not been easy at times, but there has been a pragmatic approach to making sure that we get this legislation into a good place and to the other end of the Corridor, thereby encouraging noble Lords to support not just the amendments dealt with today, but the overall Bill as a significant package towards helping people who are at risk of becoming homeless, or who do indeed become homeless.

Amendment 10 agreed to.

Amendments made: 11, page 11, leave out lines 29 and 30. This amendment, and amendments 12 and 13, limit the grounds on which a notice can be given under new section 193A of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by clause 7), so that it can only be given if the applicant deliberately and unreasonably refuses to take a step that the applicant agreed to take, or that was recorded, under new section 189A of that Act (inserted by clause 3).

Amendment 12, page 12, leave out lines 9 to 11. See amendment 11.

Amendment 13, page 12, line 16, leave out from “refuse” to “after” in line 17 and insert—

“to take any such step”.

See amendment 11.

Amendment 14, page 13, line 16, after “made” insert “by a private landlord”.

This amendment, and amendments 15 and 16, make it clear that a final offer of an assured shorthold tenancy would not be made by the local housing authority itself, but rather be made by a private landlord and approved by the authority. A local housing authority cannot grant an assured shorthold tenancy—see sections 1 and 19A of, and paragraph 12 of Schedule 1 to, the Housing Act 1988.

Amendment 15, page 13, line 19, leave out “by or”.

See amendment 14.

Amendment 16, page 13, line 29, leave out from “not” to “unless” in line 30 and insert—

“approve a final accommodation offer, or make a final Part 6 offer”.

See amendment 14.

Amendment 17, page 13, line 39, after “if” insert—

(a) section 193ZA(3) disapplies this section, or

(b) “—”—(Mr Marcus Jones.

This amendment inserts, into section 193 of the Housing Act 1996, a reference to section 193ZA of that Act (inserted by amendment 10), under which section 193 can be disapplied.

Clause 9

REVI EWS

Amendment made: 18, page 15, line 6, after “section” insert “193ZA or”—(Mr Marcus Jones.

This amendment allows an applicant to request a review of a local housing authority’s decision as to the suitability of accommodation offered to the applicant by way of a final accommodation offer or a final Part 6 offer under section 193ZA of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by amendment 10).

Clause 12

SU ITABILITY OF PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR AC COMMODATION

Amendments made: 19, page 17, line 22, after “section” insert “193ZA(6) or”.

This amendment applies the provision in article 3 of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 (S.I. 2012/2601), about when accommodation is to be regarded as unsuitable, to a decision by a local housing authority as to whether they should approve a final accommodation offer by a private landlord for the purposes of section 193ZA of the Housing Act 1996 (inserted by amendment 10).

Amendment 20, page 17, line 26, leave out “vulnerable person” and insert—

“person who has a priority need”.

This amendment applies the provision in article 3 of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 (S.I. 2012/2601), about when accommodation is to be regarded as unsuitable, to accommodation secured by a local housing authority in discharge of their duty under section 189B(2) or 195(2) (inserted by clauses 5 and 4, respectively), for all persons who have a priority need rather than just “vulnerable persons”.

Amendment 21, page 17, leave out lines 32 to 37.—

(Mr Marcus Jones)

See amendment 20. This amendment removes the definition of “vulnerable person”.

Third Reading

12.15 pm

Bob Blackman: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This is a very proud moment for me. Reaching this stage of the proceedings has been a long road. When my name was drawn out of the hat and I was No. 2 in the ballot, I needed to consider what issue to take on. I was
minded to choose something that would make a difference to thousands of people across the country. Little did I know how much work and effort would be involved in getting a Bill to this stage.

The expert panel was convened by Crisis in the summer of 2015. We then had the Communities and Local Government Select Committee inquiry last summer, to which many of us in the House contributed, plus its pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill in September, and finally an unprecedented seven Committee sittings, involving some 15 hours of debate. I think it is fair to say that no private Member’s Bill has ever been so well informed or well scrutinised. Indeed, it is unique among private Member’s Bills in that it has been the subject of a Select Committee inquiry and report and of pre-legislative scrutiny, and that it is the longest such Bill, with 13 clauses and 18 pages of detailed legalese. It will probably also be the most expensive private Member’s Bill, and I look forward to hearing good news in a few minutes’ time from the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) on the funds that could be allocated in addition to the £48 million that he has already set out.

I would like to thank a number of people and organisations who have been instrumental in bringing the Bill to this stage. It is clear that, although I am the promoter and leader of the Bill, this has been a team effort. The contribution of the Select Committee and its Chair, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), has been invaluable. We could not have got to this stage without their input. In particular, the Committee’s pre-legislative scrutiny provides an example that all hon. Members should consider, should they be fortunate in future private Members’ Bill ballots. Select Committee Members continued to offer their expertise to the Bill Committee, and I thank them for their time and constructive support.

I also want to put on record my thanks to all the members of the Bill Committee for their hard work and dedication. They asked constructive questions and scrutinised the proposed legislation in detail. The fact that 21 Government amendments have been tabled and passed today is a direct consequence of all the detailed work that was done to ensure that we got the Bill absolutely right.

The outcome of Bills such as this should not be left to a lottery. The Procedure Committee, on which I have the honour of serving, recommends that the first four private Members’ Bills be subject to a bidding process through the Backbench Business Committee so that well-researched Bills with cross-party support can get to the House without depending on the current lottery procedure.

I thank Crisis, which has supported me from the start and facilitated consultations right across the piece to ensure that the Bill was delivered properly. There has been huge interest from a whole host of groups from across the country. I thank the LGA, individual local authorities, Shelter, St Mungo’s, the National Landlords Association, the Residential Landlords Association and the many others that have written or spoken to me about the Bill. Members from across the House will want to mention the charities and support groups that have provided much-needed help and assistance to rough sleepers and homeless people. The advice, work and challenges that I have received from the people at the sharp end have enabled me to ensure that this strong Bill is in the best possible shape to send to the House of Lords and that, critically, it will have long-lasting impact on people who suffer the crisis of being homeless.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for supporting and championing the Bill from the outset and for ensuring that we got the Government’s full support. Not only has he devoted a significant amount of his personal and ministerial time, but he secured resources from the officials to ensure that the Bill reached this point. He also followed through on his commitment to fund the new burdens associated with the Bill. The Government will be providing £48 million for local government to implement the new duties in the Bill. We do not know whether that will be sufficient to meet those new duties, but I am delighted that the Minister has committed to review the figure following not only the amendments that we have passed today, but the new burdens that we are placing on local authorities. I thank the Minister and all his officials for their work in getting the Bill to this point.

I want to put on the record my thanks to Martine Martin, my parliamentary assistant. For those who have not had the pleasure of meeting her, she has ensured that the whole process has remained smooth. Her calmness has kept me calm, and I owe her a particular debt of gratitude.

I also thank the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter)—something that is hard to do at times—and the Opposition members of the Bill Committee for ensuring that the Bill was well scrutinised and in good shape ahead of Report today. I thank all the hon. Members who are in the House today to wish Godspeed to the Bill so that it reaches the statute book as fast as possible. Many were here on Second Reading way back on 28 October, when we had some 39 speeches, and many have followed the Bill’s progress with interest, subjecting me to appropriate scrutiny and challenge on the details. As the hon. Member for Hammersmith pointed out earlier, I have rapidly become an expert in homelessness and housing law even though I have no legal background whatsoever.

I thank everyone for their time, effort and dedication, but we must remember that this is a process and that we are implementing a Bill that changes the law for the most vulnerable members of society. We must ensure that people who are sleeping rough or threatened with homelessness get the help and support from local authorities that they need and deserve. I have said from the word go that having one rough sleeper on our streets is a national disgrace; the fact that we have so many is something that we must end. Equally, I have said from the word go that the Bill, which will hopefully become an Act, will not deliver any new housing units, which is part and parcel of a new strategy that I look forward to the Government pursuing. What the Bill will do is change the law and the requirements on local authorities to ensure that they deliver help and advice to vulnerable people who need it at a crisis point in their life.

The Bill will also mean a massive culture change for local authorities, and we should not underestimate how much of a culture change it will be. I passionately believe that people enter public service to help people,
Andy Slaughter: I begin where the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), the Bill’s promoter, finished by wishing the Bill every success in completing its passage as it leaves for the other place. I also echo some of his thanks. I thank him for putting extraordinary effort into the Bill. I do not know how long he intends to stay in the House, but I suspect that, whenever he departs, the Bill will be one of the things about which he is most proud—it will be a lasting testament to his work—and I am sure that many of us envy him. Such praise is well deserved because he has had to put time and effort into the Bill. I suspect that he now thinks it was all worth it, but I bet there were times when he doubted that.

Obviously the Bill would not be where it is without the support of the Government, which should be acknowledged, as well as that from the official Opposition and others. The Minister has been particularly assiduous in pushing through the Bill. Although he may or may not reveal this in his speech, he has had difficulty with his colleagues in other Departments. The hon. Member for Harrow East will recognise the Minister’s personal devotion to the Bill, which he will count a success.

I extend my thanks to all Members on both sides of the House who have been involved. I particularly thank the Labour members of the Committee who are sitting behind me: my hon. Friends the Members for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), for Westminster North (Ms Buck) and for City of Chester (Christian Matheson). They shared the burden with me in Committee and brought their considerable expertise to our proceedings. I am sure that the Minister and the Bill’s promoter would say the same of Government Members. It has been a good session.

We must also acknowledge the various interest groups involved, not only because they stood up strongly for their interests, but because, in the end, they wanted the Bill to succeed. They include the landlords and charities, but we should not forget local government, because it is local government that will have to execute the provisions of the Bill and on which its burdens fall. It knows more than anybody else the difficulties in dealing with homelessness, given the levels of funding and demand.

The officers and councillors who are at the sharp end deserve our thanks. Some do fail—many do their very best under difficult circumstances. That is true of my own council and, I am sure, of many others. The Bill has been a collective effort, and my final mention is to the Communities and Local Government Committee. Its work has formed the bedrock of the Bill and the basis on which it can go forward.

As the hon. Member for Harrow East said, our proceedings have been something of a template for the way in which complex private Member’s Bills can go forward. I, like him, hope that it can be a precedent for a change to just not just the House’s procedures, but the way in which the Government approach private Member’s Bills. It might change the way in which some of our colleagues approach such Bills, but perhaps that is a matter for another day.

As we have discussed the Bill for so long, it is quite easy to gloss over what it does. It does several fundamental things, such as introducing the prevention duty. Although, as we have heard, that is nothing new—the previous Labour Government encouraged that approach through legislation, and it is also encouraged by best practice in local government—the Bill puts the matter clearly and firmly into statute. That is a major change to the way in which homelessness is addressed.

The Bill also extends the relief duty to anybody who is homeless. Although the assistance to be given to those who are non-priority homeless cannot, for reasons of resources, be as comprehensive as it is for those who are priority homeless, that is, again, a significant change.

Let us not forget the duty to co-operate, about which we have had quite an extensive discussion. Perhaps the co-operation that will be required does not go as far as some of us would have liked—my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East moved an amendment relating to that in Committee—but local authorities cannot avoid their responsibilities. We know that the homelessness sector and the charities have been working to perfect the way in which they deal with the complex needs of homeless people. Sometimes other institutions do a good job—those in the health service or probation, for example—but we really need everyone to step up to the plate. I am pleased that the duty to co-operate is in the Bill, but I hope we hear more about it as the codes are developed.

With the current pressures on the public sector, it is easy for people to say that these things are just too difficult. The reality is that a number of homeless people have been in mental health units or have just come out of prison. They need assistance, and that cannot come only from homelessness charities and local government. Everybody has to do their bit.

For those three reasons, among others, the Bill is a significant piece of legislation. I will not repeat what I said in the previous debate about what remains to be done, but let me mention just two things. First, when the White Paper is published, I would like to see in chapter 1 a commitment from the Government that is the same as that given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) before Christmas on behalf of a future Labour Government: rough sleeping will be eliminated over a single Parliament. Earlier this week, we saw shocking
figures showing that 4,134 people are sleeping rough in England. That is a 16% increase on the previous year, and a 134% increase since 2010. I could not have agreed more with the hon. Member for Harrow East when he said that one person in that situation is one too many, but 4,134 is a national disgrace. Nevertheless, it is a figure that we can manage.

Many other aspects of homelessness are getting much worse over time. Statutorily homeless households have increased by almost 50% since 2010, with the number now standing at just under 60,000. That is a huge problem, and while the difficulties with housing conditions such as overcrowding all need to be tackled, the first step has to be dealing with rough sleeping and the street homeless. I would love to hear from the Minister today that that will happen, but I will look particularly at whether the issue is addressed in the White Paper. I would not say that that would silence us—we will never quite be silenced—but it would be an effective way of dealing with the points that have been made throughout the passage of the Bill when we have said, “Yes, legislation is great and yes, this Bill does some great things, but in itself it is not going to build one more house or house one more person—it is words on a piece of paper.”

I plead with the Minister to do what I have said. I praise the initiative of the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne, in taking the lead, but he will be the first person to say congratulations if the Government go ahead with this.

There are so many aspects of the problem that need to be dealt with to start to tackle homelessness that we could think that it is all just too much. I was impressed by the briefing that Shelter sent to us, which highlighted two aspects. It said:

“we consider it inevitable that, to be able to help people under the new duties, councils with significant levels of existing homelessness will require not only additional resources but, more importantly, an adequate supply of accessible, affordable and suitable homes in the social or private rented sectors.”

That is self-evidently true. The two things that are at the top of Shelter’s wish list are:

“Reverse the freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates”;

and an

“indefinite suspension of the forced sale of high value council homes in areas with high levels of homelessness”.

Neither of those is going to solve the problem, and they might not even be the most effective steps that could be taken, but they are the two most obvious ways in which the Government are actively making the situation worse. It is very difficult to accept the Government’s wholehearted support for the Bill when at the same time they are pushing those measures through.

I say that with clear personal knowledge from my own constituency, where, when a Conservative council was in charge for eight years, social homes were regularly sold when they became vacant. Several hundred individual homes were simply sold off at market rates rather than being used to rehouse homeless families. That has created devastating problems, the consequences of which we are still suffering. If we see that replicated on a grand scale throughout the country through the sale of high-value council homes—in my borough it would mean, over time, 50% of council homes being sold off—the homelessness situation is going to become far worse.

Local housing allowance rates are utterly distorting local housing markets and leading to what the Minister, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and others have said today that they do not want to see: people being forced out of central London—and out of London and the south-east altogether—and separated entirely from their support networks, their families, their children’s schools and sometimes their jobs.

I am beginning to see another disturbing trend that I hoped never to see recurring. I shall refer to a case that I dealt with in my surgery only last week. Landlords are letting properties at rates that are just within local housing allowances, but they are doing so by letting properties that are unsafe and degrading, with no proper electricity and in danger of collapse. I never thought that I would see those housing conditions in this country.

The Government have to come to terms with the effects that their policies have on individual families living in the private rented sector. I beg them to look again at the freeze on the local housing allowance rate, because it is having a severely detrimental effect on thousands of families around the country.

We wish this good Bill well as it goes through its stages in the other place. We will do what we can to assist to ensure that it is enacted. I still look forward to the Minister’s comments about the extra funding, and I know that people in council finance departments all around the country are hanging on his every word about that. Let us celebrate the Bill today, but let us also be aware of how much we need to do if we are to tackle one of the worst crises in homelessness that we have experienced, certainly in my political lifetime, and one of the worst blights on our society.

12.40 pm

Pauline Latham: I rise to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on getting so close with this Bill, and with relative speed. Interestingly, most of our constituents will not understand that it is really hard to get private Members’ Bills to this stage and that very few such Bills make it to the end, so he has done incredibly well. Obviously, as he said earlier, he has had help from an awful lot of people, not least from a couple of Opposition Members whom he has already praised.

Cross-party work to help vulnerable people is one of the most important things that we as Members of Parliament do, and my hon. Friend was fortunate to be drawn high enough up the ballot to be given an opportunity to bring something into law.

Homelessness is a very difficult issue. Not many Members in this Chamber will remember “Cathy Come Home” or even Rachmanism, but it is clear that we have progressed hugely as we no longer see those sorts of problems on our streets and in private rented households today.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) talked about private landlords. I think that that problem is bigger in London than in places such as Mid Derbyshire. Our landlords are better sorted out by the local authorities than they are in London, which is a much harder market on which to focus.

I wish to return to an earlier point, which is that, when women are on the streets, they are one of the most vulnerable groups. Very often, they are on the streets
because they have been abused by their partners or their husbands. It is a very difficult situation when a vulnerable young woman—or a woman of any age—is thrown out on to the streets, or chooses to leave, and has to sleep rough. I have experience of that with a family member who, because she was being beaten up very severely, had to run away and sleep on the streets. In the end, she had to go back, because she had nowhere else to go—or so she thought. Eventually, she went back to her family. It was a very difficult situation. It does not matter where in the country vulnerable people are, they depend on the support mechanism to pick them up and help them out. Some people have nowhere to go. That may be due to the fact that they were in care as a child or are mentally ill. As constituency MPs, we know how many mentally ill people there are out there. They write to us on a regular basis on a range of issues because they do not know where else to go. Some of the most vulnerable people become homeless for those and many other reasons.

My hon. Friend talked about all the charities that helped him to prepare for this Bill. I pay tribute to many of the charities that I have worked with over the years in Derby city and Derbyshire. A huge number of people want to help the vulnerable, and I commend them for their work. An organisation called the Padley Centre in Derby helps vulnerable people not only by housing them overnight—and sometimes for extended periods—but by giving them additional skills so that they can eventually get a job as well as housing. Very often, the homeless out on the streets do not have a job because they have missed out on education.

At this time of year, the city centre churches come together so that a different church is open every night or every week; seven churches have participated. In that way, people do not have to sleep out in this really cold weather that we are experiencing at the moment. The initiative has been incredibly successful. Even the cathedral in Derby city has opened its doors to the homeless. Milestone House and Centenary House in Derby work hard with the homeless to support them and give them a roof over their heads. The YMCA, of course, has been going for many years and particularly helps young people, although it also helps others as well.

I am sure that all those organisations will appreciate the Bill’s coming into law. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East said that he felt proud standing in the Chamber today talking about his Bill and about having got so close. So he should: he should accept the praise he deserves. His Bill is tackling a problem that many people would like to have addressed but never have. I am pleased that this Conservative Government are supporting him.

Women are more vulnerable when they are out on the streets. There are fewer places where they feel safe to go and ask for help because of the predominance of men. I clearly remember coming across a woman while walking through the centre of Derby after a council meeting. I do not generally give money to beggars on the streets because I would rather contribute to a charity that will help them. But this particular woman came up to me and said, “I’m in the middle of my period. I have no money, so I cannot buy any ‘Tampons.’” I had never thought about that, and I decided to give her the money. As every woman will appreciate, it must be very difficult for a woman on the streets to have a period and no money. Perhaps we forget about that. As I say, I did give her the money—whether it went on that or whether she bought drugs I will never know. I hope that it was a genuine call for help from this poor, young woman who looked freezing cold and needed help from people. I hope that the Bill will help such women.

Earlier I mentioned the family from Borrowash who found themselves homeless. They had been in a private rented house that burned down—when they were not there, fortunately. They had no insurance because they are very poor. Both parents work but they have four children and do not have any savings to fall back on. They have received some money through crowdfunding, which has helped them get back on their feet. They are the sort of people who have a problem when they are with private landlords. In such situations, it is, apparently, the landlord’s job to rehouse such families—but if there are no vacant houses, how can they, particularly if four children are involved?

I rang the Derbyshire County Council helpline, but all the people there were interested in was whether the children were being abused or vulnerable. All homeless children are vulnerable, of course, but so were the parents. I did not feel that the mechanisms to help were in place. Eventually, Derby City Council, which I would not normally praise for very much at all, stepped in and helped this couple with their children.

I am delighted that the Bill is to pass into law. I wholeheartedly support it. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East and many others have worked incredibly hard to get it on to the statute book and I commend him for his hard work. I support him, this Bill and the Minister.

12.49 pm

Mr Betts: This is obviously a time for congratulations, and I shall not disappoint, but we should still remember that, tonight, in this rich country, there will be people sleeping rough on our streets, individuals sleeping on sofas that belong to friends, families trying to live with relatives in overcrowded accommodation, and other families living in unacceptable and inadequate interim accommodation.

We also have to be careful not to give the impression that, as a result of this Bill, all these problems will be resolved. It will make a contribution to solving the homelessness problem, but it will not actually solve it. It will help to reduce homelessness—that is what the title of the Bill says—but it will not, of itself, solve the problem of homelessness.

However, congratulations are due, particularly to the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman)—on this occasion, I will reciprocate and call him my hon. Friend. We should not underestimate the amount of time, sheer hard work and effort that he and his staff have put into bringing the Bill to this stage, as well as the forbearance—there must have been times when he was tearing his hair out. [Interruption.] Yes, it’s the same with my hair. He must have been tearing his hair out at the complexities and at the need to get different competing forces together to take the Bill forward on a consensus basis. There have not necessarily been problems with getting consensus across this House, but there has been a lot of consensus-building to do outside, and everyone does not always see and appreciate that.
I express many thanks and congratulations from the whole House, I think, to the hon. Gentleman for what he has done.

The cross-party nature of proceedings extended right through the Bill Committee to all Members. That applied particularly to the Minister—[Interruption.] I thought for a minute that he had gone—that he had given up and left us to it, but he is still there. Throughout, he engaged with all members of the Committee. Where we had issues we needed exploring, he tried to deal with them in the Committee, but also outside—either himself or through his officials. That is really appreciated. Even today, he has suggested ways in which the Select Committee can continue to be involved in the code of practice, the code of guidance and the reviews. That is really constructive and helpful, and it shows a recognition of how the whole House can make a contribution.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who has obviously held the Government to account, and quite rightly, including on some broader issues today. Nevertheless, he has played a constructive and positive role. My hon. Friends the Members for Westminster North (Ms Buck) and for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who are here with me, also played their role.

I want to say a little about the Select Committee. It is good that, as well as the hon. Member for Harrow East and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood, the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) has seen this process right the way through. Indeed, I think I am right in saying that he first suggested that the Select Committee look at homelessness as the subject of a report. It was around a year ago that the Committee started taking evidence. Indeed, I have the report here—I carry it around with me at all times, of course—and we had our first hearing on Monday 14 March. It is appropriate that, on that occasion, some of our first witnesses were from Crisis, St Mungo’s and Shelter, and they have certainly been an important part of this whole process, along with other organisations.

As I mentioned on Second Reading, the way in which the Select Committee was involved from the beginning—doing our report and then the pre-legislative scrutiny—has not merely followed precedents, but actually set precedents for the House, and I hope those precedents will be followed on other occasions. That is very important, and the Committee will follow the Bill with a look at the new burdens review the Government are doing, at the code of practice—when it is produced—at the code of guidance and then at the two-year review of how the Act is operating.

Let me finish by saying that the Select Committee’s initial report looked at the wider issues. There is still the issue of the shortage of homes in this country. We are now doing an inquiry into the capacity of the house building industry, and as part of that we hope to ask Ministers questions about the housing White Paper. I think that the permanent secretary said when she came to the Select Committee two weeks ago that it will be available soon, and we hope it will be. The word “soon” has an expandable quality in Government circles, but I certainly hope it will be before the end of March.

Building enough homes, particularly homes that people can afford, or afford to rent, is absolutely crucial in dealing with the problem of homelessness in the long term. I will not go into issues about the sell-off of high-value assets, although it is interesting that the permanent secretary used the word “if” in relation to that when she came to talk to us. Of course, Ministers could not possibly comment, but let us hope that there may be substance to the word “if” on this occasion. We want co-operation in dealing with homelessness. Organisations at the local level—health authorities and others—need to properly engage with councils in tackling homelessness. That is absolutely crucial. It is also important that Government Departments get their act together and understand that the policies of one Department can affect the operation of policy in another.

In our report we drew attention to welfare reform in general terms, and to the particular issue of the withdrawal of housing benefit from 18 to 21-year-olds and how that can affect people. Young people who lose a job should not be put out on the streets or forced out of their home while they try to find another one. We addressed the problems with universal credit and the difficulties that can be created, and already are being created in some parts of the country, in driving up rent arrears. That is a serious potential problem. We hope that Ministers will look at this to see whether, on occasion, payments direct to landlords, where tenants are satisfied that that is appropriate, can help to stop such problems occurring—and stop homelessness occurring, given that one of the major causes is the loss of private rented tenancies, as we heard in evidence.

With just those caveats about issues that we need to look at further, I very much welcome and support this Bill. I am really pleased that we have got to this stage. Once again, I particularly thank the hon. Member for Harrow East for selecting this subject and for operating so consensually and collectively to get the Bill to this stage.

12.57 pm

Mr Burrowes: It is a great pleasure to follow a whole litany of speeches rightly paying heartfelt tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). I congratulate him and all those who have been involved in this Bill. I am glad that it is a cross-party effort, and also that there has been collaboration across the sectors that he has had to navigate and deal with over the past weeks. I am proud that a Conservative Member of Parliament has led the way on this. It is right that that should be the case. I was pleased to encourage him down this path when he was picking a subject. Everyone, including the Government, wanted to encourage him to take an easier route—a hand-out Bill. That would have involved less effort but would not have addressed a burning injustice—a phrase rightly used by the Prime Minister. Homelessness is a burning injustice, and it is right that my hon. Friend chose it. It was a great pleasure on this occasion, and probably the last occasion, to be a “Whip” on a Bill. [Interruption.] Who knows? We live in interesting and surprising times.

There is a long track record of Conservatives tackling homelessness, not least one of my predecessors from a part of Enfield; there were boundary changes then and we may or may not have boundary changes to come. In 1967, 50 years ago, Iain Macleod helped to found the
homeless charity Crisis, to which we pay particular tribute for its great work in supporting this Bill. It is right to pay homage to him for that. Like others, I pay tribute to the other homelessness charities that have been supporting us along the way, particularly Shelter, St Mungo’s, and Centrepoint.

Iain Macleod fought for the first piece of legislation to protect homeless families. It is right and fitting that, 40 years on from the last substantive piece of homelessness legislation, Members across the House acknowledge that this is a good Bill. It will make prevention a statutory and core duty for all councils, which will make a significant difference. Homeless households will no longer have to put up with the current situation. There is some good practice on preventing homelessness, but that will now become the norm across the country.

My council in Enfield will no longer be able to wait for a bailiff eviction notice before it has to help vulnerable people threatened with homelessness. A constituent of mine fled domestic violence and needed help to move to alternative, private sector accommodation that would not be known to her attacker. She and those like her will no longer have to put up with the response she received from the housing officer when she made the call for help. They said, “What do you expect us to do?” She and others like her now know that, under this Bill, there is an expectation and a clear duty of prevention with regard to vulnerable people.

The Bill will also help—this is a particularly challenging case, but I look forward to it being delivered on—an elderly 72-year-old in my constituency who as we speak is in unsafe and unsuitable temporary accommodation. Basically it is a bedsit. The bed is propped up by chunks of wood and cold air comes through big gaps in the windows. There is very little furniture. There is an office chair. He and his wife have serious health needs, but they have been placed in unsuitable accommodation. He told my office manager recently, “My life isn’t worth living because I’ve been sent to a hellhole.” A lot more needs to be done, but I hope that the Bill will help to address the issue of inspections and the private sector, which, sadly, is increasingly a cause of homelessness, so that that does not happen again to that 72-year-old and others like him.

As has been said, the Bill will not end homelessness. There are structural issues, but those are for another day. We need to debate the issues of welfare reform and the local housing allowance; matching housing costs and benefits; the supply of affordable and supported housing; and the forthcoming White Paper. I look forward to the Bill being part of making progress on a cross-Government homelessness strategy.

I welcome the progress that has been made in London and the Mayor’s announcement of a record-breaking £3.15 billion deal for affordable housing, supporting 2,000 places for adults with complex needs. We have spoken about reviews and assessments, but the litmus test for the Bill will be its success in addressing the complex needs of those individuals who visit our constituency surgeries because they are always in and out of the system. The Bill will break that cycle of crisis management. It is about early prevention to help those complex individuals into sustainable housing.

In conclusion, in 1967, Iain Macleod spoke at a candlelit vigil in Hyde Park to raise awareness of homelessness. Sadly, his words continue to resonate 50 years on:

“This is an appeal to help those who no longer have any dignity and self-respect... What we do expect is that you will acknowledge that they are fellow human beings, and that they have nothing left to look forward to... We call upon the talents, ideas and enthusiasm of people from all different prejudices and beliefs in a constructive attempt to tackle this growing urban problem.”

The Bill is a constructive attempt to follow in that spirit of continued and sustained collaboration, with the aim of finishing the race—on a cross-party, cross-Government and, indeed, cross-housing sector basis—to end homelessness.

1.4 pm

Ms Buck: There is indeed a cross-party consensus in support of the Bill, as we showed on Second Reading, in Committee and again today. It is a step in the right direction and will, I hope, lead to a significant cultural shift in the way that homelessness is treated, especially—although not exclusively—for single homeless people and those who have traditionally been non-priority need. It is a good thing that we will put into legislation the duties in the Bill to assess and to co-operate and the duties of prevention.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on introducing the Bill and leading on it in recent months, as well as Members who helped to put it together, with the support of Crisis and the expert panel. We want the Bill to proceed with speed and to bring about a transformation. Although in many cases local authorities have no barrier to carrying out the kinds of duties in the Bill, we know that given recent financial pressures—and, in some cases, for other reasons—local authorities have taken the law literally and tested and challenged it to its outer limit, and beyond in some cases. It will be good to have a legislative framework that will make it harder for some of those bad practices to continue.

It is also true, as my hon. Friends and other hon. Members have said, that the Bill does not exist in isolation. We have already referred to the fact that existing non-statutory duties for the prevention and relief of homelessness, which assist some 100,000 households every year, have not been able to check the remorseless upward trend in homelessness, for those in priority need and non-priority need, and rough sleepers, in recent years. That is because the pressure on resources—in many areas, and by no means exclusively local government—has been a contrary driver to any attempts to bring down homelessness.

Rough sleeping, the sharp edge of homelessness, has leapt by 16% just this year—Westminster, my local authority, is on the frontline with the highest number of rough sleepers. New information that I obtained from the health service last week shows not only a rise in rough sleeping but—terribly—an escalation in the number of rough sleepers for whom mental health problems are the main driver. Since 2010, the number of rough sleepers with serious mental health problems has gone up by 80%. That is a really disturbing figure and reflects something else that is happening across the public services, especially the NHS.
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I agree with my hon. Friend on her support for the Bill. As I am sure she knows, last Sunday was Homelessness Sunday and I happened to be in her borough, although not her constituency. Attention was drawn to the large number of church-based night shelters of various kinds that operate all over the country to try to meet the rapidly growing need. Will she join me in commending those initiatives for their efforts?

Ms Buck: I am happy to do that. Stunningly good work is being done by volunteers, churches and other faith communities on homelessness. At Christmas I went to the Crisis centre at the City of Westminster College in my constituency and met volunteers, some of whom have been going to Crisis for 20 years to provide the support that is given over the difficult holiday period. We should congratulate those people, whether it is their job or a voluntary commitment, who put so much into helping the homeless.

The fact remains that fundamental problems are pushing in the opposite direction to the Bill. On welfare reform, the House of Commons Library briefing confirms that, this year alone, £2.7 billion less will be spent on housing support than would have been the case on trends from 2010 and that £5 billion has been taken out altogether since 2010. Unfortunately, that puts the £48 million contribution to the Bill into rather alarming context. Of course, the delay in universal credit payments is driving more and more tenants into arrears, which in turn is making private landlords—the default option for many homeless people—less likely to let. I see no signs of that problem reducing. In fact, the trend is likely to go in the opposite direction. The hon. Member for Harrow East said that we should judge the Bill on its merits, and I am happy to do that, but we cannot ignore the wider context.

As the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) reminded us, this is fundamentally about people. It is not just about money and the legal framework; it is fundamentally about those at the sharp end. In the last few weeks, I have dealt with many cases of people either homeless or at risk of homelessness. This week, I heard from a young mother of two children, 20 years resident in my constituency, who was made homeless from the private rented sector. Her sick parents, for whom she provides care, live in the constituency. She had to wait until the bailiffs came before she could be rehoused, and she has now been rehoused in north London, over an hour away from her support network and sharing a single room with her two children. That is the reality of homelessness.

Even more acute was a case that came to me just before Christmas. It goes to the heart of the challenge, particularly of single homelessness. With the House’s permission, I will read a few lines from the letter that came in from a young man who was kicked out of home for reasons that I will not share with the House but which are very profound and difficult and which I understand:

“After I was kicked out, I was forced to live in a friend’s car through the winter of 2016. One night when I was sleeping the car was broken into... the people held a knife to my neck and took everything I owned in the world, even my only shoes. I slept on a park bench in Victoria until a stranger told me about a hostel... I was given a place 3 days later... In the meantime, I went back to sleep at the park, which I found very unfair.”

Unfortunately, at the hostel, he was subject to an attack and robbery, and so the hostel place broke down. When he finally came to me the week before Christmas, he had been sleeping rough for the whole year. His letter finishes:

“I don’t want to be robbed or killed... 2016 has been the worst year of my life. I have wanted to kill myself so many times... You hear about people being killed on the road every day, and I know if I don’t get help, I will be the next to be killed.”

That boy is 19 years old. He will be scarred by that experience for the rest of his life. The mother of the two young children will also be scarred. Homelessness scars people’s lives, even after they have been found somewhere to live. If the Bill can do anything for that 19-year-old boy, I will happily support it, but the test of the Bill, for that mother and her children and for that 19-year-old boy, and indeed for the hon. Member for Harrow East, is whether it can exist in a context of support and financial backing that seeks to deal with the drivers of homelessness, whether housing supply, the failures of universal credit or the impact of welfare reform. If it does not, welcome though the provisions will be, we will unfortunately find ourselves back here again, in a year or two, facing yet more increases in homelessness and yet more individual lives scarred by this terrible scourge of modern life.

1.13 pm

Mr Jackson: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), who has always been diligent in pursuing the issue of housing in her constituency. I am also delighted to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for his wonderful work and my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), the Bill’s de facto Whip.

Today, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East is a bit of softy—we are being very consensual and cross-party—but, having known him for 20 years as a political bruiser, I know how painful it must have been for him to praise inordinately the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). In the same spirit, however, I echo his remarks. We are all here to help needy and vulnerable people, whom we have the great honour and privilege to represent in the House. I was concerned a few days ago when it appeared that the Opposition were intent on effectively—potentially—wrecking the Bill. I am glad that they resiled from pushing the amendments to a vote, not necessarily because that was indeed their intention, but because when the Bill reached the other place peers might have complicated the issue, thereby endangering the Bill’s viability in the long run. That has not happened, for which I thank the Opposition and, indeed, my hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East said earlier that the Bill was in the great Conservative tradition of progressive social change. We look back on public health reform, municipal reform, local government reform and, of course, the housing boom of the 1950s in the Macmillan era, and we see that the Bill demonstrates a similar commitment to encouraging people to make the world a better place.

I think I am fairly unusual in being a Conservative Member of Parliament who is very keen on house building, and who believes that we must tackle the housing crisis at source by building more homes. That does not always happen. I do not decry the motives of my hon. Friends, and other Members, for wanting to
protect the residential amenities and quality of life in their own areas, but I think we all accept that if we are to solve the housing crisis in the long term, we must build more homes. I was, I think, a lone voice when, a month or so ago, I argued against some of the more restrictive amendments in the Neighbourhood Planning Bill, because in doing so I was arguing against not building more homes.

We look forward greatly to the housing White Paper, and I thank the Minister for the excellent work that he has done with his colleagues. I particularly thank the Department for allocating funds to Peterborough City Council as part of the £48 million homelessness reduction programme. Peterborough has seen an uptick in the number of people presenting themselves as homeless and in the number of rough sleepers living on the streets. The impact of welfare reform has been an issue, as has the large proportion of peripatetic foreign workers from eastern Europe who may lose their jobs very suddenly and be unable to pay their rent. However, as we heard from the hon. Member for Hammersmith, the precipitous termination of housing agreements under section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 is also having an impact, and we therefore think that the Bill is extremely timely. I strongly supported it on Second Reading, when I also did some work with charities in my constituency.

While I am at it, let me give a plug to the fantastic work done by the congregation of my own local church, All Saints parish church in Park Road, and to the parochial church council. This winter, All Saints, along with other churches in Peterborough, has participated in an ecumenical initiative to provide a night shelter for some of the more vulnerable people in the city, who would not otherwise have a bed on a very cold night. Those people have been treated with the warmth and human kindness and given the dignity that one would expect from good Christian people pursuing their mission. So I say thank you to Father Greg Roberts and the others for that.

This is the beginning of a journey. The Bill will not end homelessness and rough sleeping. However, we are on that journey, and the good thing about the Bill is that it represents a proactive effort, especially in relation to early intervention and advice. We have to concede that it is not just about dry, arcane legislation; it is about human beings and the problems they are suffering, which mean they are having to take difficult decisions. I therefore urge the Minister to think in a more holistic way around substance misuse and mental health issues as that impacts on people who are homeless. If it is possible to give more support in the course of the secondary legislation of this Bill to assist local authorities, that will be very important indeed.

Another important issue to raise is that for those authorities such as Peterborough, which participated in a large-scale stock transfer some years ago, there just is not the capacity to think ahead in terms of local trends for homelessness. Therefore, they need some expertise and help, and that costs money. But it should not be the case that the first time anyone can receive help is when the bailiffs are knocking on their door.

I welcome in particular the help-to-secure parts of the Bill and of course the individualised plan, because we are talking about individuals, each of whom has a different set of circumstances that have brought them to make the decisions they have made—life sometimes happens to you while you’re busy making other plans, to quote John Lennon from many years ago. The fact is that that proactive forward-looking advice will be good for the taxpayer, and, more importantly, good for those individuals, particularly individuals with families. That is very important.

On selective licensing, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham), who is no longer in her place, made the important point about vulnerable women who are affected by homelessness. Vulnerable women are also affected by very poor quality housing and very poor quality private sector lets. I am honest about saying that I am willing to look at the trade-off of ending slum landlords by reducing some of the provision, because I do not want my constituents living in slums at the whim of rapacious landlords who are milking the taxpayer. That might mean some turbulence in the market, but the duty does not end once we have housed that person; the duty ends when we are convinced that that person or family is in decent accommodation. A number of years ago Cambridgehire Constabulary looked at crime committed against women in new migrant households—sexual crime, theft and other crimes. So we have, and should have, a much more general duty to protect the residential amenities and quality of life in such areas.

I warmly welcome this Bill. It is the culmination of an enormous amount of effort and hard work. I particularly welcome clause 2 and the duty to provide advisory services, which was sorely needed, and of course clauses 4 to 6 on homelessness. We have seen the best tradition of the House of Commons today, with people of goodwill and faith coming together in the service of our constituents, sticking up for decent people who want a better life and who have a human right to a roof over their head. It is our job to look after their interests; they are the people we serve. I warmly endorse the Bill and I hope that it will soon receive Royal Assent and become an Act so that it can begin to make a difference to the lives of many needy people.
1.25 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I welcome the Bill, and I want to add my tribute to the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for taking on this subject and for the diligence and commitment he has shown in seeing the Bill through. I also welcome the process of the Bill. I have been pleased to be closely involved from the beginning, taking part in the inquiry as a member of the Select Committee and also serving on the Bill Committee. This is an excellent example of evidence-based legislation.

The Select Committee saw undeniable evidence that the problem of homelessness is increasing at an exponential rate and that the current system is not working. The Bill will play an important role in setting some of that right. This is a principled reform that will set the basis on which homeless people receive support on the right footing. It is right that local authorities should have a responsibility—and indeed a statutory duty—to intervene earlier when residents are threatened with homelessness, to provide help and support and, wherever possible, to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. This is the compassionate thing to do, and it is what a decent society demands, but it is also the cost-effective thing to do. When someone becomes homeless, the personal cost to them and the many different costs to the public sector rise to a level that we simply cannot afford. Money spent propping people up and dealing with a situation that should never have arisen in the first place is not money well spent.

It is also right that more people should be eligible to receive support than is currently the case, and this legislation will help in that regard. We have all had examples in our constituencies of people, usually single people, who common decency demands should receive support but who are not eligible to receive it under the current system. The Bill will help to address that problem. It is also absolutely the case that the culture of work around support for homeless people should change, as well as the practice. The Select Committee saw evidence of significant levels of gatekeeping by local authorities, and of people being treated in ways that are simply unacceptable. They were made to feel that they were somehow to blame for their predicament or that they were a problem or just a statistic. Witnesses described the dehumanising effects of being in the current system, and it is absolutely right that this legislation seeks to change that.

I support the Bill on its own terms and I believe that it will make a significant difference to the nature of the support that homeless people receive. However, we cannot for one minute kid ourselves that by supporting a piece of legislation that has the words “homelessness reduction” in its title we are solving the problem of the housing crisis in this country. I cannot speak about the Bill without speaking in the same breath about the wider context of the housing crisis. This Government’s record on housing is shameful. Under Labour, rough sleeping fell by 75% in 11 years. Under this Government and the coalition Government, it doubled in just five years and it has gone up again by a further 30% in the last year alone. The number of people in temporary accommodation is rising, and the experience in my constituency is that homelessness is becoming more intractable for those who find themselves in that predicament. Individuals and households are in temporary accommodation for longer and it is much harder for them to secure the affordable accommodation they need. That is about the supply of new homes and, more importantly, of secure, high-quality, genuinely affordable homes.

People face insecurity in the private rented sector, and I urge the Government to take reform of the private rented sector seriously. If someone decides to become a landlord, their primary responsibility should be to their tenant under the terms of the tenancy agreement, but the problem is that far too many people are living under tenancies that are not fit for purpose and do not provide the security that they need. While we wait for new homes to be built, reform of the private rented sector would make a rapid difference to people facing the terrible situation of homelessness. If more people had security in the private rented sector, fewer people would present to our hard-pressed councils’ homelessness departments for help and support. The LHA cap, uncertainty around funding for supported housing, the bedroom tax, the forced sale of council homes and many other aspects of Government housing policy are simply not helping to deliver the secure, affordable homes that we need to solve the problem of homelessness.

Funding for the Bill’s provisions is the second issue that I want to flag up. I welcome the Minister’s assurances about reviewing the funding and how the Bill works in practice. I accept that there are many unknowns about the new burdens that the Bill introduces and that a greater focus on prevention is expected to save councils money, but the Government’s working to date lacks clarity about what councils will be expected to use the funding for. Will it be for additional staffing costs only, or will it enable the provision of additional support to help people bridge a gap if they are finding it difficult to pay their rent for a period of time? Serious doubts exist about whether the funding will be enough.

I am particularly worried on behalf of Lambeth and Southwark Councils about the severe problems and pressure that they face. Some 5,000 children in Lambeth—more than 1,500 households—will spend tonight in temporary accommodation. While the Bill will help the councils to provide more support to families to prevent them from becoming homeless, the system is clogged up to the point of being at a standstill. We all want councils to be provided with sufficient resources to implement the new duties in a way that enables them to be effective. I hope that the Government will use this process of developing legislation in a private Member’s Bill on the basis of evidence through the Select Committee process as a precedent for their approach to housing in the future. They should look at the evidence of where the current system is simply not working and take decisive action on the wider contributors to our housing crisis.

I end by once again offering my congratulations to the hon. Member for Harrow East. I thank Crisis and the other homelessness charities that provided input and supported the Bill. I also thank the Minister for his support and for seeing the Bill through. Finally, I thank my Front-Bench colleagues and the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), for their excellent contributions and for scrutinising and pressing the Government on this most important issue.
Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow so many passionate speakers, not least the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who spoke well and with great knowledge of this issue. I join the tributes to the enormous success of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). In my working life, I was part of the Government machine that produces legislation, so I am in awe of how he has managed to go through the process effectively alone, albeit with the team he outlined earlier.

I am pleased that the Bill has Government support and that funding has been promised, although I hope the Minister was listening carefully to my hon. Friend when he said that more might be necessary. On that note, I thank the Department for Communities and Local Government for the £790,000 that has been given to Oxfordshire under the Government’s homelessness prevention programme to fund the trials of new initiatives on homelessness.

We have heard a great deal about the importance of co-operation and cross-party working, and I make a plug for the cross-party co-operation in Oxfordshire over the past year that has led to good practice in the reduction of homelessness. For example, our district council and charities have been working closely together to reduce the number of rough sleepers in our district by 20%, which shows how well a more holistic approach of the type set out in the Bill can work.

We have seen some great initiatives in the past year, including the production of a pocket guide for the homeless. That might not sound like much, but having all the phone numbers in one place for short-term and long-term solutions to homelessness problems is useful to people whose life is chaotic and who are moving from place to place.

We also have some great local charities. I have seen the Beacon centre at St Mary’s church in Banbury offering friendly but firm advice to some of our rough sleepers, and one of my favourite buildings in my whole constituency is the one that houses the Banbury Young Homelessness Project, which takes a forward-thinking, holistic approach to preventing the causes of homelessness. The project provides counselling and therapy for family groups, and it has a brilliant job club. In 2012, the project won the Queen’s award for voluntary service. I love going there; it is very much like being at home with one’s own teenagers. Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that you will understand and empathise with the fact that the sort of support it provides is almost that of a parent for a group of teens who are uncertain about which way to go, who need a bit of help and encouragement to get through job interviews, and who might not get such support from their family or at home in the way that we hope our own children do.

The Salvation Army has been turning lives around, particularly those of rough sleepers, for many, many years. It helped members of my family who came home from the first world war, and I am impressed by the cutting-edge work it continues to do. It is clear that rough sleepers have very different needs—families at risk of eviction differ greatly from people with drug and alcohol dependencies who have been rough sleeping—and our charities and council, working together, recognise that. I accept that not all are working together so well and that we need the safety net enshrined in the Bill, but it seems right that there should no longer be a double standard of priority need. Anyone who does not have a bed for the night is, of course, a priority.

We have heard a lot this week about difficulties in the Prison Service, and it is right that we draw attention to the link between homelessness and imprisonment. Some 15% of new inmates going into prison for the first time are homeless, and 80% of those previously homeless prisoners reoffend in the first year after release, which compares very badly with a reoffending rate of under 50% for those who were not homeless when they went into prison. Dealing with homelessness will really help in the battle to reduce reoffending, so I add my support to this well-balanced Bill, which will support the homeless without putting undue pressure on councils. I hope that, by working together, claimants and councils will help to reduce the problem of homelessness.

Mrs Drummond: I was pleased to serve on the Bill Committee and to be part of the consideration of a Bill that will make a big difference to many vulnerable people. There are two aspects that I particularly welcome: the extension to 56 days; and the measures on the personal adviser and assessment. I hope that I will no longer have constituents in my surgery who are waiting for the arrival of the bailiffs as that is the only way they can declare themselves homeless under existing rules.

In Portsmouth, the average time spent in temporary accommodation is three to four months. I hope that under the new system created by the Bill, temporary accommodation could become unnecessary for the majority of homelessness cases in my city, saving the local authority money. Removing the threat of a prolonged fight to regain possession will also encourage private landlords to take on benefit claimants referred by the local authority. The measures in the Bill will therefore ease the need for temporary accommodation at both ends of the process. Private landlords will take on more tenants, and those who are given notice will more frequently be found a new tenancy without an interval.

I hope that local authorities will look on the Bill not as a burden, but as an opportunity. Many, including Portsmouth City Council, are already working on the Bill. I hope that it will pass smoothly through the other place and will return to us with few changes, unless they make things dramatically better.

I thank the Minister and his civil servants, and the charities, especially Crisis, for providing excellent briefings. Of course, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) in particular for his many hours of hard work to get the Bill through.

Michael Tomlinson: It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), with whom I served on the Bill Committee. It is right that we pay great tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman)—he will be blushing all afternoon, I am sure. The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) might be right that this process will be the model of how to get difficult legislation through in a private Member’s Bill. All the praise that has been given is due.
The hon. Member for Hammersmith invited me to exercise iron discipline today. In fact, he invited me not to speak at all, but that would have been a step too far. However, I will exercise discipline, not least because as you will have noted, Madam Deputy Speaker, my Bills appear on the Order Paper at positions 3 and 4. I am sure you will be interested to hear that my speech on Bill No. 4 refers to cricket in some detail, so it would be a shame indeed if we were not to get to that. Pages 3 to 5 of my speech are beautiful prose about cricket, and the House will be disappointed if we do not get to those Bills this afternoon.

I want to sound a note of caution. I was disappointed by one speech this afternoon—that from the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who is no longer in the Chamber. I was disappointed because it sounded more like a campaign speech than points about new clauses 1 to 3. It might be that he misunderstood the situation because he was not here on Second Reading and did not have the benefit of sitting on the Bill Committee. He was wrong when he said that there was a cosy consensus. There is cross-party support for the Bill, but there were robust debates in Committee involving exchanges from both sides to ensure that the Bill got through.

If there was consensus, it was on one fact. I believe that every member of the Bill Committee, and every single individual in the Chamber, shares the same view—my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who has worked tirelessly on the Bill, giving 100% commitment to support the Bill and to have served on the Bill Committee. I commend the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who has been mentioned this— that one person sleeping rough is one person too many. If there is a cosy consensus around that, so be it; I stand guilty as charged.

Moving on from that one sour note, let me say that it was a huge pleasure to serve on the Committee. This was my first private Member’s Bill Committee, and if they are all like that Committee, they will be a pleasure indeed.

We cannot pat ourselves on the back at this stage because there is more work to be done as the Bill goes through the Lords. I agree with the hon. Member for Harrow East and the hon. Member for Hammersmith who mentioned this—that one too many and a national disgrace. I fundamentally agree with him. A key role for all MPs is to create opportunities and help the vulnerable and needy in our society, whatever our party. Surely the Bill goes right to the heart of that. I know that other Members wish to speak, and I never intended to speak for long because I have talked about this issue in the House numerous times. I shall finish by reaffirming my support for the Bill and its intention to prevent homelessness.

There has been some talk today about what the Bill does not cover, despite, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East pointed out, it being one of the longest ever private Members’ Bills and perhaps the most expensive. It is important that we emphasise what it does cover. We must remember that while there is much more to be done and the Bill will not do everything that we hope it can achieve—it will not be a cure-all—the existing legislation has not been changed in 40 years, so perhaps this is a monumental step forward.

The key aspect of the Bill is prevention: it does exactly what it says on the tin. Yes, it is true that some local authorities are already going above and beyond, but that is not consistent; in fact, the provision is patchy throughout the country. The Bill will end the atrocious postcode lottery and ensure that one minimum yet high standard is in place throughout the country to address and prevent homelessness. It will give local authorities guidance and create a level playing field, ending the hit-and-miss policy that has gone on for far too long.

Prevention really is the key. Perhaps the most important element of the Bill is the prevention duty that enables local authorities to provide help from 56 days before homelessness, rather than 28, meaning that they will be able to help while there is still time and that action can be taken before complex needs develop any further. That point has been raised with me several times by local charities. It will save local authorities, the NHS and other bodies money in the long run. It will prevent people from getting county court judgments, as has been mentioned, as well as helping with similar issues, and it will ensure that desperate people really do have the opportunity to get back on their feet. It will free up homelessness charities so that they have more time to help effectively.

Above all, however, prevention is the right thing to do. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East said that if one person is sleeping rough on the streets, that is one too many and a national disgrace. I fundamentally agree with him. A key role for all MPs is to create opportunities and help the vulnerable and needy in our society, whatever our party. Surely the Bill goes right to the heart of that. I know that other Members wish to speak, and I never intended to speak for long because I have talked about this issue in the House numerous times. I shall finish by reaffirming my support for the Bill and its intention to prevent homelessness.

1.44 pm

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): I am delighted to support the Bill and to have served on the Bill Committee. I commend the work of my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who has worked tirelessly on the Bill, giving 100% commitment and garnering cross-party support, which is quite an achievement. It is important to note the extent of the involvement and input of local authorities throughout the country, as well as that of national homelessness charities. We should also note the dialogue that each of us has had with our local charities. I am a long-term supporter of a homelessness charity called Doorway in my Chippenham constituency. Its views on the Bill have proved invaluable in giving me a more detailed insight into the exact impact it will have on the ground.

David Mackintosh: It is a pleasure to support the private Member’s Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). He deserves congratulation, and it has been a pleasure to work with him.

It is great that the Bill has reached this milestone in the legislative process. Our debates in Committee were thorough and productive, and we were able to analyse every aspect of the Bill, so I thank both right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions. I am also pleased with the role played by the Select Committee, which played an important part in giving the Bill proper scrutiny, so I thank its Chairman, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts).

Throughout the process, I have always believed that, as others have said, one person who is homeless is one too many, so every opportunity we have to highlight
this problem in modern society is helpful. All Members taking part in the debate will be particularly mindful of the human stories behind the statistics, and it is important that we remember the people whom we are trying to help. I put on record my gratitude to the Hope Centre in my constituency, of which I am proud to be patron. The staff there do fantastic work to help homeless people to rebuild their lives.

I express again my wholehearted commitment to the Bill and what it would achieve. Along with many other colleagues, I have said that it will not be the only solution to end homelessness, but it is a crucial step on the path towards helping people who are at risk. I am sure that in the near future the opportunity will arise to make further changes, and I eagerly anticipate the Government’s housing White Paper. The all-party group on ending homelessness will continue to push on these issues. Indeed, just this week we had an informative and helpful session on prison leavers. Last night, I had the pleasure to watch a new documentary called “Slum Britain: 50 Years On”, which was created by Shelter, Channel 5 and ITN. It focuses on the plight of hidden homelessness in our country. At the screening, which was also attended by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), we were able to meet one of the families whom the documentary had followed. We were told of their struggles with their local authority and the seemingly impossible challenges that they faced when trying to access help. Such things remind us why the Bill is so necessary and why it must progress through this place and becomes an Act. I wish to thank the Minister and his officials, not least for setting aside the £48 million that will go to help local authorities support the implementation of this Bill. I also thank Opposition Members, who have played such a key role in this Bill.

It has been an absolute pleasure to serve on the Bill Committee. It was the first real Bill Committee on which I served. Seeing such consensual cross-party working made me wish that more Bills and private Members’ Bills operated on such a basis.

So many years on from “Cathy Come Home”, there is no doubt that we have become blind to things such as rough sleeping. There is also the problem of the homelessness that we do not see—I am talking about the homeless people who are sofa surfing or who are having to sleep over with a friend. We do not see them because they are not visible on the streets. I am as guilty as anyone else of walking past those who are sleeping in doorways. I do so partly because we are advised by many charities, for all sorts of reasons, not to give money. Occasionally, I will buy sandwiches and other types of food.

Something interesting happened to me just a few weeks ago. I was walking along the road to catch the 91 bus back from the Covent Garden area, and a homeless lady approached me. I thought that she was going to ask for money, but in fact she did not; she asked for a hug, because we had had a chat. She said, “Thank you for talking to me. Thank you for engaging with me like a human being. Thank you for recognising that, just because I am homeless, it does not mean that I am not a person.” We must not forget that we cannot ever lose our humanity.

As many Members from across the Chamber have said today, one person who is sleeping rough, one person who is homeless, one family who is sofa surfing or living in a one-bedroom temporary accommodation unit is not acceptable. It is not acceptable in any country; it is certainly not acceptable in the fifth largest economy in the world. That is why I am so proud to support this Bill. As the Minister knows, our record is not great: we have seen an increase in rough sleeping and in homelessness. I am proud that the Government are now taking action by supporting this Bill, which puts prevention at its very heart. Yes, we must do far more to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping on our streets, but the key must be prevention and ensuring that we interact and engage as early as possible with those who come to us asking for help. That is why I am really proud that this Bill increases to 56 the number of days that we can help someone before they become homeless. That means that we can intervene, engage and help those who rightly seek support at the point at which they know they need help but before they reach crisis.

I support this Bill and hope that it progresses to the next stage. I also hope that all Members across the House will support it fully.

1.53 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): First, let me apologise for not referring Members earlier to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

I, too, wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), because, having piloted two private Members’ Bills through the House in the previous Session of Parliament, I know how much hard work is involved. I wish this Bill every success when it goes through the same stages in the other place.

I wish to put the Cornish perspective to the House, and to say how grateful we will be in Cornwall for the changes that this Bill will introduce. Despite the 49% fall in unemployment in South East Cornwall since 2010 and a strengthening local economy, low incomes remain a challenge across Cornwall. Conversely, as a result of our thriving tourist industry, we have one of the highest proportions of second homes, and that naturally has an impact on housing affordability. Only a strong economy that enables incomes to rise will help everyone to be safe and secure and ensure that those who deserve support and care receive it. Unfortunately, however, homelessness remains a considerable challenge in my constituency and across Cornwall—one played
out in the casework that comes across my desk every day. That is why I support the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East; it will refocus the efforts of English authorities to prevent homelessness.

We have heard of cases in which people have had to wait until they have been given a bailiff’s letter before the local authority will consider rehousing them, and the situation is exactly the same in South East Cornwall. There are also considerable difficulties for people seeking alternative accommodation. I often see constituents who feel that they have been let down by the Liberal Democrat, independently led local authority. That is why I pointed out in an intervention that the leader of the Liberal Democrats was selling a message of wanting to provide more houses without there being anybody here from that party to support the Bill. I would not be proud of that, but I am so glad to see so many Government Members here today supporting a Bill genuinely to introduce measures to help homeless.

I am aware that other Members need to speak, so I will not repeat what other hon. Members have already said. I finish by quoting what Crisis said about the Bill:

“It brings much-needed reform to England’s 40-year-old homelessness legislation.”

I could not agree more. I really applaud my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East.

1.57 pm  

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I want to add my respect and blessings to the Bill, but first I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

My absolute respect goes to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman); as the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said, my hon. Friend has surely provided a template for MPs on how to get a private Member’s Bill through and on the tone and thoroughness of work that should go into such a Bill. I give credit to colleagues who have been involved in a lot of work in Committee. I am in awe of their work and it is a pleasure to applaud them now.

I agree with other Members that this is but one part of a whole strategy. In that spirit, I wish to pay tribute to a lot of people in my community. I hope that we do our jobs as MPs and that the Lords will play their part, but local government is also vital. Brian Castle was a housing officer; he has recently retired. I could call him any time during the day or evening if I was concerned about a homeless person in my constituency. He would tell me that day, within hours, what services were being provided and help was being given to that person. That was a great asset for me as an MP.

I also give credit to Colin Kennedy, my previous borough commander. He invited me to go out with the police on a Saturday night-Sunday morning shift. I witnessed how amazing the police are in dealing with people sleeping rough who may not wish to go to A&E. I saw amazing policemen cajole those people, initially against their will, into getting help so that they received the services they needed.

I also pay tribute—this does not happen often—to the Secretary of State for Health, because we are now putting mental health on the agenda. Having psychiatric services in A&E departments, in the triage system, is a vital part of the whole strategy for everyone, and particularly for people who find themselves rough sleeping or homeless. I will not have been the only person in the NHS who treated somebody for an injury and who was then heartbroken to see them walk out of A&E, knowing they had no home to go to.

I also pay tribute to Mia, a young schoolgirl in my constituency who sold amazing cupcakes she had baked to raise money for Streetlink. As she said on her JustGiving page, she smashed it—she smashed her target.

I think my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East has also smashed his target. There are some heroes who wear capes, and some heroes who have spider webs drawn on their faces, but today there is a hero wearing a suit, a tie and a little lapel pin saying, “Back the Bill. Reduce Homelessness.” It is a privilege to be here.

2 pm  

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): How can I follow that tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman)? I have known him for some time now—since before we both came into the House—and he is a very caring man. He is also a good friend to not only me but other colleagues on the Government Benches and on the Opposition Benches as well. I pay tribute to my friend for getting this Bill through; it is well overdue. I thank him so much.

I pay tribute to the Minister for being patient. It has been quite a marathon, but it is good to know that £48 million is going to be available for these new duties—there is an intimation that there could be more, and I hope there is.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). I have not always seen eye to eye with him, but I more or less agree with everything he said today, and it has been a pleasure to sit here and listen to him speak, from 9.30 am, when we started, to this point.

It is good that we can now even out the playing field for people who are needy—especially people who were in the armed forces, people with mental health issues and people who find themselves on the streets for no other reason than that life has dealt them a bad blow.

We do not have to be reminded of the problem of homelessness; it has been creeping up over the years—I think we can all agree on that. When I leave the House every night, there are people sleeping in the underpass, and it always makes my heart sink to see that.

Even though I have had nothing to do with the proceedings up until this final point, I feel proud to have sat here today and just to look at everybody who has actually worked on everything that has got us through to this point. What we have done today—what you all have done today—in this Chamber is historic and nothing short of miraculous. I just hope that the Bill reaches the statute book as soon as possible.

2.3 pm  

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): I draw the House’s attention to my declaration in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.
I want to say how pleased I am to be here to see the passage of this very important Bill, particularly as I am sitting just in front of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who put his case, as he did on Second Reading, with passion, with conviction, with real dedication and with real knowledge about this cause.

I also want to thank Crisis and Shelter for all their work behind the scenes and for their public advocacy, and Members have turned up to speak to the Bill and to ensure its passage through the House. I know of the great work that Crisis, in particular, does, because my mum spent Christmas volunteering with it two years ago and had a really fantastic time. I would thoroughly recommend volunteering to all Members of the House.

The Minister and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), were right when they said that legislation alone would not be sufficient to tackle homelessness. We do need legislation, and that is why we are here today—to pass the first significant piece of legislation on homelessness for 40 years. This legislation will, among other things, end the nonsense that I hear time and time again in my advice surgeries, where 40% of the cases I see are about housing: that tenants facing eviction must be made to wait for a bailiff’s notice before receiving homelessness protection from the council.

As well as legislation, to tackle homelessness we need money from the Government and involvement from third sector organisations. Having convened a homelessness summit in Kingston with our many third sector organisations, council officers, the leader of Kingston Council and the lead member for housing, thereby gaining a lot of knowledge of the local processes, practices and needs, I was able to lobby the Government for homelessness funding with, I think, some authority. I am pleased that Kingston is part of a tri-borough homelessness prevention trailblazer area that is to receive £1 million of Government funding to tackle homelessness. This is great news for the Royal Borough of Kingston, which in virtually every funding formula applied by the Government, be it the revenue support grant or the schools funding formula, does not do very well. It was dismissed as a “leafy borough” by the noble Lord Prescott when he sat where my hon. Friend the Minister sits today, but that woefully fails to recognise the fact that it has pockets of social deprivation as bad as those in any other area of London—and yes, it has rough sleeping, which we must tackle.

Third sector organisations are, and have always been, vital in the fight against homelessness and in homelessness prevention. It is notable that many of these are faith-based organisations where people, as part of their worship and devotion, give service to the most needy in their local community. In Kingston, that includes Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness; the Joel Community Project; the YMCA; Churches Together, which offers up churches as night shelters in the winter; and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. I thank all those organisations, and others I have not mentioned, for their work, in collaboration with the council, to tackle homelessness in Kingston. I look forward to working with all of them, and with Kingston’s Conservative council, in implementing the provisions of this Bill, and working out how best to spend the trailblazer funding we have been granted by the Government to end the disgrace of homelessness in Kingston and in our country as a whole.

2.6 pm

Victoria Atkins (Corby) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), my fellow Home Office Parliamentary Private Secretary, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman)—a doughty campaigner who has shown great determination in steering this Bill through this House. I look forward to its receiving Royal Assent in due course and becoming an Act of Parliament.

It has been an absolute pleasure to be here on a couple of Fridays to support this Bill. I have been conscious on both occasions that I did not want to get in the way or detain the House for any length of time, so I have chosen to speak at this point. This Bill shows the real value of private Members’ Bills where it is possible to command support across the House we can really get things done. The process is a useful vehicle to achieve that. It may well be that modifications are needed to the system, but when it works well, it works very well, and this is an example of its value. It is good to see the House working so collegiately, which people out there in the country will think makes a refreshing change.

The issue of prevention is very important. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) put it better than I ever could. Our public services more generally are going to have to focus more on prevention in the years ahead to get things right and to relieve the
I can confirm that the amendments agreed today are estimated to increase the cost of the Bill by £13 million over the course of this spending review period. That increases the total new burdens cost of the Bill from the £48 million that I had announced, to £61 million. I am pleased to confirm that the Government will meet those costs.

I do not know whether it is true or not, but I suspect that, as several hon. Members have suggested, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) has achieved a record in having the private Member’s Bill with the most significant cost implications for Government spending. In that sense, he can consider that he has had a very good outcome.

The final new burdens assessment will be published once the distribution formula for the funding is complete, and when the Bill has completed its passage through the House. As I said in Committee, we will work with local authorities and the Local Government Association to develop a fair distribution model for the funding. That needs to reflect the different need in different areas, reflecting, for instance, the additional pressures and costs faced by many councils in London.

Ahead of implementation, we will work with local housing authorities to ensure that they have the resources and support they need. Key to that is updating the code of guidance, which will be reviewed in co-operation not only with local housing authorities but others with an interest and expertise, such as the homelessness charities and the landlord groups—not to mention the continuing role that the Select Committee will no doubt play in the process. That guidance will be needed by local authorities as they prepare to implement the new duties in the Bill, and as they support their staff to understand the new legislation and undertake the training they will need.

The Government will also have key implementation tasks. We will prepare the regulations setting out which public authorities will be subject to the duty to refer, identifying those authorities and working with them to ensure that they understand their new responsibilities and are ready to play an active role. We will also continue our work to improve the data we collect, so that we can monitor implementation and assess the impact and success of the Bill.

We do not see the Bill as the only way to reduce homelessness. It is an important part of our armoury, but it is not the panacea. The Government have initiated and are working on several other programmes in this area, because we are determined to do as much as we can to tackle the issues of homelessness and rough sleeping.

I want to finish by paying personal tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East for all the effort that he has put into the Bill. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with him over many weeks on his Bill. As he mentioned, the time and scrutiny the Bill has been through is unusual, but he has remained calm in the face of some real challenges and has been focused on his final aim, which has been a key factor in getting the Bill this far.

Earlier, I mentioned hon. Members on both sides of the House who have been instrumental in bringing the Bill forward, but I also wish to mention my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes),

[Tom Pursglove]
who—in the absence of a Government Whip in a private Member’s Bill Committee—acted as Whip and wing man for my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East. I also wish to thank one of our long-suffering departmental Parliamentary Private Secretaries, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), for the effort that she has put into the process. The other person on the Committee I have not mentioned is my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), who also made an excellent contribution to the debate today.

I also wish to mention Martine Martin, the parliamentary assistant to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East. I will not say she kept him in check, but she worked extremely hard and diligently to help him to bring the Bill forward.

Finally, I also thank my officials for doing a tremendous job, the charities, particularly Crisis, Shelter and St Mungo’s, the relevant landlords associations, the LGA and the many individual councils and others in local government. I look forward to the Bill’s enactment. I am sure that my hon. Friend will remain hot on my heels as it is implemented, and I look forward to continuing to work with him on this extremely important issue.

2.20 pm

Bob Blackman: With the leave of the House, I rise to say a few thank yous and to wish the Bill Godspeed through the other place.

I would like to thank the no fewer than 20 right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed on Third Reading. This is a complicated Bill with 13 clauses. It was 18 pages long before we agreed the Government amendments today, so I suspect it is now about 20 or 21 pages. It is a comprehensive Bill that attempts to ensure that anyone threatened with homelessness, or who has already reached that crisis point in their life, receives help and advice and a plan for securing accommodation from the local authority. The Bill, which encompasses the whole public sector, will concentrate efforts in the hands of experts so that they can assist those who face this terrible crisis.

I particularly thank hon. Members for their appreciation of me, and I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) that it is national cake day, as well as Holocaust Memorial Day—and we should remember the plight of those individuals too. As for the Bill, the heroes are not in this Chamber; the heroes are those who go out every day to combat homelessness throughout the country—they are the people who deserve the plaudits.

I thank the Minister for his kind remarks, and for the extra money he has managed to stump up—perhaps we should have put his feet to the fire even more. But I will draw a line there. We have done as much as we can, although the Select Committee will be following carefully the implementation and operation of the Bill to make sure that sufficient funding is available and that local authorities are doing their job. I reiterate my thanks to the officials from the Department. I will miss our regular briefings, and the texts and emails requiring my assistance at 11 o’clock at night. I hope that once the Bill is enacted we can work together again in the future.

I would like to commend and thank the charities, particularly Crisis, Shelter and St Mungo’s, as well as the landlords associations, which helped get the Bill to this stage, the LGA and all the local authorities—they, after all, have to implement the Bill. Most importantly, I hope that they plan now for the Bill’s enactment, rather than waiting for it to become a reality. Finally, I wish the Bill Godspeed. I hope that the other place will have observed our proceedings today, as well as our Second Reading debate and all our hours in Committee spent scrutinising the Bill, and that they speed it through their House, so that it might become an Act as fast as possible and start to combat homelessness on our streets straightaway.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.
Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Amendment) Bill

Second Reading

2.25 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Let me begin by echoing the comments that others have made. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and, indeed, all our colleagues who took part in the debate on the Homelessness Reduction Bill. It was an extremely enjoyable morning.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to present my Bill. It would remove primary schools and nurseries from the scope of the statutory Prevent duty, which requires teachers and others to scrutinise and report on the thoughts and ideas of children in their care and seek out signs of extremism. Although we have only a little time today, Members who take an interest in the important issues addressed in the Bill will be pleased to know that there will be more time to debate them next Wednesday in Westminster Hall.

The Prevent statutory duty was imposed by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 on nearly 600,000 public sector workers in the wake of a proliferation of terror attacks. In fact, the Bill’s Third Reading took place on the day of the horrific Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris on 7 January 2015. It was also taking place in the run-up to the 2015 general election. It would have been a brave politician to oppose those measures at that time. Had I been in this place then, I might well have taken the Government’s word for it that this was a good thing—a benign development to keep our children safe. However, we have now had an opportunity to see how the legislation operates in practice. We have the benefit of hindsight. It is time to evaluate the operation of the Prevent duty, and to determine whether it is working or whether unintended consequences are negating its underlying and worthy objectives.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Members of the Home Office Committee, of which I am a member, have spoken both to critics of Prevent and to its supporters in the police force. Has my hon. Friend spoken to Prevent co-ordinators and police officers in her own area to establish whether they support the continuation of these measures?

Lucy Allan: The Home Affairs Committee has done an excellent job and has produced an excellent report. If I had time, I would say more about it. I have indeed met Prevent co-ordinators, and I have seen examples of good work being done under the Act. However, I want to concentrate on the unintended consequences, and the impact on certain communities who perceive what could be seen as a benign state intervention as something to be feared. I think that the Government should take that on board.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Given that the hon. Lady has only a few minutes, I am genuinely sorry to intervene on her speech, but may I ask her a very simple question? Does she think that the Prevent strategy as a whole is now damaged, or does she think that there is still hope for it?

Lucy Allan: I know from my preparation for the debate that many members of all our communities are adamantly opposed to Prevent, and for good reason. I hope to say a little about some of the issues that have led them to that conclusion.

The Government naturally have a duty to protect the public, and it is a duty that they are prioritising with the utmost seriousness. Of course it is right to tackle extremism that leads to violence, but the issue becomes a little more delicate when it comes to the suppression of political or religious views that the Government perceive to be too conservative or too extreme. What they see as helpful and benign may seem authoritarian to a person who experiences the intervention, and it has the potential to undermine the very values that we all hold dear and seek to protect.

At its heart, this debate is about the sort of society we want to live in and to what extent we allow the very real terrorist threat we face to interfere with our fundamental freedoms. Since its introduction in 2015, there has been increasing disquiet about the implementation of the statutory duty and the impact upon community cohesion. These concerns have come from many different quarters and I have taken the time to meet with many of these groups—

2.30 pm

The Deputy Speaker interrupted the business (Standing Order No. 11(2)).

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March.

Business without Debate

ROAD TRAFFIC OFFENDERS (SURRENDER OF DRIVING LICENCES ETC) BILL

Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

USE OF PROPERTY (PROTECTION) BILL

Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

DEFIBRILLATORS (AVAILABILITY) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February.

FARRIERS (REGISTRATION) BILL

Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

STATUTORY NUISANCE (AIRCRAFT NOISE) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March.
Provision of Cervical Screening

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Chris Heaton-Harris.]

2.32 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who is no longer in the Chamber. He has worked incredibly hard to get a very important and much-needed Bill through this House.

I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on women’s health. I am thankful for the opportunity to hold this debate today because this week is Cervical Cancer Prevention Week. The phrasing is important, because cervical cancer is notable for being not only treatable but preventable, under the right screening conditions. The events of this week are all about trying to ensure that those conditions exist for as many women as possible throughout the UK.

I start by acknowledging the invaluable work of Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust, which I believe is unique in the UK in being dedicated to this issue. I thank it for its work in raising awareness during this week, such as through its #SmearForSmear campaign—there is still plenty of time to take up the offer to do your selfies, gentlemen—in which women, and indeed men, are encouraged to take a selfie with smeared lipstick to raise awareness of smear testing. I look forward to seeing those pictures later.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): That is a fantastic idea. Only this week, I went for my own smear because of the campaign and the highlighting of the issue. All of us might want to join together to do #SmearForSmear, and tweet the pictures after the debate.

Paula Sherriff: I absolutely agree. I definitely expect the Minister, at least, to partake in such activity.

I thank Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust for the work that it does all year round towards the eradication of this disease. It has been my pleasure to work with it, through the auspices of the all-party group, on issues to do with women’s health. I am thankful for the opportunity to put forward this Bill through this House.

I am glad that the Minister is sitting down, as I would also like to break with my habit in this House by giving a word of praise for current Government policy. As almost all cervical cancers are caused by persistent human papillomavirus—HPV—I welcome the Government’s commitment to the HPV vaccination programme, even though I feel that its effect could be amplified with compulsory sex and relationships education in our schools.

Successive Governments have developed a successful cervical screening programme and, to their credit, this Government have maintained it. It is responsible for saving an estimated 5,000 lives a year. That is to be applauded, but it should not be taken for granted. Recent years have seen a drop in cervical screening coverage, and this risks an increase in the incidence of cervical cancer and the danger of further unnecessary deaths when we have been very close to making a breakthrough. We need to be vigilant if we are to maintain the progress we have already made and make up further ground in tackling the disease.

Even with the progress that we have made on screening, some 3,000 people a year are diagnosed with cervical cancer, and an astonishing 890 a year people die of it. The figures for 2015-16 show that the coverage in England sits at 72.7% of eligible women, which is the lowest for 19 years. This is in spite of the so-called Jade Goody effect, when the TV star’s death from cervical cancer in 2009 resulted in 400,000 more women getting screened. Sadly, that effect has now been completely reversed. The numbers of screenings have been falling year on year, and they now stand at 3% lower than they were in 2011. Screening coverage rates across all age groups are falling.

I cannot stress strongly enough how significant and worrying these statistics are. They mean that more than a quarter of women in this country are leaving themselves open to a cancer that can be prevented, but that can easily be fatal if left undetected. As we all know, the general rule of cancer is that early diagnosis leads to a better prognosis, and cervical cancer is no different. The later the diagnosis, the poorer the health outcomes, and the more invasive and personally costly the treatment options. It benefits everyone involved if cervical cancer can be prevented, or detected and treated early.

Let me address one of the groups with the least coverage: young women. Women are invited for smear tests from the age of 25, but new research by Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust has shown that more than a quarter of women in the 25 to 29 age bracket are too embarrassed to attend one. Shockingly, the same research also suggested that 70% of young women did not believe that smear tests could reduce a woman’s risk of cervical cancer. Let me be clear: they absolutely can. We know that 75% of cervical cancers can be prevented from developing through regular smear testing, yet more than 220,000 of the 25 to 29-year-olds invited for a test in England in the past year did not attend.

The research found several other causes for concern, including the fact that 24% of young women were unable to recognise a single symptom of cervical cancer, and that only just over half of them recognised that bleeding outside of periods was a symptom. That is the most common symptom of cervical cancer. Additionally, fewer than half knew that smear tests look for pre-cancerous cells, and almost a quarter incorrectly thought that the test was for ovarian cancer.

This problem is not unique to the younger generation. The 25 to 29 age group remains the group with the lowest coverage, but the 45 to 49 age group has seen the fastest decrease in coverage in recent years. Women over 50 display a similar tendency to put off or ignore smear testing, with a third having delayed or not attended their test. A shocking one in 10 have delayed for more than five years. This is particularly disconcerting because women aged 50 to 64 are the most likely to receive an advanced stage diagnosis, with half of those being stage 2 or later. As I mentioned earlier, this means more invasive treatment and risks poorer outcomes.

By far the biggest risk factor in developing cervical cancer is not attending cervical screenings, but Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust has found that attendance declines with age. The charity’s long-term modelling has shown that if screening coverage continues to fall at its current rate, incidences of cervical cancer will have increased by 16% among 60 to 64-year-olds, and by a shocking...
We must ensure that coverage does not continue to fall. Indeed, it must be raised to an acceptable level, but the current outlook is mixed. A new report by Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust for this year’s Cervical Cancer Prevention Week found that local provision is confused. While there is some evidence of best practice among local authorities and clinical commissioning groups, almost half of local authorities and almost two thirds of CCGs in England have not taken steps to increase cervical screening attendance in the past two years. The report also found regional disparities. In Yorkshire and Humber, 65% of CCGs had taken steps to increase screening, compared with just 18% of CCGs in the west midlands and the north-east. Similarly, 78% of local authorities in the north-west have taken action compared with just 33% in the east midlands. Perhaps most shockingly of all, in London, where coverage lags behind the rest of the country at just two thirds of women, 20 out of 32 local authorities reported no activity at all towards increasing screening coverage. That has all the appearance of a postcode lottery. We risk coverage continuing to fall in some areas of England while other areas make progress. Nobody wants a situation in which someone’s likelihood of developing cervical cancer is determined in no small part by the area in which they live. The Government should play their part to ensure that improvement happens across the board.

What can be done? We must seek to make access to cervical cancer screening as easy as possible. Screening takes five minutes and can save a life. Great strides have been made in recent years in making another simple test—blood pressure—available at every opportunity, which has been remarkably successful. There is every reason to expect that we could do the same for cervical cancer screening. However, I fear that the Government have taken a step in the wrong direction in recent years.

85% among 70 to 74-year-olds, by 2040. If screening coverage falls by another 5%, the mortality rate among 60 to 64-year-olds will double.

Age is not the only determining factor of one’s likelihood of being screened. One area of particular concern is that only 78% of black and minority ethnic women knew what a cervical screening test was compared with 91% of white women. This fell to 70% when looking at Asian women alone. Worryingly, only 53% of BAME women thought that screening was a necessary health test. This needs to be addressed, both nationally and within those communities.

The anxieties that all women were found to have about being screened, including embarrassment, worries about taking their clothes off in front of a stranger or discomfort with their body in general, are all heightened in particular ethnic communities with certain cultural norms. I have heard examples of mothers in certain minority ethnic households intercepting NHS screening invitation letters, leading to distress among younger women, who may experience cultural pressure that they should have maintained their virginity. If such factors put young BAME women off getting screened, that exposes them to significant risk of the disease. Particular focus should be paid to ensuring that mothers in those communities appreciate the dangers of cervical cancer, and that such cultural norms are not worth risking their daughters’ lives over.

We must ensure that coverage does not continue to fall. Indeed, it must be raised to an acceptable level, but the current outlook is mixed. A new report by Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust for this year’s Cervical Cancer Prevention Week found that local provision is confused. While there is some evidence of best practice among local authorities and clinical commissioning groups, almost half of local authorities and almost two thirds of CCGs in England have not taken steps to increase cervical screening attendance in the past two years. The report also found regional disparities. In Yorkshire and Humber, 65% of CCGs had taken steps to increase screening, compared with just 18% of CCGs in the west midlands and the north-east. Similarly, 78% of local authorities in the north-west have taken action compared with just 33% in the east midlands. Perhaps most shockingly of all, in London, where coverage lags behind the rest of the country at just two thirds of women, 20 out of 32 local authorities reported no activity at all towards increasing screening coverage. That has all the appearance of a postcode lottery. We risk coverage continuing to fall in some areas of England while other areas make progress. Nobody wants a situation in which someone’s likelihood of developing cervical cancer is determined in no small part by the area in which they live. The Government should play their part to ensure that improvement happens across the board.

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programmes and their commitment to tackling cervical cancer, I hope that the Minister will take note of the research from Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust—perhaps he will even work with it to identify where there are still gaps in provision—and take that action now.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Just before I call the Minister, I say to the hon. Lady that Jade Goody lived in my constituency. When she died, I wrote to her mother to say that her daughter’s death had not been in vain because it had drawn attention to the situation and had warned generations of women of the action that they must take to protect themselves and give themselves a chance.

I am shocked that the hon. Lady has drawn to the attention of the House this afternoon the fact that that has not been the case. I sincerely hope that her bringing this debate to the House this afternoon and the Minister’s attention to the points she has made—I am sure he is about to address them now—will reverse that situation.

2.47 pm
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): Thank you for those comments, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) for her constructive speech, which was challenging towards the end. She raised four important points, which I will try to address in my remarks.

I also thank the hon. Lady for her work with the all-party parliamentary group on women’s health to lead the charge on cervical screening. On Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust and the #SmearForSmear campaign, during her remarks I was able to check with both my Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), and the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), and we will be delighted to take a selfie with her that we can use for #SmearForSmear. This debate is about asking challenging questions, but it is also about awareness. We will do anything we can to help a charity such as Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust do its job better. Perhaps we can take the selfie together after we finish.

As the hon. Member for Dewsbury said, nine women a day are being diagnosed with cervical cancer and two to three women a day are dying. It is a cancer that is almost entirely preventable through screening although, as she said, the symptoms are hard to detect, which I will cover. She said that the cancer strategy, which is being led by Cally Palmer, covers screening in some detail, including how we will proceed, and addresses the need right across the cancers for clinical commissioning groups to take a consistent approach to survival rates, early diagnosis, 62 day referral-to-treatment times and the whole cancer experience.

One of the things that I always say when we in this place have a debate about cancer is that we spend too much time—I am as guilty, or have been in the past, as any other Member—discussing the bricks and mortar of the health service and not enough thinking about some things that probably matter more to our constituents, such as one-year survival rates for cancer. We should be evaluating and holding our CCGs to account much more often over differential one-year survival rates because, in the end, they probably matter to more people and have more impact on their lives than perhaps some of the accident and emergency reconfigurations that we discuss.

There is a cervical cancer screening programme, and the hon. Lady made some good points about take-up. She did not talk about the campaign that has been waged in some areas on screening under the age of 25. I do not think that that is something that Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust wants, but I will cover it and the reasons we do not do it.

The hon. Lady mentioned the importance of the enhanced HPV screen that is coming in, asking a question about the IT systems to support that. We are planning that that will be in place—I have confirmed that; I think written questions have been tabled on the issue—by April 2019, when it will be rolled out. That will be in place. I can give her that assurance.

I want to talk a little about the point the hon. Lady made about GP awareness and clinical practice, because, as she said, there is not enough awareness of the symptoms of cervical cancer. It is hard to detect the symptoms, such as abdominal bleeding and its many causes. I will also cover the fact, which she rightly referred to, that the UK is doing a lot in the area of vaccination, which is probably what will achieve the most progress in the future and make the biggest difference in getting rid of this disease, which is, as you said, Madam Deputy Speaker, quite preventable.

On screening, I will start with the good news: we have screened 3 million women a year between the ages of 25 and 49. Every three years, a screening is available. After that, to the age of 64, it is every five years. The view is that, if that screening were not being done, there would be about 5,000 more deaths a year, rather than the 700 to 800 that are happening now.

Although there are few areas of cancer treatment, performance and survival rates on which the UK could say that it is a world leader, the screening figures from the OECD show that we are No. 4 of the 30 OECD countries. We do more screening than countries such as Germany, Denmark and Austria. However, the hon. Lady raised the point, and she is right, that screening rates are going down. They are going down across the world and we do not wholly understand why. We need to do more to get them up, as about 25% of women who are entitled to be screened are not being screened, and that percentage increases for women coming for their first screen at the age of 25 to 29. That is arguably the most important one, but the percentage of those not coming is about 33%.

As the hon. Lady said, the incidence of that is higher among ethnic minority women and among women with learning disabilities. There is a correlation with social deprivation as well. Perhaps that is predictable, but it is nevertheless true.

On the reasons for that, the hon. Lady talked about, perhaps, embarrassment. I think Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust has done some work on that. Some people say that they have no time to go to their GP, or they are scared about what the procedure involves or they think it is not important. We need to do what we can to improve that.

The hon. Lady raised some interesting points about the letter people receive, and she quoted from it. I am told that that correspondence is being reviewed, but it
strikes me—she made the point in her speech—that we are all on the same side in this regard. One way forward might be for her and Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust to come and speak to me about some of those suggestions, because they would be pushing at an open door. We can do that in the next few weeks.

We are trying to make the information more accessible, particularly for women with learning difficulties, because there are specific issues there—there are specific issues with their health in general, but particularly with regard to this issue. As the hon. Lady said, a lot of work is going on to target those GP practice areas and understand why they have such high incidence of no-shows. It is somewhat correlated with ethnic minorities, and it might involve some behavioural norms, for the reasons that were mentioned. I should say at this point that the Chancellor gave £650,000 from the tampon tax to Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust, which has used that money to try to understand, behaviourally, why a quarter of women are still not coming forward for screening in spite of a second reminder, and to increase awareness. None of that is to say, though, that there is not more to do. I am happy to speak to her and Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust about it.

From time to time there have been petitions and discussions about lowering the age limit for screening. I was pleased that the hon. Lady did not mention that, because it has been looked at again by the UK National Screening Committee, the World Health Organisation and, indeed, Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust, and there is agreement that earlier screening would do more harm than good because it is particularly likely to lead to false positives, which would create a pressure for biopsies that are not necessary. Notwithstanding the tragic case of Amber Cliff, the view is that screening that cohort of women earlier not only would not be beneficial—it is not a question of it not being cost-effective—but would actually make things worse. In that cohort of women, about five a year die, so it is particularly important that they understand the symptoms and go to their GP as quickly as possible. I should emphasise that there is no EU or other UK country that screens women under the age of 25. I shall discuss vaccination in more detail in a moment, but it is one of the things that will make a difference to women in that age group, and it will help with the screening no-shows, because we are getting much better uptake numbers for vaccination.

The hon. Lady talked about HPV as a significant indicator of risk. One thing that is being introduced on the back of the normal, historical screening is screening for the virus on the first occasion. If it is present, the woman will be monitored much more closely going forward, because it is a very good indicator of the likelihood of cervical cancer developing. As I said, that programme will be rolled out nationally from April 2019. We are at the forefront of countries that are doing that around the world. I used to work with IT systems, and the hon. Lady is right to continue to ask about this one. The referral system and database will be ready to make that roll-out happen.

The hon. Lady rightly discussed the need for a GP outcomes framework. NHS England has done work to ensure that GP awareness is as high as it should be and that women, particularly those with mid-period bleeding, understand that it is serious and should be investigated and, if necessary, that they should be sent to a gynaecologist.

HPV, which is the indicator of this and other cancers, lends itself to vaccination, and we are one of the first countries in the world to bring in a very high volume of vaccinations of girls aged between 12 and 13. I am pleased to say that, last year, 85% of year 9 girls received the vaccination, which almost entirely takes away the likelihood of cervical cancer developing. That 85% is a higher number than the screening number, and it will help us to catch the people and the areas that have traditionally been hard to reach. Indeed, it is one means that we will use to address the issue of those hard-to-reach groups.

As HPV leads to other cancers, it has been suggested that the vaccination should also be given to boys. That is under discussion now, and we will be making a decision in the next few months. At the moment, only girls are vaccinated.

Let me finish by thanking again the hon. Member for Dewsbury for the points she raised, and for the way in which she did so. This is not a party issue—all of us are against cervical cancer. However, it is right that we challenge the postcode lottery that she mentioned and discuss ways to improve the take up of screening. If the five of us who are in the Chamber can do a selfie at the end of this debate and give it to Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust it will perhaps show that, at least, the awareness part has been achieved.

Question put and agreed to.

3.1 pm

House adjourned.
House of Commons

Monday 30 January 2017

The House met at half-past Two o’clock

PRAYERS

[MRSpeaker in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

UK-US Defence Relations

1. John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What discussions he has had with his new US counterpart on UK-US defence relations. [908438]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): I had an introductory call with Secretary Jim Mattis last Monday. We discussed our joint leadership in NATO, including modernising the alliance and encouraging all members to meet the 2% spending commitment. On Friday, President Trump confirmed he is 100% committed to NATO. We also plan to work together to accelerate the defeat of Daesh in Iraq and Syria. I look forward to meeting Secretary Mattis at the NATO Defence Ministers meeting in a fortnight’s time.

John Nicolson: The new American President supports the torture of prisoners of war. We do not and neither does the new Secretary of Defence. May I ask the Secretary of State not to reiterate the Government’s position absolutely clear. We do not condone the use of torture in operations and that co-operation between European countries should be in the context of NATO, not the EU?

Sir Michael Fallon: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the Government’s position absolutely clear. We do not condone the use of torture in operations and now does the new American Secretary of Defence, Jim Mattis. As I understand it, the President of the United States has made it clear that there is no place and outrage that we feel. Has the Secretary of State not to reiterate the Government’s position absolutely clear. We do not condone the use of torture in operations and that co-operation between European countries should be in the context of NATO, not the EU?

Sir Michael Fallon: That understanding. We see no plans from the American aircraft, where they are in similar areas, are covered by that understanding. We see no plans from the American defence Secretary to impose a blanket travel ban on citizens from seven Muslim majority nations. To do this on Friday, which was Holocaust Memorial Day, only adds to the horror and outrage that we feel. Has the Secretary of State made clear to his US counterparts that there is no place for such measures in the fight against terrorism, and that

Sir Michael Fallon: That is why we agreed, at Warsaw summit in 2014. A number of other NATO members still have a long way to go to meet the 2% target. We also agree with the new President that we need to continue to modernise NATO to make it effective as a response and as a deterrent.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): What is the Defence Secretary’s attitude to the prospect of the US conducting joint operations with Russia in Syria, an idea floated by the President?

Sir Michael Fallon: The United States and Russia already have an understanding on operations in Syria that they will de-conflict their air operations. Our own aircraft, where they are in similar areas, are covered by that understanding. We see no plans from the American Government, inside the coalition, to co-operate more fully with Russia.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Cover to the Baltic states has been extended to Romania, given Russia’s direct threat to that country. What reassurance can the Defence Secretary give to the Baltic states, which are very nervous about an assertive and aggressive Russia?

Sir Michael Fallon: That is why we agreed, at Warsaw last summer, to deploy troops to all three Baltic states. Britain will be leading the enhanced forward presence by deploying a battalion there in Estonia, and contributing troops to the American battalion deployed in Poland, to deter Russia from any further aggression towards those countries.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): This weekend, we have been shocked and appalled by the US President’s decision to impose a blanket travel ban on citizens from seven Muslim majority nations. To do this on Friday, which was Holocaust Memorial Day, only adds to the horror and outrage that we feel. Has the Secretary of State made clear to his US counterparts that there is no place for such measures in the fight against terrorism, and that
such actions only inflame tensions and risk losing valuable allies, such as Iraq, who are with us in the fight against Daesh?

Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Lady and indeed the House may have the opportunity to discuss this matter a little later on, when a statement is made more formally about immigration policy, but let me be very clear that we look forward to working with a new United States Administration on the battle against Daesh. That includes, of course, measures to prevent and reduce radicalisation.

Nia Griffith: Many of us have also been embarrassed by and ashamed of our Prime Minister, who for all her rhetoric on Britain leading the world, decided to hold Trump’s hand instead of holding him to account. Her belated and limp reply of “We do not agree” was pathetic, especially when compared with Chancellor Merkel, who spelled out that even the necessary and determined fight against terrorism does not justify placing people of a certain origin or belief under general suspicion. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that if President Trump issues defence-related Executive orders that infringe national law or are an affront to humanity, the UK Government’s response will be prompt, robust and unequivocal?

Sir Michael Fallon: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister conducted a very prompt and successful visit to the United States, and was able to secure from the new President a 100% commitment to the NATO alliance and to work with him on a number of the issues that we deal with jointly, including the coalition against Daesh.

Sea Cadets

2. Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): What support his Department gives to Sea Cadets.[908439]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): The Government and the Royal Navy recognise the benefits of supporting the Sea Cadets and provide support through a grant in aid payment. This is paid to the Marine Society & Sea Cadets through a memorandum of understanding, which also sets out further support with regard to the provision of personnel, accommodation and training.

Scott Mann: I recently had the pleasure of meeting the Padstow Sea Cadets and their chairman, and fantastic work is done there. The chairman expressed concerns to me about some of their fixed costs, such as some of their utilities, insurance premiums, transport costs and tuition fees. Will the Minister look at this again, and see if he could make a contribution to the fixed costs of the service?

Mark Lancaster: The grant in aid payment to the Marine Society & Sea Cadets is currently £10 million. The MOU between the Royal Navy and the MSSC, which is currently under review, will ensure that there continues to be Royal Navy support for the Sea Cadets. I would be more than happy to ensure that discussions on property issues will continue.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Female sea cadets make up just a third of all such cadets. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to encourage more females to join the Sea Cadets?

Mark Lancaster: It must be said that female representation in the Sea Cadets is actually higher than it is in the armed forces, but it is a matter that the Government take very seriously. We have set several targets to ensure that our armed forces are viewed as being open to both men and women, and we will continue to pursue that over the coming years.

23. [908460] Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): You cannot get much further from the sea than Kettering, yet the Kettering Sea Cadets are an example that other Sea Cadet organisations should follow. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Sea Cadets, the Air Squadrons and the Army Cadets provide our young people with some of the best examples in life that they could follow?

Mark Lancaster: I think Milton Keynes may actually be further from the sea than Kettering, and we also have a thriving Sea Cadet unit. I am a great fan of the cadets. I started my military life in the Air Cadets some 32 years ago. It is something that I valued enormously. That is why I like to think that I am one of the greatest champions for the cadet forces.

NATO Spending Target

3. James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on NATO’s 2% GDP spending target. [908440]

8. Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on NATO’s 2% GDP spending target. [908445]

13. Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on NATO’s 2% GDP spending target. [908450]

18. Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on NATO’s 2% GDP spending target. [908455]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): At the Wales summit, NATO agreed that security depends on both how much we spend and how we spend it. All 28 allies committed to meeting the defence investment pledge. The United Kingdom already meets NATO’s spending targets, and will continue to do so for the rest of this decade. I regularly encourage all allies similarly to meet this commitment.

James Berry: It is right for all NATO members to meet the 2% spending commitment which we make sacrifices here to meet, but in the course of his discussions on spending and NATO deployments, has my right hon. Friend met anyone who believes that deploying troops to a NATO ally’s territory is escalatory?
Sir Michael Fallon: The battalions that NATO is deploying to the Baltic states and Poland are combat-ready forces, but they are defensive in nature, and constitute a proportionate response to deter Russian aggression in the region. The only people who believe this deployment to be escalatory are President Putin and the leader of the Labour party. It is extraordinary that the official Leader of the Opposition is not prepared to back the deployment of British troops in Europe, but now favours some kind of demilitarised zone.

Chris Davies: Discussions are taking place in the European Union about an EU defence system. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that commitments on the part of our European allies to this new so-called EU army do not contradict commitments to spending 2% of GDP on defence?

Sir Michael Fallon: There is no agreement in the EU on the proposal for an EU army. We continue to make clear that nothing should undermine NATO, which remains the cornerstone of European defence, and we continue to press for closer co-operation between the EU and NATO. It is a fact, however, that 18 of the 22 EU members of NATO do not spend 2% of their GDP, and have much more to do to enable NATO to face the threats that confront it.

Simon Hoare: The Prime Minister played a blinder last week with the President of the United States in stiffening his sinews with regard to NATO, but President Trump’s vacillation in that regard over the last few weeks clearly exposes a weakness in NATO in respect of the many countries which do not pay that 2%. May I urge my right hon. Friend to make every effort that he can to ensure that those countries understand that we cannot always rely on the United States of America?

Sir Michael Fallon: There we agree with President Trump. Since making the defence investment pledge, the majority of allies have increased their spending in real terms, but it is still too low: 19 of the NATO 28 spend less than 1.5%, and five NATO members—by no means the poorest—do not even spend 1%. We will continue, with the United States, to encourage all allies to meet those spending commitments.

Jack Lopresti: As well as encouraging our NATO allies to maintain the spending of 2% of GDP on defence, will my right hon. Friend ensure that they do not achieve the 2% by including extraneous items such as pensions and other administration costs, rather than investing in frontline capability?

Sir Michael Fallon: The expenditure that NATO classifies as meeting or not meeting the 2% is something for NATO to judge against its own guidelines. I note that our own Defence Committee commended the Government’s commitment to UK defence and found that our accounting criteria fell firmly within existing NATO guidelines, but ultimately, as I have said, this is a matter for NATO to judge.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Since the Wales summit, 22 NATO countries have increased their defence spending in real terms, and 20 of them have increased it as a percentage of GDP. The number of allies spending 20% of their overall defence expenditure on equipment modernisation has also risen from eight to 10. Is the real risk to NATO not, in fact, defence spending, but a move away from transatlantic solidarity, which the present President is in danger of taking forward?

Sir Michael Fallon: Of course we welcome the increases in defence spending that have taken place—the baton is moving in the right direction—but I hope the hon. Lady agrees that a number of countries, including some that are quite wealthy, are still a long way from meeting the 2% target, and, in some cases, the 20% target as well. As for her latter point, I agree with her: this is a north Atlantic alliance, and it is extremely important for all of us to continue to assure the United States that that alliance is as much in the interests of the United States as it is in our interests here in Europe.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I think we should hear from a Lancashire knight: Sir David Crausby.

Sir David Crausby (Bolton North East) (Lab): Now that the United States of America has clearly become a less stable and reliable NATO partner, how pragmatic is the 2% spending target, and what consideration has the Secretary of State given to allocating more time for European defence, or is European defence simply not fashionable any more?

Sir Michael Fallon: So far as our partnership with the United States is concerned, it is the broadest, deepest and most advanced defence partnership in the world, and my aim is to continue to strengthen it with the new Administration, particularly in the shared programmes we have on the joint strike fighter aircraft and in the reinstatement of our maritime patrol aircraft capability.

So far as European defence is concerned, I believe that the President’s remarks during the campaign and subsequently are a wake-up call to all of us in Europe to make sure that when we make these commitments, we honour them.

Mr Speaker: I am sure the Secretary of State meant graciously to congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton North East (Sir David Crausby) upon his knighthood, but as he did not, I do so on his behalf.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): The National Audit Office reports that the procurement budget will reach its peak in 2020-23, at a time when massive and vital projects such as the F-35, Ajax and the Type 26 and 31 programmes will reach their peak. Our NATO partners such as the United States have a much more thorough oversight of procurement projects, something that can be undertaken here only by the Defence Committee or the Single Source Regulations Office. What plans does the Secretary of State have to increase the oversight of these massive projects, to ensure that we not only meet the 2% GDP target, but our capability is delivered on time, on budget and—

Mr Speaker: I think we have got the general drift, and we are deeply obliged to the hon. Gentleman.
Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Gentleman knows that we are increasing the equipment budget with a programme of £180 billion of spending over the next 10 years, and we have taken a number of steps to improve the delivery of that programme to ensure that, as he says, these major projects are delivered on time and to budget. We have also, of course, established the SSRO to ensure we get best value for money for the taxpayer.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Despite the Government’s huffing and puffing, it is now very clear that their commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence is more apparent than real. The Government are only able to say that they are achieving the 2% goal because they are including areas such as retired MOD civilian personnel pensions in their calculations, and my question is quite simple: will the Secretary of State instead commit to using the same method of calculation as Labour did at 2010?

Sir Michael Fallon: On the return we file to NATO, I have already told the House that it is for NATO to decide whether or not that expenditure is properly allocated, and the allocations we have made have been endorsed by a Select Committee of this House. Let me remind the House that our defence expenditure this year is £35 billion; next year it will be £36 billion, the following year £37 billion, and in the last year of this Parliament, £38 billion. It goes up every year.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The Government are certainly not breaking any NATO rules in calculating the 2%, but may I remind Ministers and hon. Members that 2% is a minimum? It is not a target, and we used to spend much more than 2% in the cold war years, as recently as the 1980s. Does the Secretary of State agree that even if all our NATO European allies were to meet the 2% pledge as a minimum, we would still be unable to deter an aggressive Russia without the wholehearted involvement of the United States, which is why the Prime Minister’s visit to President Trump was so absolutely important?

Sir Michael Fallon: I had been hoping over the last few days to find something on which my right hon. Friend and I can agree, and we have now done so, because I absolutely endorse both legs of his proposition. The 2% is a minimum, and we comfortably exceed it at the moment, but it is important that other countries meet it, and, overall, it is important that the alliance continues to improve its investment.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): On Friday, the National Audit Office placed a serious question mark against the Government’s 2% commitment. Its report revealed that in order to fulfil the defence equipment plan following the collapse of the pound post-Brexit, the Ministry of Defence will have to use all its £11 billion contingency fund and make a further £6 billion of savings in defence spending across the board. Given that Trident is ring-fenced, will the Secretary of State tell the country whether it will be hard-pressed defence personnel and our conventional capabilities that will bear the brunt of those cuts?

Sir Michael Fallon: No. We have always been able to maintain conventional and nuclear forces in the past. The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that the scale and success of our equipment programme depends on our securing and releasing the efficiencies to which we committed at the time of the strategic defence review, and that work is now in hand.

Brendan O’Hara: The National Audit Office report cast further doubt on the Type 26 programme: “Major changes to the requirement for the Type 26 Global Combat Ship mean that costings for this...will be unclear until 2018.” With an ageing fleet in desperate need of renewal, a looming budgetary crisis and the uncertainty caused by Brexit, cuts to numbers, and delays, how does the Secretary of State intend to make good on the promise to maintain 19 destroyers and frigates in the Royal Navy? For how much longer does he believe that the Royal Navy can respond to global threats with its current fleet?

Sir Michael Fallon: We set out our commitment to the size of the fleet in the strategic defence review. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the budget for the Type 26 frigate, which is designed to protect the deterrent that he does not want to keep; that seems an odd project to be worried about. The terms of that contract have yet to be finalised, but I can assure him that the expansion of the Royal Navy is fully funded.

Defence Suppliers: Innovation

5. Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): What steps is he taking to encourage innovation by defence suppliers.

14. John Howell (Henley) (Con): What steps is he taking to encourage innovation by defence suppliers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): With a rising defence budget and equipment plan worth £178 billion over 10 years, there are great opportunities to encourage innovation. We are spending up to 20% of our science and technology budget on research, creating an £800 million innovation fund and launching a defence and security accelerator to fund great innovative ideas fast.

Mary Robinson: Thales in Cheadle is a global centre for innovation and excellence in underwater combat systems and sonar. The delivery of that technology relies on the retention of high-tech skills. What steps is the Ministry of Defence taking to ensure that we continue to encourage the right environment for firms such as Thales and for smaller firms in my constituency by investing in complex engineering skills training and development to support innovation?

Harriett Baldwin: I draw my hon. Friend’s attention to the recently launched skills strategy, which is called “Securing Defence Skills for the Future”. The Ministry of Defence and the armed forces are already the biggest provider of apprenticeships in the UK. I know that Thales also runs highly competitive apprenticeships and graduate training programmes, and that it is particularly committed to increasing the number of women with these skills.
John Howell: How can small firms in my constituency that have great, innovative ideas bring them to the MOD without getting caught up in a bureaucratic procurement process?

Harriett Baldwin: I am sure that my hon. Friend noticed that, on Thursday, I launched the Enduring Challenge, which is run by the defence and security accelerator. It is designed to be a simple front door allowing anyone with a great idea that could benefit UK defence and security to enter into defence. The funding for that will be available throughout the year. On the other side of that door are helpful innovation partners who will guide small firms through a simplified procurement process, and I encourage firms from across the UK to visit the accelerator website on gov.uk to see how they can develop the next world-beating idea.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): But in order to innovate, companies must have markets and customers. President Trump has clearly proclaimed that he intends to buy American, so will the Minister assure us that, whether it is high-tech equipment, cars or supplies, her Department will actually start to buy British?

Harriett Baldwin: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we are of course the industry’s biggest customer. He will also know that there are great examples of international collaboration. For example, we are purchasing 138 planes from the 3,000 in the F-35 programme, and 15% of each of those 3,000 planes is being built in the north-west of England. We have also been selected as the global hub for the repair and maintenance of those planes.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): How are the UK Government helping defence suppliers to innovate and secure part of the £1.4 billion that is spent on repairing the UK’s nuclear weapons systems? Does the Minister agree that it would help those suppliers if there was transparency and accountability about the weapons not working effectively?

Harriett Baldwin: That is another example of where we work closely with companies in the defence supply chain on a range of ways in which they can innovate. We put a premium on innovation right across the defence industrial base, and the right hon. Gentleman draws attention to one of the areas where human innovation has been outstanding.

NATO Assurance Measures: Estonia and Poland

6. Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What deployments the UK is making as part of NATO’s assurance measures in Estonia and Poland.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning): Our Polish partners and allies will obviously appreciate such rotational deployments, but the Minister will know that they are keen to have a permanent NATO base east of Warsaw. Can he envisage that happening during the course of this Parliament?

Mike Penning: I had the pleasure of meeting my Polish counterpart only the other week. Not only did we discuss the deployment of 150 personnel and Jackal vehicles from the Light Dragoons, but I congratulated them on their spending 2% of GDP on defence. I heard what they said about NATO, but that is a matter for our NATO colleagues.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I learned a great deal about NATO on my very first visit to the United States, when I became a green card holder, so I am particularly worried about what is happening with immigration in the US. In the 1960s, NATO was the bedrock of our defence in Europe; it still is today. We need a stronger NATO and must convert President Trump into a great, positive supporter of the defence of Europe.

Mike Penning: I learned an awful lot about NATO when I was in uniform with the British Army of the Rhine back in the ’70s and ’80s. Our American allies were with us then, and they are with us today. We need to ensure that America is 100% behind NATO—that commitment has gone through—and the Labour party leadership should be, too.

Leaving the EU: UK Defence Policy

7. Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the implications for defence policy of the UK leaving the EU.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): The Prime Minister has set out our commitment to continuing to work closely with European allies and partners on shared defence and security priorities. We are already making a significant contribution to a wide range of European security challenges, and this year, in addition to undertaking our normal exercises, we will deploy troops to Estonia and Poland, and fighter jets to Romania.
Stephen Timms: The UK has long played a leading role in EU missions, including Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean and Operation Atalanta off the horn of Africa. Given the renewed commitment expressed by the Prime Minister, to which the Secretary of State has drawn attention, does he intend us to continue participating in EU missions after we leave the EU?

Sir Michael Fallon: These are voluntary missions in which we participate not simply because they are European, but because they are in our own national interest—curbing piracy off the horn of Africa, bringing peace to the Balkans and helping to stop the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean. The right hon. Gentleman is right that we will have the opportunity, if we wish to do so, to co-operate with our European partners on future missions where it is in our national interest.

Sir Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the answers to earlier questions illustrate that we punch above our weight compared with many of our European partners, both in terms of spending and in terms of deployments to protect the eastern flank of Europe? Does he further agree that that is something that our European neighbours would do very well to keep in mind as we negotiate a new relationship with them after Brexit?

Sir Michael Fallon: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his knighthood, as I should earlier have congratulated the hon. Member for Bolton North East (Sir David Crausby). My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to continue to improve the effectiveness of our work within the European Union and NATO.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The 2015 strategic defence and security review considered the pressures on allies, and the undermining of our military and economic alliances and institutions, to be possible risks. With the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, what assurances can the Secretary of State give that we will mitigate the economic risk, especially given foreign currency fluctuations? The National Audit Office pointed out that the fluctuations pose a “significant risk” to the national equipment plan.

Sir Michael Fallon: I will not comment—the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to—on the current level of sterling vis-à-vis the dollar or the euro. Suffice it to say that the Ministry, like any other large organisation, takes precautions against fluctuations in currency rates. It is far too early to say—indeed, it is wrong to speculate—where those exchange rates will eventually settle down.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Ministry of Defence’s permanent secretary has said that the European Union is “operationally irrelevant” to defence, but does my right hon. Friend agree with me that there are many areas where there is room for continued collaboration, particularly on a project-by-project basis, through the European Defence Agency?

Sir Michael Fallon: The permanent secretary agrees with me on these matters. Of course, after we leave the European Union, we will still have the largest defence budget in Europe, the largest Navy in Europe and some major capabilities that our other partners do not have. We will continue to collaborate with our partners, including key allies such as France and Germany, but also northern European allies, on different programmes. Our leaving Europe does not mean that we will not continue to seek the efficiencies that come from future collaboration.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): The Ministry of Defence has said, quite correctly, that co-operation with our European partners can both be cost-effective and achieve worthwhile results. I welcome the Secretary of State’s comments this afternoon, but can he specifically tell us whether he has had discussions with the Brexit Secretary about future European co-operation after we leave the European Union?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes, I have.

NATO: Role of US Administration

9. Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the US Administration on their continuing role in NATO.

Sir Michael Fallon: I have had those discussions, and I look forward to having further discussions when NATO Defence Ministers meet in a fortnight’s time, because we, too, would like NATO to continue to modernise; streamline its bureaucracy and decision making; improve the movement of troops, armour and equipment across its internal borders; and ensure that it can respond more rapidly and more effectively in times of tension.

Mr Cunningham: It is quite true that President Trump has said that he supports NATO 100%, but the American Administration have also said that they would like to see changes in NATO to bring it into the 21st century. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with his opposite number about that? If he has not had such discussions, why does he not start them?

Sir Michael Fallon: I have had those discussions, and I was pleased to hear that the United States remains 100% committed to NATO, the bedrock of the mutual defence pact. Does he agree that the best indication of the role of the US in NATO is the co-operation that we are seeing on bringing our carrier strike force capability back, rather than some of the commentary we are hearing in the media?

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Like the Secretary of State, I was pleased to hear that the United States remains 100% committed to NATO, the bedrock of the mutual defence pact. Does he agree that the best indication of the role of the US in NATO is the co-operation that we are seeing on bringing our carrier strike force capability back, rather than some of the commentary we are hearing in the media?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes. I was very pleased to be able to conclude an agreement with the US Government before Christmas on the US Marine Corps using the carrier to land its aircraft on. There are many more opportunities for deeper collaboration on that programme, and on the development of maritime patrol aircraft, where we are both using the same type of aircraft, as there are in the research and innovation areas that the
Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin), is leading on.

Royal Navy: Size and Capability

10. Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): What recent assessment has made of the (a) adequacy of the size of the Royal Navy’s fleet and (b) capability of that fleet to respond to global threats. [908447]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): The Royal Navy is growing for the first time in a generation, with new aircraft carriers, submarines, frigates, patrol vessels and aircraft all on their way; 2017 is the start of a new era of maritime power, projecting Britain’s influence globally and delivering security at home. [Interruption.]

Ian Mearns: Sorry, it is my back, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may ask his question from a sedentary position if he wishes. I am sorry that he is in discomfort. The House will want to hear from him.

Ian Mearns: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Select Committee on Defence recently said, in a fairly damning report, that the Royal Navy’s fleet of just 17 usable frigates and destroyers is “way below the critical mass required”. Does the Minister agree with the many former Sea Lords who gave evidence to the Committee that the number of vessels is just not sufficient, given that we are island nations, to protect our interests on the high seas?

Harriett Baldwin: My sympathies to the hon. Gentleman. I wish to emphasise that the 2015 SDSR announced that we will maintain our fleet of 19 frigates and destroyers, and committed to eight Type 26 global combat ships, three new solid support ships and two new offshore patrol vessels. That is in addition, of course, to the two new aircraft carriers, which, as he knows, are well on their way.

Mr Speaker: We all wish the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) well. Knowing what a robust character he is, perhaps I can say that no injury will dare to get him down for long.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Question 17.

Mr Speaker: No, the hon. Lady should come in on this question, to which her own Question 17 is similar; she should piggy-back on this question.

17. Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): There is a thought for a Monday afternoon. What percentage of the Royal Navy is now female? How does that compare with other NATO countries? What is the MOD doing to ensure that women who are joining up can have a long and fulfilling career in our world-class Royal Navy, alongside their family responsibilities?

Harriett Baldwin: I can confirm that as of 1 October 2016, some 9% of the naval service strength was female—the departmental recruitment target is 15% by 2020. The Royal Navy has a number of initiatives to encourage recruitment and address the retention of female officers, including having more focused career management and increased access to flexible ways of working.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): In the 2015 SDSR, and again last December in the first annual report on the SDSR, the Government were very clear that the sea trials for HMS Queen Elizabeth would begin this spring, but in response to a parliamentary question last week, the Minister informed me that the trials would now take place this summer. What are the reasons for that? What will the operational service date be for HMS Queen Elizabeth?

Harriett Baldwin: I can confirm that she will commence her sea trials this summer and enter into the same programme so that she can sail into Portsmouth later this year.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): Will the Minister join me in wishing Godspeed to HMS Diamond, which is shortly to leave from Portsmouth to lead the NATO taskforce in the Black sea?

Harriett Baldwin: I certainly will join my hon. Friend in wishing Godspeed to HMS Diamond and, indeed, to all our destroyers that are currently on a range of different tasks around the globe.

Yemen

12. Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Yemen. [908449]

16. Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Yemen. [908453]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): The security situation in Yemen has been concerning since 2014, when Houthi forces and those loyal to former President Saleh took over the capital Sana’a and forced out the legitimate Government of President Hadi.

Hannah Bardell: As the suffering in Yemen unfolds, the world watches in horror. Nearly 2.2 million people are internally displaced, half of them women and girls. Evidence from Amnesty International shows that partially exploded, UK-manufactured BL755 cluster bombs are lying unexploded, injuring and maiming many people. Despite the Foreign Office Minister denying their existence, the UK Government’s own investigations back up media reports that such cluster bombs have been deployed in the war in Yemen, so when will this heartless Tory Government wake up, do a proper investigation, take on Saudi Arabia and stop the sale and deployment of these bombs?

Harriett Baldwin: I think the hon. Lady must have missed the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave on this issue in December. I can
confirm that the humanitarian situation is extremely serious. As a result, the UK is the fourth largest donor to Yemen and is committing more than £100 million this year.

Peter Grant: The single biggest contributor to the humanitarian disaster in Yemen is the Royal Saudi air force, which has systematically destroyed almost the entire infrastructure of the country, leaving 7 million people in danger of starvation because food cannot be got to them. How much worse does the humanitarian crisis have to get before the United Kingdom stops selling £2 billion-worth of weapons per year to a Government who are accused of 250 different war crimes in Yemen?

Harriett Baldwin: The UK position is of course that a political solution is the best way forward to bring long-term stability to Yemen and end the conflict there. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the coalition in Yemen is supported by United Nations resolution 2216. He will also be aware that there are regular incursions into Saudi territory, and I am sure he will recognise the legitimate self-defence of the Saudi-led coalition under United Nations resolution 2216.

24. [908461]Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): There was widespread concern at the Secretary of State’s disclosure in December that UK-made cluster bombs had been used by Saudi Arabia in Yemen. The Saudi Government have since said that they will not continue their use, but there is no way of enforcing that commitment. Will the Minister tell us whether the Secretary of State has personally urged the Saudi Government to sign the cluster munitions convention, which implements a complete ban on this most destructive of weapons?

Harriett Baldwin: Yes, I can confirm that the Government regularly urge Saudi Arabia to sign the cluster munitions convention. I can also confirm that, in his statement in December, the Secretary of State welcomed the announcement that UK munitions would no longer be used.

20. [908457]Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): We know that the UK sold 500 BL755 cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia, but the Ministry is keen to give the impression that only one of them has been dropped in Yemen. Will the Secretary of State commit to demanding a full current inventory, including serial numbers, of the remaining munitions stockpiled in Saudi Arabia, as well as records for those no longer in the Saudis’ possession?

Harriett Baldwin: I draw the hon. Lady’s attention to my previous answer about how we welcomed the Saudi Government’s commitment. We do not routinely hold records of other nations’ use, storage or location of UK-manufactured equipment, particularly items that were supplied decades ago under previous Governments.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): As the Minister knows, there are serious allegations that both sides in the conflict in Yemen have broken international humanitarian law. Those claims are particularly worrying to us in this country because we now know that United Kingdom-supplied cluster munitions have been used in Yemen. What action are the Government taking to push for a full, independent, United Nations-led investigation into the alleged violations of international law in Yemen?

Harriett Baldwin: We do not oppose calls for an international independent investigation into these incidents but, first and foremost, we want the coalition to investigate allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law attributed to those groups and for the investigations to be thorough and conclusive.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Finally, and with rapier-like speed, I am sure, I call Sir David Amess.

Royal Navy: Size and Capability

15. Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): What funding has he allocated to increase the size and capability of the Royal Navy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Vicky Foxcroft): This Government are committed to increasing our maritime power to project our influence across the world and to promote our prosperity. Over the next decade, we will spend £63 billion on new ships and submarines. The Royal Navy will have two new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers, new submarines, frigates, aircraft, patrol vessels, support ships and tankers.

Sir David Amess: When the Queen Elizabeth sets sail, does my hon. Friend agree that it will be testament to the skill of British workers and our superb Navy? It will show Britain as a global force, so will she make sure that Portsmouth gives the ship a wonderful welcome?

Harriett Baldwin: It will be a moment of enormous pride this year when the Queen Elizabeth sails into Portsmouth harbour. I am sure that my hon. Friend will join many people on the pier at Southend, hoping for a glimpse and waving as she sails past.

Topical Questions

T2. [908429]Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): My priorities remain our operations against Daesh, strengthening NATO, and implementing our defence review. I can announce today that Her Majesty the Queen will unveil the new Iraq Afghanistan memorial, with a service in London on 9 March, as a reminder of the huge contribution that our armed forces, aid workers and civilians make to the security of the United Kingdom and to help build a more stable future for the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Vicky Foxcroft: So far, 6,981 people from my constituency have signed the petition to cancel Trump’s visit, and minute by minute the figure is going up. Will the Secretary of State publicly condemn the entry ban that Donald Trump has imposed on seven majority-Muslim countries under the pretext of defence?
Sir Michael Fallon: I think that the Government’s position on this has been made very clear. We do not agree with the way in which the ban is being applied to British citizens, and the hon. Lady may have an opportunity later this afternoon, if she catches your eye, Mr Speaker, to pursue this directly with my colleague the Foreign Secretary.

T3. [908430] Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of Trident renewal on associated supply-chain jobs in the United Kingdom?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): I can confirm that the Dreadnought submarine programme is a major national investment programme that will sustain thousands of jobs across the UK. The benefit will extend well beyond the major companies leading the programme.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Army recruitment levels are now worryingly low, due in no small part to the Government’s total failure to manage the contract with Capita, allowing that parasitic company to sponge off the public purse while bringing in only 6,900 of the target of 9,500 Army recruits? Will the Minister review Capita’s contract and improve his Department’s monitoring procedures to stop leech-like companies siphoning off taxpayers’ money for little or no return?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning):

Sir Michael Fallon: We already publish a huge amount of information about the number of strikes that the Royal Air Force has carried out. That information was updated today on the Ministry’s website. It gave details of operations last week in and around Mosul, and a strike to the west of Raqqa. That information has already been made public but I will, of course, look again into whether we can improve on it.

T7. [908435] Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): I welcome the visit to Yeovil earlier this year of the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin), and the investment in Crownest fleet protection to be provided by our Merlin helicopters. What is she doing to ensure that Boeing works with Leonardo in Yeovil on the UK’s Apache helicopters, and to encourage Boeing further to build capability in the strategic aerospace cluster in Yeovil?

Harriett Baldwin: I was very impressed when I visited my hon. Friend’s constituency earlier this month. Of course, Leonardo helicopters will support our existing Apache MK1 helicopters until they are retired from service. I am delighted that Boeing announced last week that it will make the UK its European base for training, maintenance, repair and overhaul across its defence platforms. I am sure it will want to discuss that with Leonardo, which is well placed to secure subcontract work on the next generation Apaches.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): When will the Secretary of State answer calls to grant an independent inquiry into the botched Trident II D5 missile test to inform this House and our constituents what went wrong? What plans has he made to ensure that the House can be confident that the procedure for providing information is reliable and timely?

Sir Michael Fallon: I have no plans to commission the kind of inquiry that the hon. Lady proposes because, as I have made clear to the House, we do not on the Floor of the House comment on the details of nuclear submarine operations or on the details of the demonstration and shakedown operations, except to conclude that HMS Vengeance successfully carried out that operation last summer and has now rejoined the operational cycle.

T8. [908436] Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): With Iraqi security forces making good progress in liberating Mosul, will the Secretary of State confirm what our brave British forces are doing in training Iraqi security forces to rid Iraq of Daesh?

Sir Michael Fallon: As Iraqi forces become increasingly capable and are deployed across the country, we now need to deliver our training more flexibly. In addition to training in Besmaya, Taji and al-Asad air bases, I have authorised UK personnel to deliver training at other secured and protected locations in Iraq. This aligns with our approach in the Kurdish region and ensures that we continue to deliver the infantry skills, counter-IED, combat first aid and bridge training that the Iraqi forces require.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Ministers are well aware and, no doubt, very concerned that RAF serviceman Corrie McKeague has been missing since September. The hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) has done sterling work keeping Members
informed of the work that is taking place to find him, but this is clearly a very distressing time for his family. Will the Minister place on the record the Government’s concern about Corrie’s whereabouts? Will he also give an assurance that all work is being done and all resources are being put towards the search to bring him home?

Mike Penning: Naturally, there is an ongoing police inquiry, but I am sure that Members across the whole House will want to register that their thoughts are with Corrie’s family, loved ones and his service colleagues from the RAF Regiment who I had the honour of meeting at RAF Honington just after he went missing. On a daily basis, I have ensured that all available military kit, personnel and surveillance equipment are available should the police request them, and they have requested them on several occasions. I thank the hon. Gentleman for paying tribute to my Parliamentary Private Secretary, who has done diligent work in Bury St Edmunds to ensure that the local community knows what is going on. We all want Corrie to come home safely, and the MOD will do all we possibly can.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Following the revelation of a very rare failure of a Trident missile test, will the Secretary of State confirm that our nuclear deterrent still meets what might be termed the Federer criterion of being able to deliver lethal projectiles at high velocity, in rapid succession and with total accuracy over a very long period of years?

Mr Speaker: It is a very high bar to imitate the accuracy and genius to which the right hon. Gentleman alludes.

Sir Michael Fallon: I am very happy to confirm the safety and effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State had an opportunity to speak to his American counterpart over the weekend, because many of us would hope that he would have pointed out to the Americans that Trump’s ban is potentially a massive recruiting sergeant for terrorism and is not going to protect anybody at all?

Sir Michael Fallon: I have already made it clear that the Government do not agree with aspects of the ban that was announced on Friday. The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity later this afternoon to ask more detailed questions about it.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we will need to increase the study of what is happening in the South China sea, where the strategic threats are changing?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes, we are concerned at the rising tensions in the South China sea. We continue to encourage all parties that may be contesting the sovereignty of particular islands or other areas to take those disputes through the international forums that were established for that purpose, and therefore to de-escalate the situation as far as they can.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The whole country will welcome the memorial to our 625 brave soldiers who perished in Iraq and Afghanistan, and also welcome the Prime Minister’s admission that we will never engage in wars of that kind in future. Would it not be appropriate now to investigate why we went into Helmand in the belief that not a shot would be fired, yet that resulted in 425 deaths of our soldiers? Should we not investigate that to make sure that we do not repeat it?

Sir Michael Fallon: I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who has long held these views, will take the time to read in full the Prime Minister’s speech in Philadelphia last Thursday, where she spoke of the importance of standing by the fragile democracies in both Iraq and Afghanistan, where we have increased our troop presence and where we will stay until the job is done, which is to reduce the threat to our own people here.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I am sure that the whole House will have heard with some joy that the MOD’s procurement process is to be simplified and diversified. To help us to judge the success of this, will the Minister say how many people currently work in procurement at the MOD and whether that number will go up or down between now and the end of the Parliament?

Harriett Baldwin: I can provide in writing the exact number of people, as of today, who work there. As this is a bespoke trading entity, the aspiration is that we do not manage the head count in terms of our procurement but manage down the cost of procurement.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): In the light of recent events, how relaxed is the Secretary of State about Trump having his finger on the nuclear button?

Sir Michael Fallon: The United States has always been a good partner to this country and has played a leading role in NATO, and is a key part of the nuclear alliance that we and the United States share together. It is worth remembering that NATO is a nuclear alliance. I look forward to working with the new Administration on precisely that.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the Heads of Government agreement signed at the weekend between the UK and Turkey, securing over 400 jobs in Lancashire? Does that not send out a signal that Britain post-Brexit is open for business?

Sir Michael Fallon: It does. I, too, am delighted that the agreement has now been signed in principle on the TFX programme, which will combine Turkish and British technology and brainpower into the development of a new fighter aircraft. I hope that that will lead to many more jobs being created both here and in Turkey.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): In October, NATO appointed its first ever assistant secretary-general for intelligence. If the new US President follows through with his stated intention to reinstate rendition and torture, the NATO allies would be legally obliged not to work with him on intelligence. Will the Government ensure that the alliance rules out the use of torture in all respects, for the good of NATO effectiveness?
Sir Michael Fallon: I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point. We do not condone the use of torture and there are obviously implications that flow from that.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will Ministers take action to make sure that more of the new light tanks we buy are made in Britain?

Harriett Baldwin: I am not sure whether my right hon. Friend is referring to the Ajax programme, but I can confirm that we have taken extensive steps to ensure that a significant portion of the manufacturing processes of the Ajax vehicles takes place in south Wales, and we will continue to work with our suppliers to ensure that we get significant UK content in all our procurement.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): What are the reasons for the delay in the HMS Queen Elizabeth’s sea trials, and what will its in-service date be?

Sir Michael Fallon: It has always been our intention that HMS Queen Elizabeth should be accepted into the Royal Navy before the end of this year. We are not giving specific dates as to when the sea trials are likely to commence. Queen Elizabeth will set out on those sea trials when she is ready to do so.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): In 2020, Plymouth will commemorate the Mayflower leaving in order to found the American colonies. Is my right hon. Friend willing to meet me and potentially some other people to discuss how we can put together a review of the NATO fleet, not only for Her Majesty the Queen, but potentially for the President of America?

Sir Michael Fallon: I am very happy to consider that suggestion, which is the first I have heard as to how we might commemorate that particular anniversary at sea. It is certainly worth looking into.
Jobcentre Plus Offices: Closure

3.37 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP) (Urgent Question):
To ask the Minister for Work and Pensions if she will make a statement on the proposed closure of Jobcentre Plus offices throughout the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): On Thursday 26 January, the Department for Work and Pensions published proposals for the future of its estate, including jobcentres and back-office sites.

The Government are committed to helping people who can work to get back into work. Since 2010, the claimant count has dropped from almost 1.5 million to about 800,000, and employment has risen by 2.7 million to near record levels.

Old office contracts that are held by our jobcentres and benefits centres are now coming up for renewal, and in the 20 years since those contracts were signed the welfare system has undergone large-scale reform.

The roll-out of universal credit and our reforms of Jobcentre Plus have increased the number of digital interactions that claimants now have with us. Eight out of 10 claims for jobseeker’s allowance are now made online, and 99.6% of applicants for universal credit full service submitted their claim online. That has resulted in the DWP buildings being used much less: 20% of the DWP estate is currently underutilised.

As we renegotiate our out-of-date contracts, we are merging some smaller jobcentres with larger ones and co-locating others with local government premises. That will help the DWP to offer a better service to people looking for work, while delivering a better deal for the taxpayer, saving about £180 million a year for the next 2,500 new work coaches.

Most importantly, we want to see service delivery to claimants that may be affected, we will put in place robust procedures, such as offering home visits or maintaining a claim by post, to make sure that they get the support they need.

Ronnie Cowan: The UK Government’s proposal to drastically cut the number of jobcentres and DWP offices across Scotland and, indeed, the UK, including in my constituency of Inverclyde, will have a profound impact on thousands of people desperately seeking work and the support to which they are entitled. It is an insult that there has been a distinct lack of consultation with the communities affected and with our Government in Scotland. That lack of consultation is against the principles of the Smith agreement. Can the Minister explain to me why no consultation took place before the announcement of the closures?

In my constituency, the proposal is to close Port Glasgow jobcentre and make people from Kilmacolm, Port Glasgow and the east of Greenock travel miles to access DWP services. Disappointingly, this model has been replicated across the UK. That is an utter disgrace and it could push vulnerable people further into crisis, what with the added travel distance and cost placed upon individuals, many of whom have little or no readily available funds to pay for that commute. What assurances can the Minister provide to my constituents that they will still have ready access to Jobcentre Plus and DWP services?

This should be far more than a spreadsheet exercise. I ask the Minister to put people first. Many Jobcentre Plus staff work hard to build good working relationships with service users, and they are aware of specific issues and needs. Can the Minister guarantee service users the continuity and quality of those working relationships? If the Minister is so certain that the measures are required, will she at least halt their implementation until a full equality impact assessment has been conducted and a full consultation of all sites has taken place; and if not, why not?

Caroline Nokes: There are lots of points to reflect on. Most importantly, we want to see service delivery to claimants, and the hon. Gentleman was right to focus on claimants in his constituency. As he will be aware, the claimant count in his constituency is down by 39%. I believe it is critical that we seek to maintain the relationship between work coaches and the claimants they have been working with, which is why we will seek to replicate that when work coaches are moved to a new jobcentre.

Claimants will be able not just to go to the jobcentre that falls in the catchment allocated by us, but to choose the one that works best for them. We are very conscious of the fact that many people in employment already travel significant distances to work. We are making sure that when changes fall outside the ministerial criteria, there is a public consultation, and we will use that to reflect on our public sector equality duty, which we take very seriously indeed.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate the very considerable interest in this subject, but I should point out to the House—and remind those colleagues who previously knew—that there is a statement by the Foreign Secretary to follow, and thereafter other important business, which is likely to be well subscribed. There is a premium on brevity from Back Benchers and Front Benchers alike.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the Government’s success in reducing unemployment leads to the need to look at reducing the number of Jobcentre Plus offices?

Caroline Nokes: As my hon. Friend will have heard me say, the jobcentres that we are looking at are, in some cases, 20% under-occupied. It is absolutely critical and appropriate that we look at how we use our estate, and that we reflect on providing not only the best service that we can to jobseekers, but value for money to the taxpayer.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The Opposition strongly oppose the Government’s latest plans for the closure of one in 10 jobcentres in the UK. What assessment has the Department made of the
impact of these closures on claimants, in terms of travel times and additional costs? Will the Department consider issuing guidance to staff to take into account increased travel times when issuing sanctions? Accessibility is a major issue for many disabled people. The Government have said that they aim to halve the disability employment gap in the lifetime of this Parliament. How do the planned closures fit with that aim?

From this April, lone parents will be obliged to prepare for work through interviews with work coaches once a child is three years old, rather than five years old as is currently the case. We are particularly concerned about the impact on women, children and people with disabilities. Will the Government publish an assessment of the impact of these proposals on equality issues?

The Government continue to roll out universal credit, and, for the first time, people who are actually in work will have to attend interviews at jobcentres. Will the Government delay their plans to reduce their estate until they have a clearer idea of what the demands on jobcentres and staff will be under universal credit? The Government’s hope seems to be that universal credit claims will be made and managed online, but many people are not confident using IT and they may not have access to a PC, laptop or tablet. What provision will be made for claimants who have difficulty using PCs and the internet in areas where jobcentres are earmarked for closure?

These plans have simply not been thought through, and they will have a damaging impact on the way in which vital employment support is provided. The Government should think again.

**Caroline Nokes:** As the hon. Lady will have heard me say, the vast majority of our UC claimants now access services online, and we welcome and encourage such a relationship. We have made it very clear that vulnerable claimants will be able to make claims by post in some circumstances, particularly where they find it difficult to access a jobcentre or have childcare responsibilities, and it is very important to make that distinction. The hon. Lady talked about accessibility. Where there is a difference under the ministerial criteria of more than 3 miles or of 20 minutes by public transport, we will seek to hold a public consultation, which will then feed in to our equality analysis so that we can best understand the impact on claimants.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): One of the things that really impressed me during my spell at the DWP was the quality of the work coaches and their capacity for supporting real, positive change in people’s lives. If there is an opportunity to spend less on near-empty bricks and mortar and to invest more in a greater number of work coaches, is that not exactly the right thing to do?

**Caroline Nokes:** My right hon. Friend is of course right. Our work coaches are on the frontline of delivering services to claimants, not just helping them into work but helping those who are in work into more and better-paid work. That is why we are recruiting more work coaches and looking to make sure that our DWP estate both best reflects value for money for taxpayers and provides the services we need for claimants.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

May I tell the Minister that the Government appear to be making exactly the same errors as they did with the announcement of the Glasgow closure programme? Will the Minister tell us why the Scottish Government were not consulted, as per the Smith agreement? Why did she say in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) that jobcentres have catchment areas, when written answers to Members of the House have suggested that there are no catchment areas for jobcentres? Will she also tell us why the written ministerial statement indicated that redundancies may be required, and may we have further detail on that? Finally, what support, if any, will be available to claimants, particularly those with caring responsibilities, who have to travel greater distances?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman will of course be conscious that, as an employer, the DWP has sought to put its staff first and to make sure that they are informed first about the proposals. It is important to reflect that we need to make sure we have good working relations with the Scottish Government, and he will be aware that my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment travelled to the Musselburgh jobcentre the week before last. It does matter to us that people get to go to the jobcentre most convenient for them. That need not be the one allocated to them by the jobcentre, but could be one they choose for themselves. In every instance, we are seeking to make sure that claimants can work with their work coach and go to the jobcentre that is most appropriate for them.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I received notice on 26 January of a proposal to relocate the jobcentre from Red Lion Street in Chesham to Chesham library on Elgiva Lane. Will the Minister say what consultation has taken place with the 14 members of staff, and will she confirm that there will be no reduction in services for my constituents in the surrounding areas? We all want to see value for money, but will she send me the detailed analysis of the costs and savings that derive from this move, because it is just around the corner and we need to ensure that it makes sense and provides the value for money that she is rightly seeking?

**Caroline Nokes:** In many instances, co-location provides the best solution, exactly as my right hon. Friend has described, for claimants and indeed for our own staff. She will be aware that we have consulted jobcentre staff closely and looked at how we can best make sure that the new location for their roles fits with what they want, or, where essential, that they can be redeployed to other DWP roles.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): In 2010, I had three jobcentres in my constituency. Old Swan was closed by the Minister’s Department at the start of 2010, and now she wants to close the other two, in Edge Hill and Wavertree. My constituency has the 39th highest level of unemployment in our country. Why does she want to make it harder for the 2,950 people who want to access support but will have to pay £8.80 every month to do so?
Caroline Nokes: It is important to reflect that we are trying to make it easier for claimants who interact with the DWP online to do so. We are looking at instances where we can get involved in outreach projects, as has happened in various places around the country. When there are special circumstances and when people are vulnerable, we are trying to ensure that they can be given assistance with travel to jobcentres.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Shipley jobcentre has an excellent local rapport with the Salvation Army, which is situated next door and provides additional help and support for many of the people who go to the jobcentre. Will the Minister look again at such local circumstances before she goes ahead with her closure programme? In doing so, will she tell me what consultation will take place with the local community and staff at the Shipley jobcentre to ensure that any decisions taken are the right ones for my constituents and the people in the surrounding areas?

Caroline Nokes: We are seeking to ensure that we consult our staff, local stakeholders and claimants to understand what is best for them. This is part of a process brought about because the prime contract expires in March 2018. It would be grossly irresponsible of us not to reflect on how we make best use of our DWP estate, particularly when up to 20% of it is underutilised.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give it a rest with the jargon about relocating or co-locating, because she is actually closing jobcentres? Hyson Green jobcentre in Nottingham, where we have twice the national average unemployment and are in the 5% least employed, was opened by Lord Heseltine after civil disturbances in the city. It has been important in matching people with vacancies. Please will she think again?

Caroline Nokes: It is important to match people with vacancies, but it is also important to reflect on making the best use of our estate. This is an opportunity to reflect on the fact that 20% of our space is underutilised. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree that this comes at a time when we should not be wasting taxpayers’ money.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): I support the rationalisation and modernisation of any service, but Brighouse is the largest township within the Calder Valley, so relocating our jobcentre uphill and down dale out of the constituency will be a disaster to the long-term unemployed who rely on it for job advice and training. Will my hon. Friend assure me that those who have put forward the proposals have visited places such as the Calder Valley to understand the demographics and geography, or have they just sat in their offices in Whitehall using Google Maps?

Caroline Nokes: This is not an exercise using Google Maps. We have engaged in the exercise over very many months to make the best use of our DWP estate. When we are not using the space we have but are paying for it, it is critical that we think very hard about how we can best provide services to our claimants.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Has the Minister done another Glasgow? Before Christmas, her Department announced the closures of eight out of 16 jobcentres in Glasgow, calculated using Google Maps. Has she done the same again?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman and I discussed this matter in Westminster Hall just a few weeks ago. It is important that we reflect not only on geographic location, but on travel patterns so that people can get to the jobcentre that is most convenient for them. We should not simply allocate them to the jobcentre that we want them to go to. They should have the ability to choose and work with their work coaches to ensure they have the best access to facilities.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): In 2013, I sat on the Work and Pensions Committee when we produced a report on jobcentres. Overwhelmingly, we found that it is more important to have quality over quantity. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is more important to have modern and efficient services in our jobcentres, such as disabled access? At the end of the day, it is all about outcomes. We have more jobs than ever in our country, and it is all about getting the long-term unemployed into work.

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government have done a great job of getting people into work, but it is important that we do so with qualified work coaches, whom I have visited in many jobcentres up and down the country. They are working as hard as they can to help individual claimants. We must focus on those relationships.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Is there not a more sinister reason as well as some of the ones discussed earlier—namely, the operation of agency workers in most of the ex-mining areas, where people do not use the jobcentre, principally because as many as 500 people at a time can be brought in to work on zero-hours contracts? As a result, they do not go to the jobcentre at all. That is one of the reasons.

Caroline Nokes: I would like to reassure the hon. Gentleman that this is not about anything sinister. This is about us looking at the best use of the DWP estate, value for money for taxpayers, and the unemployment rate, which is down significantly since 2010.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The staff and users of the Bury Jobcentre Plus office will be delighted that it will remain open, but will my hon. Friend say when her Department next plans to review the number of Jobcentre Plus offices?

Caroline Nokes: As I indicated, this review is part of the prime contract established in 1998. It is nearly 20 years old and expires next year. All the proposals are a part of our making the best use of that contract and looking forward to what we need to provide now and in the future.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Two jobcentres in my constituency are being relocated to another jobcentre in my constituency. I need to understand why that decision was taken. We have no evidence or anything on our equality duty. I am very concerned that in Lambeth there is still a problem with gang culture, and young people in particular do not want to move from one area to another. Will the Minister please look at this again and talk to people in Lambeth before the decision is taken?
Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady makes a really important point. We want people to be able to access the jobcentres they feel most comfortable with. In some circumstances, for example where people feel sufficiently vulnerable that they do not wish to go to a jobcentre, we send the DWP visiting. I have seen that at first hand, with claimants accessing services by telephone—perhaps in instances of domestic violence—where they feel vulnerable about having to go to a public building. I absolutely take on board her points about our public sector equality duty, which we take very seriously. That is why we are carrying out an equality analysis and talking to our claimants to understand how this will impact on them.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): In my constituency over the past seven years, unemployment has more than halved. That is good news, but it means that the people who are still unemployed are the more difficult people to place and they need more intensive work. The good people of Edgware will be wondering what they have done to upset their public services, with the closure of jobcentre Plus offices. I deal with vulnerable people week in, week out for whom that centre is highly important. They will have to travel to either Walthamstow or Stratford to receive advice and sign on. What impact assessment was made before the announcement on the effects across north-east London?

Caroline Nokes: The consultation that we are carrying out with both our staff and claimants will feed into the equality analysis that we are carrying out.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The good news in Kettering is that the number of unemployed people has fallen from more than 2,000 in May 2010 to just over 900 today, and record numbers of local people are in employment. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the key achievements of hard-working jobcentre staff is to get many people online for the first time, thus improving their employability?

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is exactly right. We should celebrate not only the high number of people in Kettering in work, but the additional skills with which they have been helped by our hard-working work coaches.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): Unemployment may be falling now, but numerous forecasts suggest that the effects of Brexit might reverse or stagnate this decline. What assessment have the Government made of the ability to scale up support in the already overstretched jobcentre pluses if, as many expect, unemployment begins to increase in the future if the cuts go ahead?

Caroline Nokes: I would like to direct the hon. Lady’s attention to the National Audit Office report of 2005, which says:

“One of the Department’s main needs is flexibility in the amount of accommodation it uses.”

I reassure the hon. Lady that we are ensuring that we retain enough flexibility within the system to be able to cope with future changes in the jobs market.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): For those out of work or in other difficulties, it could be incredibly useful if citizens rights bureaux, jobcentre plus offices, council offices, local law centres and possibly agencies for those with disabilities were found in the same place—more or less co-located. Will the Minister update us on the extent to which regional Jobcentre Plus managers are discussing that with local authorities?

Caroline Nokes: I do not intend to give a blow-by-blow account of the sensitive commercial negotiations, but my hon. Friend will be aware that we are working very closely with local authorities, the voluntary sector and the education sector to make sure that we can put co-location in place. I direct him to the co-location that has taken place in Lincoln, which has proved to be a beacon of how we can best deliver services.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Some of my constituents do not use the internet, and they use jobcentre resources to complete their job searches. With the closure of Batley jobcentre, will the Minister confirm that she will reimburse those who wish to travel to use Dewsbury jobcentre for visits which, while not mandatory, are absolutely and utterly essential?
Caroline Nokes: What we are looking at is how best to support the vulnerable. The hon. Lady makes a really important point about those who are not able to deal with their claims online. It is crucial to continue to look at how our work coaches can work with those people to make sure that provision, whether it be in the shape of outreach or at a different location, is best tailored to their needs.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Wellington Jobcentre Plus office is due to relocate to Telford later this year, and Telford is 4 miles away. While we have record employment in Shropshire and in my constituency, which is most welcome, what can the Minister do to mitigate the increased costs for those who are long-term unemployed to get from Wellington to Telford to seek work?

Caroline Nokes: Many jobseekers will already travel more than 4 miles to access their nearest jobcentre, and it is important that we remember not just that, but that people in employment will also be travelling significant distances in their daily commute. We are seeking the best solutions for individuals by looking at outreach and co-location—to find ways that people can access services online so that where possible we can minimise the disruption to their looking for work.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): The DWP administration centre in my constituency is closing, and 300 jobs will be transferred out of Paisley. Has there been any assessment or consideration of the economic impact on the area? Has there been any consultation whatever, and if not, why not?

Caroline Nokes: The most important aspect when it comes to relocations such as that one is, of course, the staff. That is why we have been working closely with all our DWP staff to make sure that we find roles for them elsewhere and give them the assistance they need, should we choose to relocate them.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Many of my constituents use the jobcentre or the council’s housing services, so I welcome the decision to move Kingston jobcentre to the council offices when the lease expires in a few months’ time. It will be much more convenient for my constituents.

Caroline Nokes: Co-location is an important part of our strategy, and I am glad that my hon. Friend welcomes it. We need to identify the ways in which our claimants can best gain access not only to DWP services, but to the services of other organisations such as, in this instance, the local authority.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Minister has refused to answer this question, so I am going to give her another chance. Is she saying that she will repay the bus fares of my constituents who will now have to travel from the west end of Newcastle into the centre, or is she seriously proposing to make the most vulnerable people in Newcastle pay the cost of her failure?

Caroline Nokes: One of my first visits as a DWP Minister was to the jobcentre in Newcastle, and it was a great opportunity to see the universal credit full service being delivered at first hand. It is important to reflect on the specific criteria, and I am happy to answer the hon. Lady’s question. When people have to attend a jobcentre more than once a fortnight, we will reimburse them. As for those who are vulnerable and have childcare responsibilities, we are considering various ways in which we can deliver the service, which include allowing them to claim by post. We are very conscious that many people already travel much further than the distances that the hon. Lady has mentioned, either to go to work or to gain access to jobcentre services.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): In Corby and east Northamptonshire unemployment has also fallen by more than 50% since 2010, but what assessment has my hon. Friend made of the actual outcomes for jobseekers when Jobcentre Plus facilities are co-located with other services?

Caroline Nokes: We should reflect on some of our successful co-locations. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, we have worked closely with the local authority in Lincoln. The outcomes for jobseekers who are able to gain access to many services in the same place are as good as, or better than, the outcomes at individual jobcentres. It is important for us not to get hung up on the bricks and mortar, but to focus on the services that our work coaches provide for people who are looking for work.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): On 23 January, in a written question, I asked the Secretary of State what the criteria were for the equality analysis. I was told: “The criteria for equality analysis requires us to pay due regard to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010… We will be undertaking an equality analysis… This will include feedback from public consultation.”

As the only promotion of that public consultation has been carried out by my colleagues and me, how can the Minister ensure that due regard has been given to the Equality Act?

Caroline Nokes: In fact, there are also notices in all the Jobcentre Plus offices indicating that the consultation is ongoing. We have communicated with our claimants, and it is very important that it is their views that feed into this process.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Does the Minister or her Department think that there is any correlation between ease of access to jobcentre facilities and those who are seeking work? Can she give a cast-iron guarantee that no one will be sanctioned as a result of the closure of jobcentres in a locality?

Caroline Nokes: What we do know is that those who are on universal credit full service are spending more time looking for work. We also know that the vast majority of those job searches are conducted online, and that they are more successful.

It is important for individual claimants to have a relationship with their work coaches, because circumstances may change. That was emphasised to me in a Westminster Hall debate relatively recently. What is someone missing a bus? What if missing a connection means that a person is late for an appointment with the work coach? We want people to have a good relationship with their
work coaches, so that they give them the necessary information. It is critical that if people miss appointments, they tell us why.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for disability, I am extremely worried that closing jobcentres will make employment even less accessible to disabled claimants. Will the intensive support that needs to be given in person—not online or by post—be afforded to that group, and will home visits be afforded to all disabled constituents?

Caroline Nokes: Of course, many disabled claimants access our services very successfully online, but, as I have said, the DWP has a home visiting service which we can extend to all disabled claimants who ask for it when their circumstances make it difficult for them to go to a jobcentre. We want our work coaches to provide tailored support for each of their claimants, to have a relationship with them, and to understand their specific needs.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is difficult to square the Minister’s claim that she is merging smaller jobcentres into larger ones with her plan to close Hammersmith, our busiest jobcentre in our main town centre. Coming on top of the closure of courts, post offices and police stations, is this not the hollowing out of vital public services from our towns and cities?

Caroline Nokes: No, it is not the hollowing out of public services; it is finding the best way to deliver services to our jobseekers at the most cost-effective price for the taxpayer.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The proposal to cut the back-office functions at Corunna House and Portcullis House in my constituency came on the back of the proposal to shut the Jobcentre Plus office in Bridgeton, one of eight being closed in the city of Glasgow—and before the consultation which closes tomorrow had even concluded. This proposal is a bolt from the blue, with no consultation with agencies in the city or with the Scottish Government. What do this Government have against the people of Glasgow?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady will have heard me say earlier that my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment was in Musselburgh just two weeks ago, and she will remember that the claimant count in her constituency is down 42% since 2010.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister has talked a lot about jobseekers choosing the jobcentre that works best for them. For many of my constituents, that is the one on Eastern Avenue, which she is proposing to close. She has talked about claimants who have to attend more than fortnightly, but does she not recognise that, even for claimants who have to attend fortnightly, she is imposing huge additional travel costs on those who can least afford them?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will, of course, be aware that we expect claimants to be prepared to travel for up to an hour to seek work, and it is important that we get feedback from claimants and talk to our staff and understand the impacts. As I have said, we are looking at outreach options, we can do DWP home visiting, and many claimants will be able to conduct their claims either online or by post.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): One of the “super co-location” proposals we have heard about applies to Ayr jobcentre: Russell House, a medical centre, is going to close down and be relocated to the jobcentre. The medical centre has a car park with disabled parking spaces and a bus stop that my constituents can use, but it will be moved to a jobcentre with no parking that is half a mile from the nearest bus stop. How does that meet an equality impact assessment?

Caroline Nokes: As the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say, we are very concerned that disabled claimants make us aware of their circumstances so that they can nominate the jobcentre that is most convenient for them, benefit from DWP home visiting or conduct their claims online.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Rhondda has one of the highest unemployment rates in this country, so how on earth does it make sense to close the debt management service—the only one in Wales, at Oldway House in Porth in the Rhondda—taking the 93 jobs and sending them somewhere else? For that matter, why on earth are they closing the office in Llanelli as well? Is the plan just to put everything in Cardiff, because I simply say, like the Prime Minister said last week, yes, Cardiff is in Wales, but not all Wales is in Cardiff?

Caroline Nokes: No, of course the plan is not to put all services in Cardiff. As the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say many times, what we are seeking to do is make the best use of our estate, learn from what claimants and our Jobcentre Plus staff are telling us about these proposals, and make sure we get value for money for the taxpayer.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The DWP said that it wants to reduce its estate by 20%, but in Glasgow it is closing 50% of the estate, and in Inverness, where I grew up and my father once worked at the jobcentre, it is reducing locations by two thirds. Why is Glasgow losing out disproportionately?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will, of course, be conscious that the Jobcentre Plus estate in Glasgow has grown up historically and has many more smaller jobcentres than other parts of the country. This is about making best use of the premises we have and making sure we do not have empty desk space in our buildings.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): Lewisham has a higher than average unemployment rate, yet the Government are proposing to close the main jobcentre in Rushey Green. They want to squash it into an alternative, less accessible premises in Forest Hill. That defies common sense, to be honest. Will the Minister confirm that she will seek to find alternative premises in Lewisham town centre?

Caroline Nokes: This is not about squashing anything; it is about making sure that we have full desks in buildings, not empty desks. In some instances, we have
jobcentres where more than 20% of the desks are unused.
The hon. Lady will be aware that unemployment is down nearly 5% across London since 2015, and it is very important that we make the best use of the facilities we have and get the best value for taxpayers.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The DWP guidance says that it is a reasonable expectation that claimants should have access to an office within 3 miles or 20 minutes' travelling time. The Minister is planning to close the Broxburn centre in my constituency, which will result in claimants travelling 6 miles or 30 minutes. Given that that closure is in breach of her own guidelines, will she reverse the decision? If not, will she put on a free, accessible bus for my constituents and others so that they will not be left out in the cold?

Caroline Nokes: The circumstances that the hon. Lady has outlined are outside the ministerial criteria, and that is exactly why we are having a consultation with the public on the matter.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The Torrington Avenue office in my constituency is due to be closed and its claimants sent into the centre of the city. Does the Minister not realise that this will cause great inconvenience and great cost to my constituents, who live in one of the least well-off areas of Coventry? What is she going to do about that?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we expect jobseekers to be prepared to travel for up to an hour for work. This is about making the best use of the DWP’s estate and making sure that there are no empty desks in jobcentres up and down the country.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): Contrary to the Minister's assertion, it was confirmed to Glasgow’s MPs at meetings with DWP Ministers and representatives before Christmas that the Department used Google Maps. The Government have stated that they are consulting in areas where service users would be forced to travel more than 3 miles or for more than 20 minutes on public transport. I have checked, and it takes 23 minutes to travel the 3 miles from Easterhouse to Shettleston. Given that I made the Minister aware of this fact in last week’s Westminster Hall debate, will she tell my constituents why Easterhouse was not included in the consultation?

Caroline Nokes: The circumstances that the hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. It is crucial that we do not lose expertise, which is why we will be listening to all DWP staff to see how we can best use that resource in future.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP) rose—

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) rose—

Mr Speaker: What an unenviable dilemma! I call Margaret Ferrier.

Margaret Ferrier: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have been out on the streets of Halfway and Rutherglen in my constituency over the past two wet weekends, collecting signatures for the petition to keep the Cambuslang jobcentre open. Collecting the signatures has not been a difficult task; people are outraged by the DWP’s decision and they want to make their views known. Will the Minister please allow them to do that by doing the right thing and opening up the consultation process to all DWP sites marked for closure?

Caroline Nokes: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment will be delighted to receive the petition from the hon. Lady’s constituency and that he will reflect on the views expressed.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Does the Minister agree with those of us losing local services, such as the Alexandria jobcentre in my constituency, that the Prime Minister’s vision of a shared society is nothing other than this Government’s camouflage for attacking the most vulnerable in our communities and putting them at risk?

Caroline Nokes: We are talking about a shared society in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, where unemployment has gone down by 56% since 2010. It is really important that we ensure that our DWP estate and our work coaches are in the right locations to provide the best service to claimants and value for money to the taxpayer.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to all colleagues, and I thank the Minister for her splendidly succinct replies. Perhaps she should send a copy of her textbook to all her ministerial colleagues.
The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the implications for this country of the recent changes in US immigration policy.

In view of the understandable concern and uncertainty, it may be helpful if I describe for the House the consequences for British citizens and dual nationals of the Executive order issued last Friday. Let me begin by saying that it is not UK policy — this is not our policy — nor is it a measure that this Government would consider. I have already made clear our anxiety about measures that discriminate on grounds of nationality in ways that are divisive and wrong.

On 27 January, President Trump issued an Executive order banning citizens of seven countries from entering the US for a period of 90 days. Those countries are Syria, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Sudan. The order makes it clear that no US visas will be issued to citizens of those states and that anyone who already has a visa will be denied entry. The immigration policy of the United States is of course a matter for the Government of the United States, but on the face of it this Executive order has consequences for some British citizens. For that reason, I spoke yesterday to the US Administration and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today spoken to General Kelly, the Secretary of Homeland Security. I am able to provide the following clarification: the general principle is that all British passport holders remain welcome to travel to the US. We have received assurances from the US embassy that the Executive order will make no difference to any British passport holder, irrespective of their country of birth or whether they hold another passport. In any case, the Executive order is a temporary measure that is intended to last for 90 days until the US system has added new security precautions. This is of course a highly controversial policy that has caused unease and I repeat that it is not an approach that this Government would take.

Let me conclude by reminding the House of the vital importance of this country’s alliance with the United States, which I am sure Opposition Members appreciate. On defence, intelligence and security, we work together more closely than any other two countries in the world. That relationship is overwhelmingly to our benefit. The Prime Minister’s highly successful visit to the White House last week underlined the strength of that transatlantic alliance. Where we have differences with the United States, we will not quail from expressing them, as I have done today.[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me just say to the House that it is obvious that there is huge interest in this matter, which colleagues can rely upon me to accommodate. I understand the strength of feeling, but the Foreign Secretary’s statement, and his upcoming answers to questions, must be heard.

Boris Johnson: Where we have differences with the US, we will not hesitate to express them, as I have done today—if Opposition Members were listening—as the Prime Minister did yesterday, and as she did in her excellent speech in Philadelphia last week. We also repeat our resolve to work alongside the Trump Administration in the mutual interest of both our countries. I commend this statement to the House.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing sorrow at last night’s gun attack on a Canadian mosque, which left six dead and eight injured. They were all victims of hate, and we all have a duty to stand up to hate whenever, and in whatever form, it appears.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement. I must say that I thought that it was missing a few pages—apparently not—so I hope, Mr Speaker, that you will allow me to ask about some details that were missing from the statement and about its timing.

First, on the detail, as the Secretary of State knows, thousands of people in Britain live here on a permanent basis but are nationals of the seven listed countries and have no dual citizenship. Many of them are here with indefinite leave to remain, having fled persecution or war. Can he confirm, based on what he has said today, that these thousands of British residents are now barred from travelling to the United States? Dr Hamees Tayari, an Iranian national living and working in Glasgow, was told on Friday that she was not allowed to fly home from Costa Rica because she needed to change planes in New York. Similarly, can the Foreign Secretary confirm that a Somali national with a temporary US visa who is currently in the UK visiting their family cannot now return to the US under these rules? I hope he can clarify those points.

On the timing of the announcement, the order was issued at 9.45 pm on Friday, UK time. It then took No. 10 until midnight on Saturday, a full 27 hours later, to say that it would consider the impact on UK nationals. It then took the Prime Minister until Sunday morning to tell the Foreign Secretary to telephone the White House, and it took him until midday on Sunday to call the travel ban “divisive and wrong”—that is 38 hours. It took 38 hours to have the courage to say what everyone else was saying on Friday night.

Forty-six hours after the Executive order, we got clarification that UK nationals and dual nationals would not be affected. If that was because the wheels in Washington were slow to turn, it might be understandable, but Canada was immediately in touch with its American counterparts on Saturday and by that evening it had secured the travel rights of Canadian nationals, a full 17 hours before we had secured the travel rights of ours. Canada is supposed to be five hours behind the UK, so why was it a day ahead of us in resolving this issue?

Finally, on the timing, the order was signed barely an hour or two after the Prime Minister left the White House. Can the Foreign Secretary tell us whether this imminent order was mentioned in the discussions about terrorism and security? I do not know what is worse: that the President has such little respect for the Prime Minister that he would not think of telling her, or that he did and that she did not think it sounded wrong. If it was the first, it would hardly be a surprise; but if it was the latter, we really do have a problem because, when it comes to human rights, when it comes women’s rights and when it comes to torture and the treatment of
minorities, President Trump is already descending a very dangerous slope. When that happens, we need a Prime Minister who is prepared to tell him to stop, not one who simply proffers her hand and silently helps him along.

Boris Johnson: I listened very carefully, and I think the hon. Lady’s most substantial point was about the particular case of a Glaswegian doctor. I appreciate that there will be all sorts of cases—particularly difficult cases, heart-breaking cases—in which people have experienced a lot of frustration as a result of this measure. I repeat, because perhaps Members did not follow it first time, that this is not the policy of Her Majesty’s Government but a policy that is being promoted elsewhere.

What we will do is make sure that all our consular network and all our diplomatic network are put at the service of people who are finding difficulties as a result of these measures, but, as I said, because of the energetic action of this Government, of the Prime Minister and of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary we have an exemption for UK passport holders, whether dual nationals or otherwise. I think that most fair-minded people would say that that shows the advantages of working closely with the Trump Administration and the advantages of having a relationship that enables us to get our point across and to get the vital protections that UK passport holders need. The approach taken by the Labour party, of pointlessly demonising the Trump Administration, would have achieved the very opposite.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary welcome the joint statement by Senator John McCain and Senator Lindsey Graham expressing their fear that this Executive order will be a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism?

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. What the interventions of Senator McCain and Senator Graham possibly show is that this is a subject of lively debate on Capitol Hill, as it is here in this House. I repeat that we do not support this—it is not a policy we agree with—and it is clear from what my hon. Friend says that others in the US do not agree with it either.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement. Without a thought to the context, on Holocaust Memorial Day President Trump issued an Executive order to ban those who were born in seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the USA, including those “bad ‘dudes’” who are actually the real victims of violence fleeing the conflict in Syria. This action is inhumane, racist and immoral, and I welcome the fact that this House is now treating the threat posed by President Trump with the seriousness it deserves.

We on these Benches would also like to pay tribute to and support the strong statements made on this issue by Scotland’s First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and acknowledge the work that has already been done by so many—[Interruption.] You can learn some lessons from Scotland’s First Minister. I also pay tribute to the work being done by so many on the ground in Scotland, particularly Women for Independence, who have provided moral and practical support to those who have been unjustly affected by this desppicable action. Given the Prime Minister’s blossoming and frank relationship with President Trump, did she know in advance that he was going to issue this order, which has concerned so many of our citizens? Does the Foreign Secretary agree with senior national security experts in the US and elsewhere that this will have national security implications for the UK, given that the US Administration have now adapted Daesh’s false narrative that its conflict is one between the west and Islam? If we want to be a global leader, this Government need to show global leadership—where is it? The Prime Minister has been tested and she has failed on this, her first challenge.

Boris Johnson: As the hon. Lady will know, when it comes to tackling the scourge of Daesh—she is absolutely right about that—this country is the second biggest contributor to military action in strikes against Daesh in Iraq and in Syria. We continue to be the second biggest donor to dealing with the humanitarian crisis in that region. Everybody in this House should be incredibly proud of the leadership that the UK is showing in that respect. I have already set out my views. It is up to Members of the House of Commons if they wish to exhaust the wells of outrage in the denunciation of this policy. I have made my position clear—I made it clear yesterday. I said it was wrong to promulgate policies that stigmatise people on the basis of their nationality, and I believe that very profoundly. What we have done in the last few days is to intercede on behalf of UK nationals—that is our job—and UK passport holders. We have secured very important protections for them.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): President Trump is what we might call a “known unknown”: we know that he will do and say unpredictable things, and often just as quickly abandon those positions. He will learn as he goes along, and what we have to remember is that our security and that of Europe depends on the Atlantic alliance. So does my right hon. Friend agree that there must be no question of our refusing to welcome him to these shores, in the hope of setting him along the right path as soon as possible, to our mutual benefit?

Boris Johnson: My right hon. Friend is entirely right, in the sense that the Prime Minister succeeded the other day in getting her message across about NATO and President Trump affirmed very strongly his commitment to that alliance; it is vital for our security, particularly the article 5 guarantee, and the new President is very much in the right place on that. [Interruption.] He said so. It is totally right, of course, that the incoming President of our closest and most important ally should be accorded the honour of a state visit. That is supported by this Government and the invitation has been extended by Her Majesty the Queen, quite properly.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): This is not just about the impact on British citizens. One of our closest allies has chosen to ban refugees and target Muslims, and all the Foreign Secretary can say is that it would not be our policy. That is not good enough. Has he urged the US Administration to
lift this order, to help refugees and to stop targeting Muslims? This order was signed on Holocaust Memorial Day; for the sake of history, for heaven’s sake have the guts to speak out.

**Boris Johnson:** As I say, it is open to Opposition MPs—indeed, MPs on both sides of the House—to come forward with yet fresher expressions of outrage about the presidential Executive order. They are entitled to do that. I share the widespread disquiet and I have made my views absolutely clear. I have said that it is divisive, I have said that it is wrong, and I have said that it stigmatises people on grounds of their nationality. But I will not do what I think the Labour party would do, which is disengage from conversations with our American friends and partners in such a way as to do material damage to the interests of UK citizens. We have secured important protections for people in this country, and that is the job of this Government.

**Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): Given our newfound closeness to the Trump Administration, what plans does my right hon. Friend have to persuade the Administration, after the 90 days, to abandon what many is a despicable and immoral policy? Would he agree—to paraphrase a far wiser President, John F. Kennedy—that those who ride on the back of a tiger end up inside it?

**Boris Johnson:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend’s words will be heard in Washington, but all I can say is that we will continue to engage with the Administration to make our points about the interests of UK nationals and, of course, to convey our feelings about the global consternation that this measure has caused.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary clarify what the position would be for an Iraqi national resident in the United Kingdom whose child was a dual British and Iraqi citizen working in the United States, in the event that that child died? Would her mother be able to travel from London to the United States to bury her daughter under the current US arrangements? If not, would he agree that that would be quite simply inhuman and outrageous?

**Boris Johnson:** Of course, it is possible to create all sorts of hypothetical situations that are yet more outrageous. As far as I understand the matter—the right hon. Gentleman’s memory is at fault if he thinks that Mussolini staged concentration camps and that we have to intervene now and get the best deal we can for UK nationals.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): The United States Congress and courts, as well as the President and diplomacy, will play a part in arriving at a solution to this question. Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a universal threat from jihadists? For example, Europol has estimated that up to 5,000 jihadists have come over from several of the relevant countries. Furthermore, we should remember the victims of 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London, and in Paris, Brussels and Berlin, not to mention Lee Rigby.

**Boris Johnson:** We understand the threat from jihadists both at home and abroad, so it is ever more vital that we work with our American friends to combat that threat.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary for a moment try to recall, along with me, what it was like as I hid under the stairs when two fascist dictators, Mussolini and Hitler, rained bombs on towns and cities in Britain? Now this Government are hand in hand with another fascist, Trump. I say to the Foreign Secretary: do the decent thing and ban the visit. This man is not fit to walk in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela.

**Boris Johnson:** I hesitate to say it, but the hon. Gentleman’s memory is at fault if he thinks that Mussolini rained bombs on this country. I hear the comparison that he makes, but I do not accept it; I believe that it is in our interest to work with our American friends and partners, to show our disquiet where appropriate, and to get the best deal for UK nationals and dual nationals.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): When President Obama imposed a similar ban on a single country in 2011, American democracy ensured that it did not last, and other action was taken. Can we not rely on American democracy this time to do the right thing and take the right moral pose, and is it not the job of British Ministers to speak for British policy?

**Boris Johnson:** My right hon. Friend is entirely right; indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) has pointed out that there is already disquiet about this policy on Capitol hill. I have no doubt whatsoever that the American political system will help to introduce the requisite balances in the end. It is our job to intervene now and get the best deal we can for UK nationals.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): In November 1938, the then Conservative Government prepared a Bill that led to the Kindertransport that transported Jewish refugee children to this country. Does the Secretary of State not realise that in making his statement he should uphold the Geneva convention and speak truth to power in the United States? He has let the House, and his job, down.

**Boris Johnson:** The right hon. Gentleman is taking sanctimony to new heights. Most fair-minded people would say that we have made it clear to our friends in America that we do not agree with their policy and that we disapprove of discrimination on the grounds of nationality. However, we have worked with them to get the best possible outcome for UK nationals and dual nationals. We have also made clear to the American
Boris Johnson: I am sure that he will approve—the widespread consternation felt by individuals such as him around the world.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on condemning America’s policy, which, by any standards, is completely unjustified. Like many of us, I am delighted that Sir Mo Farah can apparently go home and see his wife and children. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with Sir Mo Farah, who described the policy as based on nothing more than prejudice and ignorance?

Boris Johnson: I savour the rare congratulations from my right hon. Friend on any matter whatever. I am particularly delighted that Sir Mo Farah can continue to go back to the United States, where he trains and can get fit to win the many medals that he does.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary knows that this policy is counterproductive, immoral and wrong. His attitude and approach is to get an exemption for UK citizens and invite the perpetrator to a full state visit. That does not seem like the wholehearted condemnation that the House deserves to hear given. What will he do to make it absolutely clear, in no uncertain terms, to the American Administration that this kind of discrimination is counterproductive, wrong and immoral?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Lady says that the policy is counterproductive, immoral and wrong; I have said that it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong. If anyone thinks that there is a substantial difference in our positions, I invite them to write to me and explain.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): I commend the Foreign Secretary on the work that he did on Sunday into the night to ensure that Britons had safe travel to the United States. Has he had clarification from the Administration on whether they have updated the advice to their embassies, because there is confusion? Some embassies are still turning dual nationals away and not allowing them to enter the United States of America.

Boris Johnson: I am thrilled that neither my hon. Friend, with whom I have travelled many times, nor Sir Mo Farah will be affected by this presidential Executive order. I can confirm that the embassy advice has been updated as we have been speaking.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Most of us condemn xenophobia without hesitation and reject racism almost by instinct. Which of the Prime Minister’s Great British values informed the initial response to Mr Trump’s order?

Boris Johnson: The Prime Minister’s primary duty, as the hon. Gentleman will know, is to the safety and security of everybody in this country, and to protect their rights and freedoms. That is what has been achieved by the agreement that we have struck. He will also know that the Prime Minister was first or very early out of the box in saying that she disagreed with this policy.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on making those words in our passports that refer to allowing Her Majesty’s subjects to travel “without let or hindrance” a reality, and on being the first Minister to come to the Dispatch Box to defend domestic policy in the United States since Lord North. May I encourage him to defend our interest, as he is doing, and not seek to tell America how to run itself?

Boris Johnson: I am not seeking to defend, explicate or rationalise in any way the policy of the presidential Executive order. I merely seek to explain how it may affect UK nationals and dual nationals, and what we have done to mitigate its effects.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On Holocaust Memorial Day on Friday, the Prime Minister told us:

“Our commitment to remember the Holocaust is about more than words….It is about….standing up to prejudice….wherever it is found today.”

Why, then, was the Prime Minister unable on Saturday to adhere to her own call to action?

Boris Johnson: The Prime Minister made it very clear that she did not agree with the policy.

Luciana Berger: She didn’t.

Boris Johnson: She did, and I have made it abundantly clear several times during the course of these proceedings that the policy is entirely a matter for the United States, but that my view is that it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Foreign Secretary is to be congratulated on working to protect the rights of British nationals, but will he also consider that he would not be telling an ally how to run its own country by reminding it, in calm and firm terms, that our shared relationship is based on mutual respect for the rule of law, both nationally and internationally? Persisting with this policy does America no good in that regard at all.

Boris Johnson: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I would just point out that we are more likely, as a nation, to get a hearing on these vital issues if we treat our long-standing friends and partners with the respect that they deserve.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It seems that fake news has come to the House of Commons with a vengeance, because the Foreign Secretary has just said that our Prime Minister was one of the first out of the blocks to condemn the words of President Trump. She certainly was not; we have heard that it took 38 hours. Her failure shames this whole country. I am proud that more people in my constituency of Brighton, Pavilion, have signed the petition to stop the state visit than in any other. They recognise that our Prime Minister has not been involved in diplomacy, but complicit with tyranny. What does the Secretary of State say?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Lady’s constituents are, of course, perfectly at liberty to sign the petition and express their views. I have expressed my views about the measure,
but I also think it would be a good thing for the visit to go ahead, because the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States is the single most important geopolitical fact of the past 100 years, and we are going to keep that relationship going.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I strongly agree with the Foreign Secretary on the importance of this country’s alliance with the United States, but does he agree that, whatever others may do, refugees arriving in this country will be dealt with with patience, courtesy and respect?

Boris Johnson: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for his point. I am glad to see that the bust of his grandfather has been rightfully restored to its place in the Oval Office. I remind him that of course Winston Churchill took a very strong view on a country being able to control its own borders and immigration policies.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I do not think the Foreign Secretary understands that so many people in this country feel such contempt for what Trump has done. Can the Foreign Secretary clarify what he said earlier? If indeed the visit of this wretched, bigoted man is going to take place, can we be reassured that under no circumstances will he address Parliament in Westminster Hall? That, in itself, would be a disgrace.

Boris Johnson: I am sure that the mood of the Chamber of the House of Commons will be reflected in all discussions about how the visit is to go ahead, but we should bear in mind that he is the elected Head of State of our closest and most important ally, and there is absolutely no reason why he should not be accorded a state visit, and every reason why he should.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Certainly, if we got the Queen to have tea with the President of China, I do not see why she should not have tea with the President of America. As all our security for 70 years depended on the special relationship, and with regard to our prosperity and a future trade deal, was not the visit of the Prime Minister an absolute triumph? We are all thoroughly proud of her. Is not the first fruit of this special relationship the fact that the Foreign Secretary has ensured the rights of British citizens?

Boris Johnson: I agree with my hon. Friend about the Prime Minister’s visit. I think it was a very great success, and the two evidently kindled an important relationship. The parallels that were drawn extensively in the US commentariat between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and our Prime Minister and the new American President were very apposite. We can look forward to a new era of security and stability, working together with the US.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The British embassy in the United States has a very important page on a website that shows a list of presidential visits to the United Kingdom. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that George W. Bush and Barack Obama were President for more than two years before they made a state visit, and that many previous Presidents did not have state visits at all, although they did visit this country in the course of their duties? Why on earth has Theresa the appeaser got this President here within a few months?

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have heard the response to what he said, but my immediate reaction is that the matter—[Interruption.] Order. I do not require any assistance. My immediate reaction is that the matter is one of taste, rather than of order—and I certainly do not need any help from the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen), who would not have the foggiest idea where to start.

Boris Johnson: May I therefore say, with your guidance, Mr Speaker, that I do find it distasteful to make comparisons between the elected leader of a great democracy and 1930s tyrants? I really have to say that I think it is inappropriate. As for the exact protocol of when the visit should take place—something about which the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) obviously cares very deeply—I cannot give him any guidance about that; it is a protocol matter.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): May I offer the Foreign Secretary my commiserations on his being sent out to bat on a very sticky wicket? Will he tell the House whether, when he intervened in Washington, it was through the State Department or the President’s son-in-law?

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that ingenious question. I am sure that the House will appreciate that we have very good relations with the US Government at all levels now. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had an excellent conversation today with General Kelly of the Homeland Security Department, confirming the very important exemptions that we have achieved for UK nationals and dual nationals.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Foreign Secretary does not like outrage, so does he understand the dismay felt by millions of Britons at the Prime Minister’s failure to condemn immediately and unequivocally Trump’s Muslim ban? Does he acknowledge that the ban may have increased the risk to British citizens in the seven countries affected by it?

Boris Johnson: I will simply have to repeat what I have already said about 15 times this afternoon about my views on this policy, which I think are exactly the same as those of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle): it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong. As for the exact protocol of when the visit should take place—something about which the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) chooses to. Let him reach into his thesaurus and exhaust the wells of outrage, by all means. We have made our position clear, and we have also secured an important exemption for UK nationals.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): As recent barbaric attacks across Europe demonstrate, we all face a continuing threat from Islamic fundamentalism, which we are all trying to address in our different ways. Although we may not have adopted the same policy as the United States, surely this is a matter for the newly elected Administration in America, its courts and its people. Our position has been immensely enhanced by the fantastic visit by our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Britain now has influence, thanks to her.
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rather obvious one?
May I suggest that a return visit by the President is a
opportunities will there be to maximise our influence?
and the mitigation that he has secured, what further
the reservations that my right hon. Friend has expressed
the world should not come to this country. May I
encourage the Secretary of State to ensure that the state
visit proceeds? Could he also advise Northern Ireland
citizens who hold Irish passports but who are entitled to
full British passports on whether they should apply for
British passports for ease of travel to the United States?
Boris Johnson: I completely agree with the point that
the hon. Gentleman rightly makes. President Trump
and his Administration have not, to the best of my
knowledge, been engaged in terrorist offences on mainland
Britain, unlike those with whom the hon. Gentleman
and his party were asked to negotiate.
Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Given
the reservations that my right hon. Friend has expressed
and the mitigation that he has secured, what further
opportunities will there be to maximise our influence?
May I suggest that a return visit by the President is a
rather obvious one?
Boris Johnson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend
for that very good thought. The presidential visit will,
of course, be an occasion for deepening the relationship
and having further such conversations. I will meet my
US counterpart at the Munich security conference in
just a few days’ time.
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): In addition
to the general dismay, does the Foreign Secretary realise
that those of us with constituencies with large Muslim
populations—my constituency has the largest Arabic-origin
population in the country—are feeling deep concern
and anxiety? Many of them travel regularly to America
for work and family reasons, and they are looking for
the strongest possible reassurance from the Government.
Can the Foreign Secretary help me on one specific
point? A very diverse school party will leave for America
in a few days, and a couple of the students have already
been refused visa waivers. Will he do what he can to
ensure smooth passage for those students, who are
going to America to study the great tradition of American
democracy?
Boris Johnson: We will, of course, do everything we
can to help the party of schoolchildren that the hon.
Lady refers to and to make sure that they have a great
trip to the US. If there are any difficulties with their
visas, we will assist. As for the Arab Muslim minority in
her constituency, of course we must speak up for them
and defend their interests and rights. That is why we
have made the points that we have about the needs of
duals and the needs of UK passport holders.
Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I commend my right hon.
Friend for his statement of condemnation. Is he aware
of the speech in 1940 in which Winston Churchill said:
“Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the
crocodile will eat him last”,
in reference to the countries that remained neutral in
the war? The dangerous trend towards nationalism,
which we have not seen since the 1930s, inflicting itself
on the western world has wrongly been defined as
populism. It is clear that this Executive order needs to
be condemned. Does my right hon. Friend agree with
me that the House must make its stand, here and now,
for the weight of history stands on our shoulders?
Boris Johnson: I completely agree that we must stand
up against bigotry and nationalism, but I do draw the
line at the comparison that has been made relentlessly
this afternoon between the elected Government of our
closest and most important ally—a great democracy—and
the anti-democratic, cruel and barbaric tyrannies of the
1930s. Continually to use the language of appeasement
demeans the horror of the 1930s and trivialises our
conversation.
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): People feel strongly about the matter because of the
great love held for the United States in this country and
in this Chamber. The Foreign Secretary is right to say
that our deep friendship brings with it the ability to be
candid. Strength also brings with it the ability to be
candid; is not the lesson from the weak response to
these announcements that desperation leads to the opposite
candour?
Boris Johnson: The important point, I stress again to
the House, is that the Government have earned the right
to speak frankly to our friends in the US. We have done
so, and we have made our views about this measure
known. As the House has heard, my views are ad idem
with the views of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle)
and other Members here today. The Prime Minister
does not approve of the measure, but the important
thing to do is to talk to our friends and partners in the
US—to reflect and relay some of the global consternation
that we detect, but to get a positive outcome for UK
nationals.
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I congratulate my
right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on securing the
rights of dual British nationals. Will he undertake to
look into the case of some middle eastern and other
Asian countries refusing entry to dual nationals from
this country?
Boris Johnson: I am aware that there are other countries,
particularly in the middle east, that ban the citizens of
at least one country from entering their own.
Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Why
did the Foreign Secretary make no reference at all in his
statement to the Americans’ suspension of their refugee
programme? Should not our Prime Minister have echoed the words of the Canadian Prime Minister by saying that we welcome those who are fleeing persecution, terror and war, regardless of their faith?

Boris Johnson: Our policy on receiving refugees has not changed, and we have a good record. The United States, to the best of my knowledge, has taken about 12,000 Syrian refugees alone. As I said earlier, I do not think that anybody could reasonably fault the United States of America as a great recipient of migrants from around the world. If we look at the numbers—45 million people in the US were not born in that country—we see that it has a very distinguished record.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that so many Members of this House have got so used to our not having control of our own immigration policy that they appear to resent another sovereign country having control of theirs?

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend puts it bluntly, but accurately. Whatever Members may think about this policy—there is a wide measure of agreement about the policy across the House—it is the prerogative of the President of the United States and the American Government to do this.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The world is an increasingly dangerous place and if the special relationship is to mean anything, surely we, as friends of America, should be deferring to the strongest possible terms and saying to President Trump that he must desist. This is not about making clear our anxiety, as we read in the Foreign Secretary’s statement; it is about the leadership we must show to deliver peace and security in the world.

Boris Johnson: With great respect, the hon. Gentleman must have failed to pay attention during the previous 15 answers I have given on exactly that point. We do not agree with the policy, but we are engaging with the United States to improve it.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I know the Foreign Secretary understands the fear that this Executive order has struck into the hearts of some of our British citizens, particularly as during the Obama Administration British citizens of Iranian extraction in my constituency had their bank accounts at UK banks closed, ostensibly because of US banking rules. May I urge the Foreign Secretary not to disengage from the USA, but to seek protections and assurances to ensure that the Executive order does not lead to further personal financial sanctions on British citizens originally from these seven countries?

Boris Johnson: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I would just remind the House that the reason the particular seven countries have been singled out—there has been a certain amount of confusion and controversy about this—is that they were in fact the seven selected by the Obama Administration for the withdrawal of the visa waiver scheme for anybody who had been to those countries.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I am sure that the three Members of this House who were born in Yemen are grateful to the Foreign Secretary for allowing us to travel to America, but a British citizen who happens to be an aid worker in Yemen or has visited Yemen for humanitarian purposes will be caught by this ban because—as I understand it, but he may have other information—the United States will not allow those who have visited or worked in Yemen to visit the United States, even though they are nationals of Britain.

Boris Johnson: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I know that he was born in Yemen, and there must initially have been some anxiety in his mind about exactly how he would be treated were he to go to the US. I am happy to say that he will face no obstacle whatever because he is a UK passport holder; nor will any UK aid worker in Yemen, because that is what we have achieved.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): We did not need the Executive order to be signed to realise that this was President Trump’s policy. After all, it was an election pledge in an election he went on to win. Given that we knew, or should have known, that this was going to happen, did the Foreign Secretary raise the issue in his meeting with President Trump’s transition team or did the Prime Minister raise it when she met President Trump? We should have known about it, and we should have raised it.

Boris Johnson: The reality is that conversations between the new Administration and the UK Government have been going on for many months. I have to say that we became aware of the policy when it was enacted by the President on Friday evening, and since then we have worked very hard to secure the exemptions and protections that we now have.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Given that the Foreign Secretary has said today that the US President’s policy is “divisive, discriminatory and wrong”, can the House safely assume that he will strengthen any representations he makes to our friends in the US on this policy by working closely in co-operation and partnership with our counterparts in the European Union and the Council of Europe?

Boris Johnson: We already work very closely—hand in glove, cheek by jowl, locked at the hip—with our friends and partners in the EU on matters of common foreign and security policy, and by the way we will continue to do so once we have left the European Union.

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): Many thousands of people will be comforted by the fact that all British passport holders will be able to travel into the US, and that those who have the legal right to be here will be able to apply for a visa. Seven countries are on President Trump’s list—their citizens are banned from entering the US for a period of 90 days. Every one of those countries bans Israeli passport holders from entering their country. Has the Foreign Secretary had any representations from dual British-Israeli citizens regarding that immigration policy, which is similarly divisive, discriminatory and wrong?
Boris Johnson: I am glad my hon. Friend has pointed that out. I had alluded to it in an elliptical way, but it is right that the House should be aware of that discrimination and the ban that exists. By the way, the House should reflect on the fact that all immigration and visa policies are by their nature discriminatory as between individuals and nations.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary is right about one thing: we have lots of friends in America. I stand with our friends there today who are standing up against this ban, which affects Muslims and others from those countries, but may I turn the Foreign Secretary’s attention back to the humanitarian cause in the middle east? Many of those affected will have been striving to save lives in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. What contact has he had with humanitarian leaders to ensure that they can travel to the United States if they need to do so?

Boris Johnson: What I can say about the conversations we have had so far is that, where people have diplomatic or political reasons to travel, or if they are travelling because they are aid workers, there should be expeditious systems for ensuring that they get through fast. That also applies to some of the people who are resident in this country but do not have either dual or UK nationality.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): The Foreign Secretary has touched on this point. Sixteen countries currently forbid admission to Israeli passport holders. What the US is doing is without question misguided and wrong, but does my right hon. Friend agree that we should be consistent in our condemnation?

Boris Johnson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising a point about which many Members of the House would have been ignorant until this afternoon. [Interruption.] There we go. Opposition Members knew it. In that case, why did they keep silent?

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Many in our academic community are not British passport holders. At the weekend, my constituent Hamaseh Tayari, a specialist vet at Glasgow University, was prevented from boarding a flight because it involved a transfer in New York. The holocaust did not start with the gas chambers. Only days after Holocaust Memorial Day, the parallels are clear. I welcome the Foreign Secretary’s condemnation, but will he condemn the restrictions in any discussions he has with his US counterpart? Will he assure the House that the price of trade with the US will not be our complicit acceptance of the new rules?

Boris Johnson: I said in my answer to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who speaks from the Front Bench, that we are aware of the problem with the Glawsegian vet and will do everything we can within our consular power to help her. The hon. Lady’s repetition of comparisons—they have been made all afternoon—between these events, the second world war and the holocaust trivialises the holocaust.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary make it clear that, while America pursues this terrible and divisive policy, which I utterly condemn, the United Kingdom will always be a place where refugees are welcome and made to feel welcome? In that spirit, will he join me in praising and thanking voluntary groups such as Refugees Welcome in Richmond, which do great work in this field?

Boris Johnson: Absolutely. I assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to be a great open society in the UK. I was very proud when I was Mayor of London that 40% of Londoners were born abroad, including me. She has repeated condemnation of the Executive order, which has been heard on both sides of the House. As I have said, it is not my place to defend or explicate that policy, but it is there for 90 days and 90 days only, and will be subject to the full scrutiny of debate on Capitol Hill. As we have heard, there is doubt there, too.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): President Trump’s decision to issue this Executive order is deeply divisive and dangerous. It has sent shockwaves around the Muslim world, including in Muslim communities across Europe and here in this country. As a Muslim, I find it deeply worrying and disturbing. Living in this country, I am deeply fearful of reprisals like the attack in Canada. When political leaders amplify tensions, when they fail to show courage and leadership, and when they fail to stand up in the face of division and hatred, we send the wrong message. I appeal to the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister to show courage and leadership, and to take steps to provide protection for those communities across Europe who are feeling very, very worried about their safety after this Executive order.

Boris Johnson: I agree very much with a lot of what the hon. Lady says, which is why the Prime Minister and I have taken the line we have on this measure. She speaks of hate crime and is absolutely right to do so. I do not want to see anything that stigmatises, entrenches divisions or causes communities to feel unwelcome, whether in this country or elsewhere. That is absolutely wrong. We take hate crime very seriously in this country. We can be proud of some of the achievements we have made in the past 10 to 20 years in cracking down on those who foment mistrust and division between our communities.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): The Prime Minister’s speech in Philadelphia was one of the best expositions I have heard in recent years of the importance of the Atlantic alliance. I urge all hon. Members who doubt that to read her speech and they will see why this is a relationship worth holding on to. Will my right hon. Friend, in considering these issues, recognise the warm response the Prime Minister received from Congressional leaders, and redouble our efforts to reach out to them across the aisle as wise counsel and friends of the United Kingdom in Washington?

Boris Johnson: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. There is a wide measure of agreement across the Atlantic on some of the essentials that unite us: the importance of NATO and our collective western defence; and the importance of promoting our values and our belief in freedom, democracy, the rule of law, equality and human rights. They are shared by many, many people in the Republican party on Capitol Hill. They also share our
strong desire to develop our trading relations with a new, free trade deal, one of the great achievements of
the Prime Minister’s visit.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I have
to say to the Foreign Secretary that the emptiness
and hollowness of his statement demean his great
office of state. Given that during President Trump’s
campaign he very clearly set out a policy to ban Muslims,
does he agree that the Executive order amounts to
banning Muslims?

Boris Johnson: No. The hon. Lady will understand
that it does not amount to that. Certain states have
been singled out. As I have said, I believe that to be wrong in
the sense that it discriminates against people on the
grounds of their nationality.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): When President
Obama came over here during the EU referendum, he
voiced his concern about what we were trying to do. We
told him in no uncertain terms that it was none of his
business—it was entirely ours. Friends should be able to
speak to each other, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the American people have voted Donald
Trump to be their President and it is their business how
they defend their borders?

Boris Johnson: I agree with my hon. Friend up to this
point: it is also our duty, as many Members have said
today, to make our views about this measure clear to the
American President. We do not like it. We disapprove of
it. We think it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong, as I
have said repeatedly. As he rightly says, however, this is
a sovereign Government of a friendly country and they
have taken this decision by due process.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate remaining
interest. If colleagues have been listening, they will have
noticed that the Foreign Secretary has been giving pithy
replies, so I would now ask for pithy, single-sentence
questions without preamble. If people want to go for
preamble, let me politely say, “Keep it for the long
winter evenings that lie ahead; we do not need you
today.”

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op):
What assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of the
impact of this Executive order on British foreign policy
objectives in the middle east and other areas in the
world with substantial Muslim populations, and how
will a state visit from President Trump assist them?

Boris Johnson: Of course, most countries in the middle
east are exempt from these provisions, but we will work
with the incoming Administration to address all the
crises in the middle east, including those affecting the
countries concerned.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I congratulate the
Foreign Secretary on standing up for British nationals.
It is right that we remain a close friend of the United
States, but will my right hon. Friend also point out as a
candid friend to the US Administration that we should
steer clear of policies that could act inadvertently as a
recruiting sergeant for Daesh?

Boris Johnson: We have been extremely candid with
our American friends and partners, as indeed I have
been candid with the House this afternoon about our
reservations, which include the grounds that my hon.
Friend mentions.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland
West) (Lab): In the hope that he will now answer it, let
me repeat the question put by the shadow Foreign
Secretary that the Foreign Secretary did not answer. In
the light of our special relationship with the United
States, why did it take the Government of the United
Kingdom over 17 hours longer to get the same assurances
that the Canadians got much quicker?

Boris Johnson: It is our duty to secure the best possible
deal for citizens of the United Kingdom. What Canada
does is a matter for Canada, and I have no knowledge
of what deal the Canadians may or may not have
secured. It is important for the House to understand
that this is an Executive order that caught many
Departments of the American Administration on the
jump, as it were, and it has taken them some time to
elaborate the policy that we now have.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Given that Donald
Trump is the democratically elected President of our
closest ally and our single biggest trading partner who is
carrying out a promise that he made to the American
people in their general presidential election, I commend
the Foreign Secretary for standing firm on the state
visit, which is absolutely in our national interest. After
all, if pursuing policies that the UK Government did
not agree with or pursuing policies in a ham-fisted
manner barred any country from a state visit, no country
would ever get a state visit.

Boris Johnson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend.
To the best of my knowledge, both Nicolae Ceausescu
and Robert Mugabe have been entertained by Her
Majesty the Queen, and I think most Members would
concede that it is our duty and the right thing to do to
make preparations now for receiving our friend, our
partner, the leader of a long-established great democracy
and our most important ally.

Mr Speaker: What a great relief it was for those of us
who did not have to meet either of those two people.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op):
Does the Foreign Secretary share my concern that the
reciprocal ban imposed by Iraq on US nationals may
damage the bids to further increase stability and security
in that fragile country?

Boris Johnson: I am very aware of that particular
problem, and I have already heard representations from
Iraqi politicians. There are, as the hon. Gentleman will
know, specific exemptions for those involved in politics
or diplomacy, and I hope that their applications will be
treated expeditiously by the US.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right
hon. Friend agree that while we can of course say that
we would not have such a policy in the UK, interfering
in the affairs of another country can be counter-productive,
as President Obama found out when he tried to influence
the outcome of the EU referendum last year?

Boris Johnson: I agree with my hon. Friend up to this
point: it is also our duty, as many Members have said
today, to make our views about this measure clear to the
American President. We do not like it. We disapprove of
it. We think it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong, as I
have said repeatedly. As he rightly says, however, this is
a sovereign Government of a friendly country and they
have taken this decision by due process.
Boris Johnson: That is entirely right. As things turned out, I was rather grateful for President Obama’s intervention. If I may say so to the House, I think we have got the balance just about right. It is very difficult, and we have had to be clear with our American friends and partners, but we have also had to secure important protections for duals and for UK citizens.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary referred earlier to matters of taste. Well, I personally find a man who refers to grabbing a woman by the pussy very distasteful. A fearful constituent called me yesterday to say that he was devastated by the Prime Minister’s failure to condemn the actions of President Trump. Does the Foreign Secretary agree?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Lady will know very well that the Prime Minister has herself said several times that such language is unacceptable.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for coming to the House and answering questions so fully. I also thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing such a debate so that we can move swiftly on to the Pension Schemes Bill afterwards.

If the Foreign Secretary had a very special friend who had been invited to a big party, which would be the better way of influencing them: banning them from the party, or taking their hand and saying to them quietly what you would like them to do?

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend has made the point very elegantly. We do not agree with this policy, we do not support it, it is not something that we would do ourselves, but we think that the best way to effect change and influence the White House is to engage, and to be as positive as we possibly can.

Mr Speaker: My keenness to accommodate colleagues is undiminished, but may I very tactfully say that if people feel that they are going to add further insight to our proceedings with their contributions they can of course continue to stand, but it is not compulsory to do so?

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Prime Minister wants to do business with President Trump, presumably in the same way that she does business with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Muslim majority countries that are not on the banned list. Not a single terrorist attack on United States soil has come from one of the seven countries on the list, yet 90% of the 9/11 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Has the Foreign Secretary made any assessment of a potential conflict of interests between the President’s personal business dealings and his domestic policy?

Boris Johnson: I am afraid that the hon. Lady must have been momentarily thinking of something else when I pointed out earlier that those seven countries had already been singled out by the Obama regime for very substantial visa restrictions.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): In March, I shall be attending a United Nations conference in New York. Can the Foreign Secretary assure me that I, as a British subject born in Yemen, and others like me will not be detained for questioning at the airport’s immigration area?

Boris Johnson: Yes, I certainly can. If my hon. Friend has any problems, she should get on to us.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Ceausescu, Mugabe and, for that matter, Putin did indeed make state visits, but none of them was invited to address both Houses of Parliament. Whose idea was it that Mr Trump should be invited to do so? Was it the Foreign Secretary’s, the Prime Minister’s, or whose?

Boris Johnson: I like the way the Labour party is obsessing about points of protocol, but all this has yet to be determined.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): The Foreign Secretary has said that British citizens should be treated on an equal basis regardless of religion or ethnic origin. May I say this to him? When I entered Pakistan, but I am a British national. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that anyone who experiences the same treatment should write to the Foreign Office, so that we have a record of it and can make the appropriate representations to the United States?

Boris Johnson: I assume that that took place under the Obama Administration. Obviously I should be happy to receive correspondence about it, but, again, my hon. Friend and every other possessor of a United Kingdom passport will be free to travel to the United States without let or hindrance.

Mr Speaker: Pithiness personified, perhaps, by Mr Pound?

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I am sure that, as a man of catholic literary tastes, the Foreign Secretary will be as familiar with that great book “The Art of the Deal” as I am. In the book, Mr Trump says that a good negotiating position is to start with something so utterly outrageous that it will incite fury throughout the world, and then move to something that may initially seem outrageous, but by comparison appears almost reasonable. As a responsible Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Gentleman will have analysed possible future actions by the President. What conclusions has he drawn?

Boris Johnson: I think the conclusion that anybody looking at the President’s electoral rhetoric and what he is in fact doing will draw is that his bark is considerably worse than his bite. I think we have every opportunity to do a very good deal with him on all sorts of things, not least free trade.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): What assessment have the UK Government made of the risk to which the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) referred a few minutes ago, namely that the Islamophobia being propagated in America may make it easier for Daesh to recruit terrorists to operate in the United Kingdom?
Boris Johnson: I understand the phenomenon to which the hon. Gentleman alludes, and we all need to work harder, and to work with our American friends and partners, to tackle that sense of exclusion and isolation which can drive extremism.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): When it comes to refugees, women’s rights or torture, we are either on one side or the other. Can the Foreign Secretary explain how many refugees we will take to offset the ban and how many women’s organisations will receive additional funding from us to offset the cut in their funding from the US Government, and will he rethink that state visit—that honour, that highest honour?

Boris Johnson: As I said earlier, this country has a proud record of taking refugees, and, indeed, of funding international organisations and of campaigning for female victims of sexual violence in conflict. We have done, I think, more than any other country in the world in that regard, and we continue those pledges. As for the hon. Gentleman’s point about the state visit, which has been made repeatedly this afternoon, I repeat: Her Majesty the Queen has extended that invitation, it is right and proper that it should go ahead, and it will.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Could the country come to the conclusion that the Government and Foreign Secretary’s response to this abhorrent and pernicious policy shows that they are so desperate for a post-Brexit trade deal with the United States that they are willing to become an apologist for the Trump Administration?

Boris Johnson: I think that any fair-minded person would, having listened to what has happened over the last 48 hours, understand that far from supporting the policy, far from acquiescing in the policy, and far from approving or agreeing with the policy, we have worked with the incoming Administration to modify that policy and to secure important protections for UK nationals and for dual nationals.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I refer the House to my entry in the register of Members’ interests. Given that a number of psychologists have now suggested that President Trump displays traits of narcissism and may be dogmatic in policy approach, how will the Foreign Secretary seek to reason with him, and will the Foreign Secretary be seeking psychological opinion himself?

Boris Johnson: Irrespective of the psychological traits of various world leaders, in which I am sure the hon. Lady is an expert—I have not had a chance to consult her register of interests to discover whether she is indeed a psychologist—we will work with the President, and indeed with all our friends and partners, to get the best outcome for our country. The partnership with the US is absolutely vital, not just for our stability and security but for that of the entire world.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): This order stigmatises not just on the basis of nationality, as the Secretary of State says it does; it stigmatises on the basis of faith. This is a Muslim ban, and that has been admitted by those the American President asked to help him implement his Muslim ban legally. Why is the Secretary of State persisting in pretending that these people are not doing the very thing that they themselves are telling us they are doing?

Boris Johnson: To the best of my knowledge, the President has himself dissociated himself from that characterisation of this policy, and I just remind the House that these seven countries do not comprise the entire Muslim world, and indeed, they are the very countries that were singled out by President Obama for thoroughly restrictive visa regulations.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Given that the Trump Administration seem intent on trading in man’s inhumanity to man, when was the first time the Secretary of State called his opposite number to express his disquiet?

Boris Johnson: As the hon. Gentleman may know, my putative opposite number has not been finally confirmed in office yet, but we have had abundant conversations with representatives of the Trump Administration about this policy.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary could comment on the blog that has just come up from Gary Gibbon at Channel 4, which states that the Prime Minister was “told a US refugee ban was coming” prior to the signing of the Executive order. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm or deny that fact?

Boris Johnson: I do not comment on confidential conversations between the Prime Minister and the US President, but I can tell the House that as soon as we had a full understanding of the measure that the US had brought in, we decided to intercede to get the protections that we needed.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): So when the Prime Minister visited the United States and Trump held her hand, did he whisper sweet nothings or did he tell her what his intentions were? Will the Foreign Secretary remind the Prime Minister that “no deal is better than a bad deal”?

Boris Johnson: I am afraid that I could not quite make out the earlier part of the hon. Gentleman’s question, but I totally agree with the last bit.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Holocaust survivors have said that this reminds them of the 1930s, so is this a time for appeasement or a time for standing up for British values?

Boris Johnson: I think that it is time for perspective and time to stop demeaning the holocaust.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I was in Washington last week with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. While we were there, members of NATO, high officers of state in the United States, congressmen and senators took us to one side and said, “Stand by us, because our values are under attack under this Administration.” Does the Foreign Secretary not appreciate that what
comes out of this Chamber and the statements that we make are important for those Americans who want to fight to retain their values?

Boris Johnson: I thank the hon. Lady for what she is doing with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. It is important that we talk to our friends and partners in NATO about the vital importance of that organisation. She is right to suggest that we have many friends on Capitol Hill who agree profoundly about the importance of NATO—as, indeed, do many in the new Trump Administration—but the way to nail down those arguments is to engage with that Administration in the way we are doing.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The ban affects the resettlement of refugees from seven countries, many of whom had been waiting in the camps for years and who had been cleared and were ready to go to the US before the ban came in. How will the Foreign Secretary use this much vaunted special relationship to speak up for the rights of those people, who are themselves the victims of war?

Boris Johnson: We have made our position clear on this policy. We believe that the US has a proud record of taking in refugees; it has already taken 12,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict, and I hope that it will think again.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary not share my concern that, although extending this invitation to the President might earn us some short-term brownie points from the new Administration in Washington, it will lose us the respect and trust of many more countries with which until recently we shared the common values of decency, tolerance and respect?

Boris Johnson: I will turn the hon. Gentleman’s entire proposition on its head: I think that other countries around the world are looking to us to engage with the new American Administration in order to reflect their concerns and to get across our key messages on NATO, on trade and on the values that unite us.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The shameful lack of an immediate condemnation and the insular, complicit platitudes from the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are a disgrace to this House. The Government often talk about their global influence, but they do not seem to have the necessary influence—or perhaps the guts—to condemn this disgraceful racist order. Why does the Foreign Secretary seem unable to condemn the impact that it will have on some of the most vulnerable people on the planet simply because they are Muslims?

Boris Johnson: I must say in all candour to the hon. Lady that it strikes me that her question was composed long before she came to the House for this statement and heard what I have had to say. Any fair-minded person listening to what I have had to say about the measure and about what the UK Government have done over the past 48 hours would not conceivably have put things in the way that she did.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, regardless of the exemption for UK nationals, the Trump presidency is tainted by this bigoted, immoral ban, that the Prime Minister is tainted by her hand-in-hand association and that he is tainted by his craven complacency?

Boris Johnson: A ministerial colleague makes from a sedentary position the important point that the leadership of the Labour party is currently in the hands of somebody who advocated talking to the IRA not so many years ago, and possibly still does. We are advocating engagement with the Government of the most powerful nation on earth, on which the security of the world depends.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Can the Foreign Secretary not understand why the measure is perceived as discriminatory against Muslims? The seven countries have Muslim majorities and the President himself said that those of minority faiths from those countries, such as Syrian Christians, will be exempt from the order.

Boris Johnson: I do not think that there is much between our perspectives on this. I have said repeatedly this afternoon that I believe the measure to be divisive, discriminatory and wrong, more or less parroting the hon. Lady’s words—in fact, she parroted me. That is my view. In so far as the measure may turn out to be counterproductive, which is the view of many hon. Members, we are also making that point.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that such action is exactly what ISIS wants and plays into its false narrative that the west is anti-Muslim? What President Trump has done is not only immoral, but a threat to our national security. That is why we cannot be seen to endorse it.

Boris Johnson: Everybody understands the scope and extent of the challenge that we face from radical Islamic extremism. I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point about the danger of pushing people into a corner and making them feel more isolated. He is quite right to raise that. However, we are working with a huge coalition of Muslim countries, many of which are completely unaffected by this measure, to defeat that extremism and radicalisation.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Did the Foreign Secretary at any point in his conversations raise the Geneva convention and the US Government’s obligations, or was that left to Chancellor Angela Merkel?

Boris Johnson: At the risk of repeating myself, and as I have said several times already this afternoon, we have expressed our clear views about the policy in respect of both refugees and migration from the seven named countries.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) raised an important point a few moments ago to which the House did not get a full answer. It would appear that the Prime Minister was told in her talks about the
refugee ban, so will the Foreign Secretary confirm whether that was the case? If so, what was her advice to the President?

Boris Johnson: I think that I gave an answer a moment or two ago. I do not comment on the confidential conversations that take place between the Prime Minister and her opposite number. We have worked with our friends in the White House, the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security to understand exactly how the measure is to be implemented and to ensure that we secure the protections that this country needs.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): James Rottger, my constituent, emailed me to say that being received with the pomp and ceremony of a state visit will be presented by Trump and his cronies as a ringing endorsement from the UK and therefore, unfortunately, Scotland. Does the Foreign Secretary appreciate that we are judged by the friendships we keep and by the way in which we react to our friends?

Boris Johnson: I understand the feelings of many people in this country and around the world. They have expressed themselves. I have seen the numbers on the petition. I will repeat my point to the House: it is our job as a sensible Government to work with the most powerful democracy in the world, the leadership of which is absolutely indispensable for our security and for the stability of NATO and the western alliance. That is what we are going to do. Just as every other President before him who has come to the UK, it is entirely right that Donald Trump should receive a state visit.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary realise that the special relationship with the Americans is partly based on the strength of our leadership and its candour, rather than its weakness and compliance? Does he recognise how much it undermines that special relationship when we have a Prime Minister fawning over the President, rather than standing up to him?

Boris Johnson: It is obvious to the meanest intelligence that we have not complied meekly with this policy but have sought changes and improvements so as to protect the rights of UK nationals and of dual nationals who may have been born in the seven countries that have been identified.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): A country must be judged by the company it keeps. How will the Secretary of State answer should history judge that it took the Prime Minister so long to condemn President Trump’s Executive order because, after cosying up to him, she set off to sign trade deals to arm the increasingly dictatorial and out-of-control President Erdogan?

Boris Johnson: I refer the hon. Lady to what I said earlier, but I would add that, while the repercussions of that Executive order were being felt in the US alone, the Prime Minister was in transit to Turkey for another very important visit where she secured a fantastic deal for this country—an agreement to supply Turkey with British-made fighter planes.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The US has been a leader of so much that is best in the world, and this policy has let the US down and let the world down. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm whether he knew that the Prime Minister knew about it in advance? Was he asked to brief her and, if so, what did he say that she should say in response before the Executive order was signed? If he did know, did he make any preparations in advance of this coming into force?

Boris Johnson: I have answered that question already, with great respect, and I do not comment on the conversations that take place between the Prime Minister and her opposite number.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): More than 4,000 of my constituents have signed the petition against the state visit, more than 100 of them in the two hours since the Foreign Secretary took his feet, so he is clearly not convincing many people. If the state visit does go ahead, what opportunity will they have to protest peacefully and visibly?

Boris Johnson: I am delighted that 100 of the hon. Gentleman’s constituents have been waiting with bated breath for him finally to get that question—I cannot remember what it was—off his chest. I hope he will forgive me. The views of his constituents are important, and they clearly disapprove of the prospect of a visit by the President of the United States. I must humbly and respectfully say to them that I think it is in the interests of this country that, as with every other President of the United States, Donald Trump should come to the UK.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for coming to the Floor of the House this afternoon. Does he agree that it is striking that supposedly the largest democracy on earth has excluded from this Executive order the four nations whose citizens have killed the most American citizens in the American homeland over the past 40 years? If this was a decision of defence, it is clearly lacking because there is not the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there is not Egypt, there is not Turkey and nowhere is there the United Arab Emirates. Is the United States making a big mistake?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening when I pointed out—I think I am now pointing it out for the third time—that the list of the seven countries in question was drawn up not by the Trump Administration but by the Obama Administration when they applied their own thoroughly restrictive measures on people travelling from those countries.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary and to colleagues.
Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, to whose point of order I shall come momentarily. I do not wish to dwell on the previous matter, but my response was, if truth be told, incomplete. I thanked the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), and I stand by that, for his courtesy in remaining for the point of order, which was proper, and for his apology. However, I neglected to respond to a particular part of the point of order from the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), which was: would such a statement have been in order? The short answer is no, it would not have been in order; it is discourteous and that expression should not have been used. That said, the right hon. Gentleman has apologised, with considerable grace and very succinctly, and for today we must most certainly leave it there.

Hannah Bardell: On a point of order—

Mr Speaker: I call Hannah Bardell on a point of order.

Hannah Bardell: On a point of order—

Mr Speaker: I beg your pardon, but I am getting ahead of myself. So enticed was I by the prospect of hearing a further point of order from another hon. Member that I neglected to respond to the previous one.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West has raised her point of order, and I thank her again for her courtesy, but the issues to which she refers are matters for debate. However, what I would say to her is that the Joint Committee on Human Rights not infrequently reports to both Houses on the human rights implications of Bills, and I have a feeling that this Bill may be no exception.

Hannah Bardell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Friday, the world lost a giant of British politics, and I feel that I must put on record my sorrow and sadness, and that of my constituents and I am sure of the whole House, at the passing of the former MP for West Lothian and for Linlithgow, Tam Dalyell. He served this House and his West Lothian constituents with immense dedication and distinction for some 43 years. Latterly, he was Father of the House, and he was known locally, in particular, for his absolute commitment to his constituents. Our thoughts at this very sad time should go to his wife, Kathleen, his daughter, Moira, and his son, Gordon, as well as their wider family and friends. Tam brought us the West Lothian question, which, for the time being, remains unanswered, and he was famous for grilling the then Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, about the sinking of the Belgrano. I know he will be a desperately sad loss to his colleagues and friends across the political spectrum, particularly those in the Labour party.

On a brief personal note—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I gently say to the hon. Lady that I absolutely respect her sincerity and very proper generosity of spirit in taking the opportunity, but I hope she will understand when I say that I have to be sensitive to the wider interests of the House? What she has said already has been very powerful, and I think it will be widely echoed across the House. I have, of course, written to Tam’s widow, Kathleen and to both of the children to express my condolences. He was a
parliamentary giant whose contribution was enormous. He never held ministerial office but achieved a great deal, and we thank him greatly for that service. I hope the hon. Lady will not take offence, but we must move on.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it discourteous to the House for the Foreign Secretary to leave during an application for an emergency debate in his area? I appreciate that this did not come up on the screens, but it had been widely telegraphed. Indeed, in case there was any doubt about it, I wrote him a note to tell him it was coming.

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer is that these are matters upon which Members can form their own views. As to whether there is anything disorderly about the conduct of the Foreign Secretary, the answer is no, there is nothing disorderly about it. The Foreign Secretary was here for exchanges lasting approximately an hour and a half, and the question of which Minister is fielded by the Government is a matter for the Government. They have fielded the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan). The hon. Lady can form her own view of him, but he is certainly not disorderly; nor is he in any way, on any occasion that I have ever observed him, remotely dishevelled.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. How do we get on the record our thanks to you, Sir, for allowing that statement to run for so long that everything was discussed that could possibly want to be discussed? We do have important other business, such as the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords], to continue with. How do we get that on the record?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman has found his own salvation. If he is implying that the appetite for commentary, and possibly even speech making, on a matter of immediate interest has been satisfied, I can say only that he is a braver man than I am.

On the assumption that points of order have indeed been exhausted, I call Mr Edward Miliband to make an application for leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration under the terms of Standing Order No. 24. The right hon. Gentleman has up to three minutes in which to make such an application.

5.57 pm

**Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab): I seek leave to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration: the need for repeal of President Trump’s discriminatory, divisive and counterproductive ban on entry to the United States for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries and the indefinite ban placed on Syrian refugees.

I am supported in this application by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) and a number of other hon. Members. This ban has provoked outrage around the world and in our country, and I believe it to be of sufficient urgency and importance to qualify for immediate debate under the Standing Orders of this House. Notwithstanding the statement we have just had, I believe that it is right, given the gravity of the issue, that this House has a proper debate today on these matters, so that Members from across all parties can express their views.

The ban is not an attack on terrorism; it is an attack on those of a particular religious faith: Muslims. It is clearly discriminatory, it represents a repudiation of the 1951 UN Geneva convention on refugees and it will not make the world a safer place—it will make it a more dangerous one. From the exchanges earlier, we can see that there is a host of unanswered questions relating to UK residents who have passports from the countries concerned. Given our close, historical alliance with the United States, it is particularly important that this Parliament speaks up—preferably with one voice—to seek to get this ban revoked. An emergency debate would represent an important opportunity to do this; indeed, it is for an eventuality such as this—a matter of pressing and immediate importance—that the Standing Orders were designed. So I ask you, Mr Speaker, to grant this application under Standing Order No. 24 for an emergency debate.

**Mr Speaker:** I have listened carefully to the application from the right hon. Gentleman and I am satisfied that the matter raised by him is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24. The right hon. Gentleman has up to three minutes in which to make such an application.

**Mr Speaker:** I must advise colleagues that the debate will be held immediately as the first item of public business today. It will last for three hours and will arise on a motion that the House has considered the specified matter set out in the right hon. Gentleman’s application.

The scheduled business for today will take place afterwards and, under Standing Order No. 24(7), may continue for the same time beyond the moment of interruption as that taken by the emergency debate. Obviously, there is no list of speakers because Members
were not to know whether such a debate would take place. Therefore, analogous to Report stages in debates on Bills, Members who wish to catch the eye of the Chair should simply stand in order to do so.

[Mr Speaker]

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered the need for repeal of President Trump’s discriminatory, divisive and counterproductive ban on entry to the United States for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries and the indefinite ban placed on Syrian refugees. May I place on record my thanks to you, Mr Speaker, for granting this debate? It is right that Members from both sides of the House of Commons have a clear opportunity to address these pressing issues. I will seek to keep my remarks brief to allow others to contribute to the debate.

I thank the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for co-sponsoring this debate. Throughout the past couple of days he has acted with great dignity and great eloquence, as recognised on both sides of the House. He and I are approaching this debate in the hope of sending a clear and united view from this House about President Trump’s measures.

I should say at the start that this debate is not about our respect for the United States or our friendship with that country. I have lived there and I have friends there, and the declaration of independence is one of the most powerful political documents. Since its foundation, the United States has been built on the back of immigrants from around the world. Indeed, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty is the phrase: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

It is precisely the role of the United States historically, and our friendship and unique relationship with America, that gives us a special responsibility, given what has transpired over the past few days.

At the heart of this debate are three simple questions. First, is it right for President Trump to ban indiscriminately people from certain countries of the world from entering the US, and to indefinitely ban Syrian refugees?

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is making an eloquent speech, as usual, but will he tell the House who gives the most funds to support Syrian refugees? Is it not the United States?

Edward Miliband: The US plays a role and this country plays a very important role, but that is really beside the point of whether the US should impose an indiscriminate ban on entry to the United States for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries and the indefinite ban placed on Syrian refugees. I shall come to that later in my speech, as I am sure will other Members.

The second question is crucial: will the President’s actions make the world a safer place or a more dangerous one? My contention is that they will make the world a more dangerous place, and that on its own reflects our national interest in this matter. The third question follows on from that: what is Britain’s responsibility in speaking up on these issues?

I shall discuss those three questions briefly, but let me say first that Americans and, indeed, people in this country are fearful about the threat from ISIS and wider terrorist networks. Those fears are understandable...
and we must respond to them. There is no dispute about that. I support measures that keep our citizens, and those of the United States, safe, but it is not enough to say that we are fearful, or that our citizens are fearful; we then have to weigh whatever actions are proposed or taken. Understandable fears cannot be an excuse for the suspension of reason and rationality—that applies to the Trump Administration in a whole number of areas. The only way to understand the ban is that it represents the suspension of reason and rationality. Indeed, it has perversity, discrimination and divisiveness at its heart.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): One of the key aspects is the dramatic effect of the ban on those who had boarded aircraft, ready to go to the United States with valid visas, only to arrive and be told that they had to go back. It is that physical, emotional effect that is the most damning part of what is being proposed.

Edward Miliband: My right hon. Friend speaks with great eloquence on this issue and the wider issues raised. One of the most chilling things—I am sure that other Members found this as well—was that the accounts of what happened to individuals over the weekend sounded like the results of the actions of a tin-pot dictatorship. They did not sound like what we would expect or hope for from the United States.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I share the right hon. Gentleman’s concerns, but does he agree that we have a responsibility to act and speak responsibly in this Chamber? The seven countries of concern were identified by the Obama Administration, and restrictions were placed on migration in 2015.

Edward Miliband: The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon will perhaps say something personal about that, but I say to the hon. Gentleman—this is very important—this case people of Muslim belief or people from a certain country. That way of thinking is against my interpretation of the basic tenets of international refugee support and co-operation. Chancellor Merkel put it incredibly well. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) said, we have seen the dreadful results of this blanket ban playing out over the past few days.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that the statesmanship that has been shown by Chancellor Merkel was not shown in our name by our Prime Minister this weekend?

Edward Miliband: The intention of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon and I is to maintain as much unity as we can in this debate so that we send a clear message. I would have liked the Prime Minister to be much clearer, much earlier, and I would still like a clearer message from the Government.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Is there not a danger that the ban could increase hate crimes in this country and elsewhere? Is there not another danger that it will give ammunition to the violent extremists? It will almost be a recruitment sergeant, as we have learned from other experiences—for example, in Ireland.

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend puts it very well, and anticipates what I am going to say. What message does this send to a quarter of the world’s population? What message does it send to Muslims around the world? It sends the message that they are not wanted in the United States because of their religious faith. What more of a recruiting sergeant, as my hon. Friend says, could there be for ISIS and others?

I was saying that we have seen the dreadful results of the order over the past few days, and I will briefly mention some of them. One of the first people detained, I believe for 19 hours, was an Iraqi interpreter who had worked with the US military for 10 years. If that is not a perverse result, I do not know what is. There are instances of green card holders being handcuffed and held in detention for 16 hours. A five-year-old was apparently detained for several hours, and then there is the issue—it is welcome that the Foreign Secretary clarified this—of dual citizens, including our own, such as the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon and Sir Mo Farah, being caught up in this.

As bad as the substance of the Executive order—“cavalier” is not putting it nearly high enough—is the appalling way in which the US Government have gone about this. It is the action of a tin-pot dictatorship. I think that the Foreign Secretary acknowledged in his statement when responding to a question from one of my hon. Friends that people had been caught on the hop. This draconian measure was imposed without even consulting the people responsible for its implementation.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making an extremely powerful speech. I think that everyone in the House loves, admires and respects America and its democratic traditions, and is saddened by what has happened. One concern is the fact that the federal court rulings often do not appear to be implemented in the airports and points of entry. The message about respect for the rule of law is one that we all endorse and want to be heard. We want to get that message out.
Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend speaks very eloquently. I noticed that the Prime Minister told President Erdogan that human rights and the rule of law were incredibly important. The same thing applies to President Trump. All of us have to make that clear, and it is good to see in the Chamber the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who—I do not want to cause him trouble—issued a good statement earlier today. He is noding.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that in one way the Executive order is not a surprise, because it was a key plank of President Trump’s election campaign last year? Simply because it was an election pledge does not in any way suggest that it is right.

Edward Miliband: That is completely right. The person who coined the phrase that people were taking Mr Trump seriously but not literally has turned out to be wrong, because the President is acting literally. Whether he talked about this in the campaign or not, we all have a responsibility to decide both how we respond and the strength of our response. I will come on to why it is important that we speak up.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: I am conscious of the fact that other Members want to speak in the debate, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Robert Jenrick: I do not wish to diminish the topic that we are discussing, but my wife, who is a British citizen, was born in Israel. She will not be able to travel to 17 countries in and around the middle east. If the right hon. Gentleman cares so passionately about this—and I do not dispute that he does—what does he intend to do about that?

Edward Miliband: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about what he says. These are definitely important issues. I do not want to sound like the old man of the sea, but I recall the debate on intervention in Libya in which I supported the then Government. A Back-Bench hon. Friend got up and said that they could not support the measure—and different people had different views on intervention—because there were many other terrible things happening in the world, so what were we going to do about them? Two wrongs do not make a right. This is, after all, supposed to be our closest ally and the people who are supposed to uphold human rights and the rule of law all around the world. It is hard to lecture other countries on respect for human rights if the President of the United States fails to do so.

I would like to mention a specific case that brings home the lunacy of the proposal. I read yesterday about the case of an 18-year-old called Mahmoud Hassan from Syria. He was recently accepted for a degree in engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The letter that MIT sent him described him as “one of the most talented and promising students in one of the most competitive applicant pools in the history of the Institute.” That young man from Syria who wants to study engineering at MIT said:

“No Trump’s orders will prevent me from going there. My dreams are basically ruined.”

I hope that on the question of students, as on the issue of green cards, the US Administration find a way of changing their position, but that brings home the reason why a blanket ban is nonsense. There are countless other examples, and doubtless other hon. Members will want to discuss them.

I would like to deal briefly with the issue of whether or not this is a Muslim ban. It clearly is. That was the President’s original intention. Rudolph Giuliani said on television yesterday—I paraphrase—“Donald Trump rang me up and asked how we could get a Muslim ban and make it work. I said, ‘Here’s a way we can make it happen.’” As for the Executive order itself, we all recognise the persecution, in particular, of Christians in the middle east. It is important to take special note of that and, indeed, that is already done in the way in which refugees are handled.

The Executive order singles out the possibility that minorities from predominantly Muslim countries will receive special treatment, which draws into the order the idea that this is being done on the basis of religious faith. It is a ban aimed at Muslims.

Dame Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): What my right hon. Friend is describing emphasises why it is important that we as a country can contribute to, and serve as members of, organisations such as the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights, otherwise we will lose the ability to join other nations to make exactly the points he is making.

Edward Miliband: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. I would like—and perhaps the Minister will ponder this—a more co-ordinated European response on this issue. We are still members of the European Union, and if there is any area where Europe should speak with one voice, this is it. I do not see why there could not be a European Heads of Government meeting to discuss the issue and Europe’s response. It is important that President Trump knows that there is a co-ordinated and clear voice from Europe on this issue.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, along with how abhorrent this is to many people looking on, we must save a thought for the staff in the embassies and consulates around the world? I worked for a time with the US State Department in the consulate in Edinburgh, and I know how strong the feeling is in many offices. It is difficult for staff to have to execute the order and serve on the front line.

Edward Miliband: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Lots of people who are trying to implement the order are wondering why they have to do so. Apparently, on Friday night some of them were saying to people who were victims of the proposal, “You’d better call President Trump if you don’t like this.”

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Like the right hon. Gentleman, I am concerned. Will he clarify the difference between orders from President Obama’s Administration and those from President Trump’s?
Edward Miliband: Well, there is a huge difference. President Trump's order is a blanket ban on people from seven different countries. President Obama's proposal—if I am allowed to say so, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon has had personal experience of this—was a specific issue about the visa waiver scheme. It was not about saying that there would be any kind of blanket ban on people coming into the country.

My final point on why the order is such a terrible thing for President Trump to have done is one that other hon. Members will want to talk about: the ban on all refugees from Syria. I recommend a piece that my brother wrote on the matter in The New York Times. Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted people in the world, with up to 36 months of vetting and screening by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defence and others. There has been summary detention of the innocent, clear discrimination on the basis of faith, and a decision to depart from the UN convention relating to the status of refugees. This ban is neither rational nor fair, and it will not make the country or the world safer; indeed, quite the opposite. I can do no better than to quote Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, who yesterday said:

"we fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism...This executive order sends a signal, intended or not, that America does not want Muslims coming into our country. That is why we fear this executive order may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security."

I believe they are right.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I am sure that I am not alone in saying that my office has today been besieged by phone calls from tearful, upset constituents. I am not alone in saying that my office has today been besieged by phone calls from tearful, upset constituents asking, "Why has the world abandoned us when someone is basically saying that we are all terrorists?"

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend puts it incredibly well. In fact, I was about to come to that point. We already see the implications of the order playing out. We are in partnership with the Iraqi Government against ISIL, and today we have seen their response to the Trump ban, as the Iraqi Parliament has asked its Government to retaliate against the measures of the US Administration. As my hon. Friend said, we should think about what this order signals to 1.6 billion Muslims all around the world. It sends the message that they are not welcome. Indeed, it precisely buys into the clash of civilisations narrative that politicians from across the political spectrum have tried to avoid ever since 9/11.

Regarding our responsibilities, the United States has always been our oldest and closest ally, and some will say that this is not a matter for us as long as our citizens are protected. I profoundly disagree. It is absolutely a matter for us because the fundamental and dangerous betrayal of values that this measure represents is an affront to us all—the Muslims living here and every other citizen of this country—and it will make the world a more dangerous place. Allowing the measure to stand and shrugging our shoulders will amount to complicity with President Trump. These actions are not normal, rational or sensible. President Trump is a bully, and the only course of action open to us in relation to his bullying is to stand up and be counted.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful case about why the order should be challenged. Does he share my despair that it has become apparent today that our Prime Minister knew about this before she walked into a room, looked President Trump in the face and chose to say nothing?

Edward Miliband: I heard my hon. Friend ask the Foreign Secretary a powerful question earlier, and she makes an important point. On the wider issue, I understand the need for a trade deal with the United States—although a whole set of issues surrounds that deal—but we cannot, on the basis of our keenness to get a trade deal, shrink from speaking truths to the most powerful man in the world. That would just be the wrong thing to do.

The only course of action open to us regarding this Executive order in the United States is to act on the basis of our values. That is the purpose of the debate, which I thank you again, Mr Speaker, for granting, and that is the purpose of the motion before the House. I hope it will be approved by hon. and right hon. Members.

6.24 pm

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the request made by my friend, the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), and I to discuss this critical issue. I thank hon. Members of all parties in this House, and people beyond, for their private and public messages of support during the past 72 hours of anguish for my family.

In February last year, my wife and I had our visa waivers revoked in the wake of heightened security measures undertaken by President Obama's Administration because of our status as Iraqi-born individuals, although we are both British citizens. The precaution seemed fair at the time. We were required to present ourselves for interview at the US embassy in order to guarantee the future security of our travel to America. That was understandable, but none the less uncomfortable. It was not, though, nearly as uncomfortable as this weekend has been for my family and me.

I learned that ability to travel to the United States—a country that I revere so much for its values, for which I have such great affinity, affection and admiration, and to which I have sent both my sons to university—was to be denied to me. I learned that this great nation had put in place measures that would prevent my family and me from travelling, studying and feeling welcome there. I was concerned about the next time I would see my boys, given our reluctance to let them fly home in case they were prevented from returning to university. My wife and I despaired at the thought that, had one of our sons again been taken as seriously ill as he was last year while at university, we would not be able to go to him when he needed us most. Similar sentiments have been felt by many families in the UK and around the world over the weekend.

I fully recognise that I am speaking from a position of great privilege: I have been very lucky as a businessman, and I am hugely privileged to represent Stratford-on-Avon and to have a strong platform from which to state my views. But we need to remember that many people do not have this platform or this voice, many of whom, through no fault of their own, will be seriously affected by the policy and will still be unsure how it affects them or their families. I praise our Prime Minister for the manner in which she spoke up for those people in the
United Kingdom. She rapidly instructed our Foreign and Home Secretaries to make representations to their US counterparts. I am relieved that their endeavours have had some success, at least in the British case, but sadly and regrettably, the order remains in force.

Every country is undeniably entitled to set its own immigration policy, control its own borders and do what it thinks is in the best interests of its citizens’ safety. On those issues alone, no nation should interfere, but the UK has an obligation to speak out and to be a critical friend to the United States of America because of the ramifications of the order for the internal stability and security of our country and the rest of the world. The order undermines what our Prime Minister said so eloquently in her speech to Republicans of both Houses of Congress last week in Philadelphia about the need not only to defeat Daesh on the battlefield, but to defeat its ideology and the ideology of those who support it.

I know that I will have vast amounts of support from hon. Members across the House when I say that the Executive order is not only wholly counterproductive in combating terrorism and the narrative of Daesh, but will worsen the situation, playing into the hands of those who would see more terrorist atrocities, not less. Those sympathetic to Daesh will link the order to abhorrent recent events—notably, the burning of a mosque in Texas and yesterday’s tragic shootings at another mosque in Quebec, Canada. They will link it to rhetoric surrounding the so-called Muslim ban, and to the President’s comments revealed by the former mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, to which the right hon. Member for Doncaster North referred. On Fox News on Saturday night, Rudy Giuliani confirmed that the then presidential candidate approached him and, after announcing his intention to impose a total shutdown on all Muslims entering the USA, instructed him to

“Put a commission together, show me the right way to do it legally.”

Over the weekend, pro-Islamic State social media accounts have already begun to hail the order and the President’s comments as clear evidence that the USA is seeking to destroy Islam. They have even called it the “blessed ban”. Articles in Daesh’s English-language publication Dabiq have consistently said that the intention behind Daesh’s attacks on the west has been to provoke an anti-Muslim backlash. This Executive order has done exactly what it wants; it has, in effect, created the danger of more home-grown terrorism, not less. Those sympathetic to Daesh will link the order to abhorrent recent events, as will those who would see more terrorist atrocities, not less. The President’s comments revealed by the former mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, to which the right hon. Member for Doncaster North referred. On Fox News on Saturday night, Rudy Giuliani confirmed that the then presidential candidate approached him and, after announcing his intention to impose a total shutdown on all Muslims entering the USA, instructed him to

“Put a commission together, show me the right way to do it legally.”

I was delighted that at their joint press conference our Prime Minister and President Trump pledged to renew the special relationship between the UK and the USA—a relationship that has proven so beneficial for both countries and the world. The uniqueness of the special relationship has meant that the Prime Minister and our Foreign and Home Secretaries have rightly been able to convey their concerns to the President’s Administration, with some success.

If this strategy of calling for a sensible review of the order is to continue, with the intention, I hope, of replacing it with a reasoned, measured, evidence-based alternative, then we cannot accept calls for a cessation of relations with the President—or, I might add, the postponement of his state visit here—until this order is revoked. We cannot possibly have a constructive discussion with the President unless we maintain exceptionally close relations and dialogue. For this reason, I think we should welcome President Trump to the United Kingdom at the earliest opportunity, so that we might personally engage in meaningful dialogue with our closest ally in the hope of a change in stance.

My message to the President would be this. He is a big man—a powerful individual—and what he says and does has profound effects throughout the world. In his last statement, he spoke of his compassion. As a Christian, he should reconsider this order and look at the evidence that suggests that it will have precisely the opposite consequences to the ones he intended to achieve. He should think again on his policy to impose an indefinite ban on thoroughly vetted Syrian refugees who are in desperate, desperate need. The America I know would welcome them; it would be a cradle of comfort, and would not seek to reject them or others like them. Lastly, he should always, in everything he does, remember the values on which his great country was built.

6.33 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) for calling for this Standing Order No. 24 debate, and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for making such a very moving speech on such an important issue.

There is a brave seven-year-old called Bana Alabed, a Syrian refugee who has drawn the support and praise of the whole world for tweeting from Aleppo throughout the bombing—tweeting about her reading, her friends and the fact that she wants to be a teacher, and tweeting a desperate plea for peace. She and her mother are now in Turkey, and she is continuing, as a seven-year-old, to be an ambassador for peace. She has been tweeting again about her wish to meet up with friends from across the world who have supported her in this. Giving a voice to refugees from all over world, she has already met international campaigners and leaders, yet she has been banned from the United States indefinitely for being Syrian—and she is just seven years old. That is the destructive impact of this ban.

With the flick of a pen, the President has banned not only Bana Alabed but a Syrian family who had spent many years building up their savings, got all the visas correct, and been given clearance to come to the United States as refugees to join family in Pennsylvania; they were turned away at Philadelphia airport on Saturday morning and sent back. They had done everything right, but they were turned away. This comes from a country that has always led the world in welcoming the poor, the hungry, those fleeing persecution and the persecuted—the huddled masses—to its shores. That is what makes this Executive order so tragic for all of us.
What is happening right now also feels so tragic because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North said in his powerful speech, we cherish the values that the United States has always shared with the world—the values that we, too, have tried to champion. The Executive order bans refugees from Syria indefinitely, those from other countries for at least several months, and everyone from several Muslim countries, but there is a readiness to exempt those who are not Muslims.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Members who secured this debate. Does the right hon. Lady share my concern about the case of the Glasgow vet, Hamaseh Tayari, who was denied even a transit visa through the United States because of the confusion that this policy has caused? Does she welcome the support that Glasgow University, where she is a vet, has offered? Is she aware that Glasgow University educated James McCune Smith, who was the first black doctor? He was born a slave in New York in 1813, and after his education in Glasgow returned to the United States and had a very important career as a medic and an educator. Does she wonder what sort of opportunities would be allowed to the likes of him if this kind of policy remains in place?

**Yvette Cooper** (Coventry South) (Lab): Obviously, most people in this country are appalled by the actions of the President of the United States in relation to the Muslim community. Having said that, on immigration, only about 15,000 refugees have been taken by the United States, so it is not as though it has been swamped. It is true that, as a proportion of the United States population, the number of Syrian refugees who have gone there is relatively small. However, as a proportion of those who need support and resettlement, that contribution has been important, so it is very damaging to our international support for refugees for the United States to pull out of that co-operation. That is why the United Kingdom Government have a responsibility, not to just say a few words under pressure in this House, but to raise concerns directly with the US Administration, and why so many Members are concerned and frustrated. The Government delayed making any response or criticism. We hear now that the Prime Minister was told about the ban before it happened on Friday, yet she did not speak out about it, even when the Turkish President, standing alongside her, was prepared to do so. The British Government were prepared, rightly, to raise the issue of human rights with Turkey, but they did not raise concerns about what President Trump was doing.

**Yvette Cooper** (Coventry South) (Lab): Of course, most people in this country are appalled by the actions of the President of the United States in relation to the Muslim community. Having said that, on immigration, only about 15,000 refugees have been taken by the United States, so it is not as though it has been swamped. It is true that, as a proportion of the United States population, the number of Syrian refugees who have gone there is relatively small. However, as a proportion of those who need support and resettlement, that contribution has been important, so it is very damaging to our international support for refugees for the United States to pull out of that co-operation. That is why the United Kingdom Government have a responsibility, not to just say a few words under pressure in this House, but to raise concerns directly with the US Administration, and why so many Members are concerned and frustrated. The Government delayed making any response or criticism. We hear now that the Prime Minister was told about the ban before it happened on Friday, yet she did not speak out about it, even when the Turkish President, standing alongside her, was prepared to do so. The British Government were prepared, rightly, to raise the issue of human rights with Turkey, but they did not raise concerns about what President Trump was doing.

Mr Speaker: Order. That intervention was rather long. I encourage colleagues to contribute for approximately five minutes each, but that will not be much help if Members who intervene choose to imitate those who have the Floor.

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): It seems that while UK nationals with dual nationality may be admitted to the US, the European Commission cannot at the moment verify whether that would also apply to those from other EU member states. Could my right hon. Friend comment on that?

**Yvette Cooper**: There is a whole series of unanswered questions about what happens not just in the case of dual nationals or UK citizens, but EU citizens and other nationals who may be resident in the United Kingdom and want to travel to the United States. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon described his personal experiences. I know that everyone in the House would want to stand with him against any sense of discrimination that he feels and wrongly faces. I think he would agree that, as he said powerfully, this is not simply about the rights of British citizens—it goes so much further and wider. It is about the shared values that have underpinned generations of co-operation between this country and one of our closest allies. Under our democracy and our common humanity, we have both built into our written and unwritten constitutions a condemnation of discrimination. We have worked together, over very many years, against prejudice and hatred, so it is deeply immoral for this ban to target Muslims in this way, and we should not be afraid to say so.

We have also worked together on international policy on refugees—to support the Geneva convention and the UN’s work, and to resettle refugees, including Syrian refugees from all over the world. The US has always played a historic role in resettling those refugees. For the United States to, in effect, pull out of the Geneva convention and that international co-operation is deeply damaging to a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees programme that all of us should want to champion. We should be prepared to speak out about that.

The ban also threatens our security. It is immediately counterproductive to prevent from entering the US those Iraqi citizens in the Iraqi Government and armed forces with whom the US may need to work in the fight against IS. Inevitably, the Iraqi Parliament has responded by saying that American citizens will be prevented from entering Iraq. We need these countries to work closely together, and with us, in order to defeat terrorist extremists. We should be fighting against them together, and not be divided.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Obviously, most people in this country are appalled by the actions of the President of the United States in relation to the Muslim community. Having said that, on immigration, only about 15,000 refugees have been taken by the United States, so it is not as though it has been swamped.
they do so. That is the point of having a special relationship and a good friendship: being able to speak the truth to power and say the difficult things. If Ministers are not prepared to do that, what does that say to British Muslims and others around the world who feel targeted? And what does it say to those whom President Trump may target next? This could be only the start—we do not know. This is what President Trump has done within just a few days of taking office. Where will he go next? What will it take for us to be prepared to speak out, if our Government are not prepared to speak out yet?

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does the right hon. Lady agree that, given that this is a brand-new relationship between our Prime Minister and the President, now is the time to set the ground rules? This is the beginning of the relationship and we need to set out, for all the world to see, what we consider to be appropriate in terms of behaviour and policy.

Yvette Cooper: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady. It is immensely important to establish the principles on which we will work.

I will explain why I think the state visit matters. I want the Prime Minister to meet President Trump frequently, and I want her to influence, persuade and challenge him. I also want President Trump to hear the views of people across Britain and to understand the strength of feeling about a country that we care about, but with whose actions we disagree. I am deeply worried that it will be not a normal visit by a Head of Government, but a ceremonial state visit involving our royal family, who for so long have united the country and whom we have tried to ensure are kept separate from politics and the deep, divisive arguments that countries across the world sometimes have.

By rushing into this state visit, I fear that the Government will do the opposite of what they want to achieve, and that instead of it being a celebration of friendship and shared values and a sign of increased co-operation, it will show huge divisions and our huge concern about what President Trump is doing. It will look like an endorsement of a ban that is so morally wrong and that we should be standing against.

We should also remember that the Executive order will result in further radicalisation. It will do the exact opposite of what some people think it will do.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): May I begin by congratulating the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) on securing this timely and important debate? It is with a degree of sadness that we have to have it in the first place.

America has a proud tradition of being a nation of immigrants. People fleeing torture and persecution from around the world have sought refuge on the shores of the United States and, metaphorically, I suspect that Miss Liberty is holding her head in shame because of the events of last Friday. The Executive order is shameful and immoral, but, as I said in my intervention on the right hon. Gentleman, it should not come as a surprise to any of us. Throughout the campaign last year, President Trump made it plain that, as well as building a wall, he was going to ban all Muslims—not security threats, but a religious grouping. It was rather frightening, if one looked at the audiences to which he made that pledge throughout the United States—north, south, east and west—to see the reaction of the crowds. That shows us that not only is he honouring his election pledge, but he is playing to a gallery of people who are prejudiced in favour of this sort of action. That is very sad, because it will not achieve what I assume he wants it to achieve, apart from gaining a potential narrow party political electoral advantage with a core base.

America should be stronger together, and it should be building bridges, not walls. The Executive order will alienate moderate Arabs and radicalise further those on the radical wing of the Arab world, at a time when we should be building bridges to enable us to expose the evil and violence of some of the terrorists who come out of the middle east, and working with moderate Arabs to end the evil threat not only to us, but to moderate Arab opinion in the middle east.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Simon Burns: No; I do not have time. The Executive order will result in further radicalisation. It will do the exact opposite of what some people think it will do.
It will not make the United States any safer; it will make it a more dangerous place. That is an irony, and it is unacceptable.

I take issue with some of the comments I have heard during this debate and during the statement, in that I think it is absolutely right that the British Government continue the work of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to build bridges with President Trump so that we can, through engagement, seek to persuade him and to minimise or reduce the danger of his more outrageous policies. We can do that only by being a candid friend, but we have to be a candid friend.

I believe that very little would be achieved by cancelling a state visit to which the invitation has already been extended and accepted. It is part of a process of seeking to engage, encourage and persuade. There is, however, one area at which we should look very carefully. Some will remember that in 1982 or 1983, President Ronald Reagan had a state visit to this country, but it was decided by the then Thatcher Government that there should not be an address to the joint Houses of Parliament.

Similarly, I remember, as a Member of this House, the state visit of President George W. Bush. Apart from a sojourn in Durham at Trimdon Labour club, I believe, for lunch with the then Prime Minister, all President Bush did was to travel in the Beast from Buckingham Palace to No. 10 and back again. There was no address to the joint Houses of Parliament. In the circumstances, I think that that was rather wise. We and the Government—and you, Mr Speaker—should think very carefully before considering such an address as part of the programme for a state visit by President Trump, because it might not go as well as everyone would naturally expect.

In conclusion, this ban is nasty, it is immoral and it will not succeed. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his deputy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), as well as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, have a key role to play because the ban will last for 90 days, which in theory means that it is part time and transitory. I am not convinced that that will be the case in reality. The challenge for the Government is to do all they can to influence President Trump about its counterproductive nature and the danger that it will pose in radicalising rather than pacifying those who espouse radical extremist thinking; and to persuade him that there are better ways of minimising or reducing the danger of his more outrageous policies. We can do that only by being a candid friend, but we have to be a candid friend.

I will start by sharing an experience from this weekend, when I hosted the Jewish Board of Deputies in my office in Bradford. I shared with them a publication from the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, “Path to Genocide”, which sets out the stages along that path. In stage 1, “classification”:

“The differences between people are not respected. There’s a division of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This can be carried out through the use of stereotypes, or excluding people who are perceived to be different.”

Stage 2 is “a visual manifestation of hatred. Jews in Nazi occupied Europe were forced to wear yellow stars to show that they were ‘different’.”

In stage 4, “dehumanisation”:

“Those who are perceived as ‘different’ are treated with no form of human right or personal dignity. During the Genocide in Rwanda, Tutsis were referred to as ‘cockroaches’; the Nazis referred to Jews as ‘vermin’.

This weekend, I went to the Holocaust memorial service at Bradford cathedral. Rudi Leavor, who leads the Bradford synagogue, shared his story of how he fled Nazi Germany. His father, who was a dentist, took the family away and they fled persecution. As they left on the train, they saw a family on the platform who were the last to wave them off; that family did not survive.

For me, the matter is very personal. It is personal because if my daughter decides to wear a hijab, what are the chances of her not being persecuted? We have seen videos and read news reports of hijabs being ripped off and of women being thrown down stairs just because of what they are wearing, and here is the so-called leader of the free world telling us that it is okay to ban Muslims. Donald John Trump says that he is tackling terrorism with his Executive order, but the fact is that the chance of being murdered in the US in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee is one in 3.64 billion each year. More people have been killed in America by gun crime than by people from the countries that have been banned. If the President really wants to save Americans from death, he needs to look at gun crime.

How do American Muslims feel right now? They are as entitled as anyone else to representation by their President, but they are being singled out and victimised by him. What about the 700,000 asylum seekers and 3.25 million refugees who have sought refuge in America since 1975? Having contributed and been accepted, how do they feel about now facing the blame for everything that is wrong? America, the self-proclaimed land of immigrants—proudly and rightly so—now turns its back on those who do not fit the President’s accepted mould, not because they are a threat but because they are deemed to be less worthy than others.

My skin colour is a few shades darker. That does not make me a terrorist, and it does not make me a threat. The colour of their skin does not make the Muslims in this world a threat to America or to western democracy. The thing that poses a threat is the Executive orders issued by the so-called leader of the free world, who incites hatred, demonises Muslims, sees women and others as second-class citizens and courts organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan. That is what creates terrorism—what threatens democracy, the world we live in and our children’s future—not Muslims, and not refugees.

We do not differentiate refugees on the basis of their religion; we support them because they are fleeing persecution and war. They do not choose to leave their
Homeland or to leave their surroundings. Bradford is a city of sanctuary—I am proud to come from a city of sanctuary—that hosts Syrian refugees. Can hon. Members imagine what they would feel like if we in this House ordered that we would not take any more refugees or any more Syrian refugees? That would fly in the face of what this House stands for.

I am a Muslim from Bradford West, and I have the privilege to stand here today and contribute, as many hon. Members have, but what do we really stand for? Before I get rather emotional, I will finish with the words—the famous words—of Pastor Martin Niemöller:

“First...they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist;

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me”.

I do not want to be on the wrong side of history when there is another genocide; Srebrenica happened in my lifetime.

Where does the slippery slope really lead when we demonise Muslims and those seeking refuge on our shores? Offering refuge is what being British stands for, and this House cannot abdicate its responsibility and stand silent about what is happening with our closest ally. We must engage with it, and try to stop and reverse this Executive order. We cannot stand by silently: to do so would be the greatest shame of our nation.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I gently point out that if we are to accommodate all colleagues, it will be necessary to have an informal limit of approximately five minutes? I ask Members not to exceed that limit from now on.

7.2 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing this debate. It was of course your decision to allow it, Mr Speaker. If the emotion we have already heard in the British House of Commons is anything to go by, what on earth will the effect of the order be right around the world, particularly in those nations on the list or in those that might be on any future list?

The right hon. Member for Doncaster North and the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), carefully put forward the more obvious and ludicrous consequences of such an ill-thought-out measure. I very much want to compliment my fellow member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon, on combining what was undoubtedly an emotional speech with calm rationality and reasonableness in making an immensely powerful case to the American Administration. I want to use the rest of my speech to turn to the case that our country should make to the American Administration as a whole.

I did not agree with the critique of the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee about the actions of the Prime Minister. I am not entirely sure that her suggestion that the Prime Minister was aware of this and had a chance to make her views known during her visit to the United States can be substantiated. As far as I understand it, that is not the case, but the Minister will be able to confirm that in his winding-up speech.

We need a strong voice into the White House, and we have secured it, although it may have taken the prospect of a state visit to ensure that the Prime Minister was the first foreign leader to visit the White House. During that visit, she was able to secure the pre-eminent European requirement of the visit, which was the President of the United States overturning—audibly and verbally, in answer to her challenge at the press conference—his purported position on NATO. That is of immense importance not just to the United Kingdom, but to the whole security of Europe.

This goes to the heart of what we are to do about this particularly unwise Executive order. On the previous day, the Prime Minister had addressed the Republican caucus in Philadelphia, where she was very warmly received. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon has already referred to the values that she spoke to in her remarks to the caucus. We have to remember that the Administration is not just the President. One of the failures of the order was the failure to consult the other Departments in the United States. There is a separation of powers in America: the President is not the whole Administration. The effect of our Prime Minister’s early visit is that she is in a place to ally herself with the Secretaries of the various Departments that make up the Cabinet in the United States and to be an important ally in internal debates in the Administration. Such a debate ought to have taken place on the order and there should have been proper consideration, but that process plainly did not take place.

We also have allies on the Hill. The success of her speech in Philadelphia is shown by the position taken by Senators McCain and Graham. They have made an outstanding joint statement, which ends:

“Ultimately, we fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism. At this very moment, American troops are fighting side-by-side with our Iraqi partners to defeat ISIL. But this executive order bans Iraqi pilots from American troops are fighting side-by-side with our Iraqi partners to defeat ISIL. This executive order sends a signal, intended or not, that America does not want Muslims coming into our country. That is why we fear this executive order may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security.”

Those arguments were eloquently made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon in his very remarkable speech.

It is not only in Congress that we have allies. The legal system of the United States is already cranking into action, and judges are already ruling against the legality of the Executive order. I very strongly suggest to right hon. and hon. Members in the House, as well as to the wider public, that we need to be effective in advancing the interests of the United Kingdom and the values of the liberal democracies that both we and the US are. Such values—of the rule of law and, in the United States, of the separation of powers—are already beginning to make themselves felt.
Our Prime Minister is to be congratulated on the fact that she will now be listened to by President Trump because of the actions she has taken, as our Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary have plainly already been listened to as well. There is very much more work to do to get the order rescinded and recast in an intelligent, sensible way so that it advances the interests of both us and the United States, and we need the kind of relationship that will enable that to happen.

7.8 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) on securing this debate and on putting the case so eloquently, and I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on bringing home so movingly the pain that this has caused to so many people.

My mother was a proud American from Ohio. Her forebears made the journey across the ocean to seek a better life, and they found safety and opportunity in equal measure. Perhaps that explains why those of us who have a family connection with the United States of America felt, I must confess, a sense of shame and rising anger as events unfolded this weekend. We have seen that passion expressed in this debate, which tells us something about the nature of the decision that we are objecting to. It is precisely because we have such respect for the United States of America that we yearn for something better—much, much better—than this, and why we have a responsibility as friends to speak out.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Has the right hon. Gentleman noted that Donald Trump’s mother was a migrant? She was not just from Scotland but from my constituency. Donald Trump’s first cousin’s wife was my English high school teacher, but we can leave that to one side.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned shame. As a Hebridean, I feel utter shame at how Donald Trump, the son of Hebridean woman, is behaving on the world stage. It is absolutely disgraceful and shameful. I hope he rescinds and changes the measure—not rescasts, but rescinds it.

Hilary Benn: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We hope he rescinds the measure.

I want to make three very quick points, the first of which is that however much the Foreign Secretary may seek to argue that this is not a ban on Muslims, our best defence against the lethal obscurantism of Daesh is to cleave ever more strongly to the values that make us proud to be British.

My final point is about the international rules-based system. Why did we create these institutions after the end of the second world war, including the United Nations? We knew that out of the ashes of that terrible conflict, we needed to work together to observe and uphold certain principles to enable humanity to thrive in the world we were seeking to create. Article 3 of the refugee convention states:

“The Contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin”,

and the truth is that the order offends against article 3 of that convention. We have other worries—the Paris climate agreement and the Iran deal—but they are all expressions of the international rules-based system that we have fought so hard to create and sustain.

I conclude by saying this: if we are going to deal with the challenges we face as a world as this century unfolds, we must seek and strive to bring people together and not to drive them apart. That, after all, is the very principle on which the United States of America, which we respect so much, was founded.

7.13 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It is very difficult to follow the excellent and wise words of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). I add my congratulations to my new friend the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), and my dear friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who so ably represents his constituency.

Mr Speaker, I agree with everything that has been said, and you will be pleased to know that I do not intend to repeat any of it. One danger of these sorts of debates is that we become like an echo chamber—we fall over one another to agree, exposing in us some large “L” Liberal values, but in most of us small “l” liberal values, as we unite in condemnation of this Executive order for all the reasons that many other hon. Members have expressed.

Sir Mo Farah said that the Executive order was based on prejudice and ignorance flowing from Donald Trump, but many others in that great nation unfortunately no doubt support what he has done. We must be honest that, in this country, we too suffer from much of that prejudice and ignorance. It is all well and good for hon. Members to talk as we do, but we must now ensure that we face up to the reality in our country where, unfortunately, too many people share some of the views we see mirrored in the order.

I would love to say that such things are a fancy in my constituency. We have welcomed four Syrian refugee families to Broxtowe. I am very proud of that. I am a Conservative as it happens—it really does not matter—but everybody on my council has come together to give those four families the sort of warm and generous welcome that we would expect. I do not know whether the situation is the same in America, but it is worth remembering the tough bar for Syrian refugees coming to our country. I praise our Government for the generosity and good work we have done in bringing so many
Syrian refugee families into this country, but they have to pass quite a high test. They are among the most vulnerable refugees—they have suffered either sexual abuse or torture.

It gives me no pleasure to say this as someone who has spent almost the entirety of my life in Nottinghamshire, but one of those four families did not come straight to my constituency. They started off in another town in the county of Nottinghamshire and had to leave it, such was the prejudice and lack of welcome and the blatant hostility towards them. I am proud that my constituency has taken them in. I am equally proud that our deputy mayor, Halimah Khaled, happens to be a Muslim. I have always thought of it in that way—somebody happens to be a Muslim, happens to be a Jew, happens to have brown skin, happens to be gay or happens to be straight.

I remember once seeing a documentary that shocked me to the bottom of my boots. I must have been about 11 years old. A black woman explained what it felt like to see a sign that said, “No dogs, no Irish, no blacks.” I understood how she felt, but I found it shocking that anyone would discriminate against someone because of the colour of their skin. When we were in our salad days as student politicians back in the ‘70s, I genuinely thought we had made great progress over the decades. The attitude was that nobody cared what colour or race someone was.

All those wonderful things had begun to flourish in our country, but something has happened—and it has happened not just in America, but in our country. I gravely fear that that spirit of tolerance has gone from too many. Seeds that I had thought lay dormant, or had been destroyed by the power of tolerance, have germinated too many. I had the privilege of helping Dr Ghaiith Rukbi, a Syrian refugee resident in Lebanon, into my constituency. He spoke to and worked with local GPs to help to prepare them for more Syrian refugees who will be arriving shortly. If a wee place like Motherwell and Wishaw can take in Syrian refugees, what on earth is the United States doing with this order?

In the meantime, does the Minister agree with the former head of the CIA that this order will have national security implications for the UK and the wider world? It is important that we take this into consideration.

I do not agree that the state visit should take place, and I certainly do not agree that President Trump should be afforded the honour of addressing both Houses of Parliament.

Scotland and the US have a deep friendship based on shared values, and we must all speak up for those values, including tolerance, equality and providing for those in need. The Prime Minister must be clear about our obligations, both as a good global actor and under international law. It is important that we take them forward.

I will mention the contributions of only two hon. Members who have spoken. I was deeply moved by the contribution of the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah). That in no way lessens what other Members have said. The right hon. Member for Broxtowe is correct: we sometimes just become an echo chamber, but it is important that the word goes out from here. It is important that people take this to heart, and go out and increase tolerance and understanding right across all our constituencies.

when he told me that he had helped to liberate a concentration camp. He told me that only once and never spoke of it again. In spite of the Foreign Secretary’s outrage at the repetition of references to the holocaust, I feel absolutely no shame in linking my family to what happened then and to what is happening now.

My grandchildren will wonder how I felt after this Executive order was signed and what effect it had on people in Scotland, the United Kingdom and across the world. I am able to record in Hansard that I feel fearful, upset, distressed and very, very angry. My condemnation of this vile act will matter little in the great scheme of things, but I expect the UK Government to utterly condemn this Executive order. I do not expect the Foreign Secretary to tell me, as the Foreign Secretary did, that he has mitigated it as far as UK passport holders are concerned. That is his duty. If this Government think that trade with the US matters more than the human rights of refugees and world citizens, then I feel even more affronted. If this Government want to be a world leader, they should show leadership and they should do it now.

The Prime Minister must be clear about our obligations, both as a good global actor and under international law. It is important that we take them forward.
In fact, he promised a measure that would go far further than what he is currently enacting. We should therefore be under no illusion that it is both within his power and his mandate to follow it through.

As the Executive order affected granted British citizens, it was right for the Foreign Secretary to intervene. I was pleased that he confirmed, having spoken to his US counterparts, that UK citizens and dual nationals are unaffected. However, I want to be clear: I believe that this is a misguided policy. The simple fact is that terrorist attacks, committed both in the US and in Europe over the past decade and more, have been carried out not by immigrants and refugees, but by radicalised nationals.

It is important to note that on average nine people a year have been killed by Islamic extremists in the US since 9/11. Conversely—this point has already been made—on average 12,843 people are killed by guns in the US every year. Some would argue that the priorities are in the wrong order. Not one refugee from the countries included in the President’s travel ban has killed anyone in terrorist attacks on US soil. Further, the decision to ban refugees from war zones such as Syria and Yemen will serve only to force vulnerable men, women and children to remain at risk of persecution and death. It is also remarkable that the US is banning people from Iraq, a country it is supporting militarily against Daesh.

I have to be clear: the steps announced will not keep America safe. I fear it will serve simply to divide communities and give radical extremists yet another propaganda tool with which to turn vulnerable citizens against the United States. To use the words of the President, this will do nothing more than create more “bad dudes”. As I said, this is a decision for the President of the United States, but I strongly appeal for the Executive order to be revoked. I hope that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary make the strongest representations to that effect.

I just want to raise one final point. Of course we should speak out and I very much welcome this emergency debate, but if we are to speak with authority and credibility then we must be consistent in our condemnation. As I said to the Foreign Secretary this afternoon, 16 countries forbid admission to Israeli passport holders. In recent years, we have granted state visits to the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, all of whom forbid admission to Israeli passport holders. If we genuinely believe that banning individuals on the basis of their nationality is wrong—I very much hope we do believe it—then let us condemn these policies wherever they raise their ugly heads.

7.27 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who made an excellent contribution. I, too, want to praise my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline East (Mr Johnson). My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Luciana Berger) made the point that, while we speak about conditions for entry to the United Kingdom, we must not lose track of the fact that we also need an exit strategy.

I want to make three brief points on Muslims in this country; on the importance of Syria and Iraq in the middle east; and on populism.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) made a very moving intervention earlier about Holocaust Memorial Day, and on the poignancy and horror of what we witnessed over the weekend. The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) said that her own contribution would matter very little, but I profoundly disagree. What I have observed over this weekend is an outpouring of distress and dismay from all quarters. Of course, British Muslims will feel this most keenly, but all of us in this country—whatever our background, whatever our faith, or of no faith—stand with them whether they are British Iraqis, British Syranks, British Somaleans or British people who are descendants from the affected countries. I say this to our friends in America: we are Brits, all equal, and we will not be divided on the basis of our faith or wherever we have come from.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) also spoke very movingly earlier. If anyone is questioning, wondering or thinking about whether these events have an effect on Muslims in this country, I would encourage them to listen to the tone of this debate. It is incumbent on all of us, Muslim or not, to stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity and in the best traditions of my party, and show them our support.

That is particularly true for those who have been working recently on issues connected with Syria. When I heard about these events over the weekend, my first thought was for the brave and brilliant people whom I have had the honour to come to know as part of our campaign to protect human life in Syria. Many of them are Syrian nationals and would have good cause to want to travel to the United States in order to make representations on behalf of that humanitarian cause for vulnerable people in Syria. Where does this order now leave them?

I would like to ask the Minister for Europe and the Americas—I do not feel that the Foreign Secretary gave a very substantial answer to my earlier point—what representations the Foreign Office has made to the Americans about the need for those representing humanitarian causes to be allowed access to America. That applies whether they are Syrian nationals, Iraqi nationals or even US nationals who will now no doubt face equal trouble accessing places in Iraq, Syria and other areas affected by this ban. We should ask ourselves this simple question: does this Executive order help or hinder peace and security efforts in that troubled region? I think that the answer to that question is glaringly obvious and staring us in the face: it is a total disaster for peace and security in that region.

I understand that a gentleman who played a particular role in the referendum campaign has recently gone on the radio to say that this is just the cause of “loony lefties”. To those commentators who say, “Donald Trump is a perfectly fairly elected President of the United States who is entitled to do this”, I say that this issue will affect the security of each and every one of us, including some of the most vulnerable people on our planet, and it cannot stand.

Finally, on populism, the past year has been very difficult. I always believe that we should look to the future and think about what our values tell us about
[Alison McGovern]

how to approach the modern world as it is, not as it once was, but unfortunately I feel that what we are witnessing in our world is an old, old story—that in times of economic trouble, there are always forces in our world, who I think of as the far right and the hard right, who want to turn up and tell ordinary working people in America, Europe or wherever and say, “No, your troubles and your wages failing to rise are not the fault of the economic system or Governments or companies or anyone else; they are the fault of people who are just like you, but happen to be Polish; they are the fault of people who are just like you, but happen to be Muslim; they are the fault of people who are just like you, but happen to be from another part of the world.”

That tendency and the susceptibility of people to want to believe an easy story when the truth is much more complicated is always exploited by the purveyors of hate. Those of us who stand against that cannot give in to populism. We cannot kow-tow to prejudice; we cannot say, “Yes, you are probably right, so let us try to do what you want.” We have to be very clear with people that we are all, underneath it all, fundamentally the same. We need the same ability to work together, to learn together and to have hospitals for when we are sick: it does not matter where people come from, they need the same things in life. No amount of populist rhetoric designed to divide us and make us fight each other rather than work together will change that.

7.34 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for bringing this emergency debate before us. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern).

We must stand tall for principles of inclusion and equality, and a ban on individuals linked in a simplistic manner to their religion or country of origin is not evidence based; it is surely discriminatory. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, because prior to my time here I was accredited by the Scottish Risk Management Authority to undertake violence risk assessments where the courts were considering the order of lifelong restrictions. As part of that role, I was trained to undertake violence extremist risk assessments. This type of risk assessment involves structured clinical judgments and is grounded in research and an evidence base. Assessment is based on risk factors known to predict violence and extremist violence. It has often been utilised in the United States and in Northern Ireland, and some of our security forces have been trained in its application.

The measure of an individual’s risk to the security of a country requires assessment of intelligence information about that individual’s beliefs systems, their contact with terrorist organisations, their behaviours and activity, their access to arms and a number of other pertinent risk factors. The people qualified to determine who possesses and poses true risk factors are in the intelligence and security forces. They have access to this information and can analyse it formally, as they have been doing over many years in order to highlight individual risk indicators.

A blanket ban on individuals based on heuristic characteristics of race and religion is therefore misguided. In my opinion, it will unfortunately be unlikely to reduce risk, and it may aggravate extremist beliefs and attitudes, feelings of persecution and the marginalisation of individuals who may already be in the United States and able to pose security risks there. This could strengthen extremist views on the part of a few, because it is radicalised groups, not a countrywide phenomenon, that the world has to deal with. This order will only strengthen feelings against the United States and against the west. If we do not condemn it, it will breed contempt.

In conclusion, I believe this is misguided policy. It lacks a true evidence base, it is not a national response, and it may fuel risk and be counterproductive. It does not protect the United States or the west, and we must do all we can to voice our consternation about this policy and its lack of humanity and validity. Let us call instead for evidence-based security approaches as the United States goes forward—approaches that respect human dignity across the world.

7.37 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I join others in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing this incredibly important debate. There is a reason why thousands of people have taken to the streets of Britain tonight to express their concern about this ban and what it says about our world, and particularly to ask what we are going to do about it.

I do not disagree with a word said by the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) —it is a shame that she is no longer in her place—about sometimes challenging the agreeability of our debates in this place, so in the spirit of what she said, let me bring some discord to our discussions. I feel very strongly that the central question facing us tonight is what people in positions of power will do. We have seen what the leader of the free world in his first week in office has chosen to do with that power. We now have to ask ourselves as elected representatives in the United Kingdom what we will do by return.

I do not disagree with the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) about respecting the fact that this man is an elected politician, but just because he won an election does not absolve him of responsibility for the consequences of his behaviour—and nor does it absolve us of responsibility for the consequences of not acting. With that process in mind, I wish to make four quick points. We have to speak up, and we must do so not just because of the impact on people in our communities described in the incredibly eloquent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), but because of what it says about us as a society. When we are indifferent to hatred and intolerance, we are participants in it.

This is about hatred. This is a ban on people on the basis of their religion or their nationality. No form of this ban could be acceptable. There is no way of modifying it to make it plausible. It is simply hatred, and we should be clear about that, because not being clear about it suggests that there are circumstances in which we might seek to ban people and restrict them on the
basis of their religion or nationality. It suggests that we would do the same—that we would allow there to be different classes of citizen in our communities, in our country, in our world. We must be very clear about the fact that there is no acceptable form of this ban, and only the need to challenge it.

The question is, how do we challenge that? This is where I disagree with my Conservative colleagues. Absolutely, we must engage; absolutely, we must speak up. That is why I read with despair that our own Prime Minister had the opportunity directly to look the President of the United States in the eye, in a private meeting, and say, “Look, this is not right. This will be counter-productive. This will not achieve what you want, and it will divide our nation.” She clearly has not done that. The opportunity to engage was on the table, and she did not take it. I think that that damages all of us in the United Kingdom who defend the importance of our Government in leading such engagement.

The Minister may disagree with me, but I feel very strongly. [Interruption.] If the Minister wants to intervene and confirm that the Prime Minister raised this issue with the President of the United States directly, I will happily take an intervention, but if he cannot confirm that, what I say stands. I felt ashamed on Saturday night when the Home Office, the Foreign Office and No. 10 refused to make a statement. It was damming for us as a nation when the world was calling out for leadership.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. Did this not feel so abhorrent to so many of us because it came only a few days after Holocaust Memorial Day, a day on which we pledge that when we see prejudice and hatred we will stand up in the face of it, and was not our Prime Minister’s failure to do that deeply shaming to our country?

**Stella Creasy:** I could not agree more. One of the messages that I want to send from the House tonight is that we do not recognise that as the kind of leadership that we want in our country. Something clearly has to change, even if the Prime Minister did not know about the ban before she walked into that room with Donald Trump. What cannot continue is our saying that it is simply a matter for the United States. What cannot continue is our saying, “Well, if we can be sure that it will not affect our citizens, we will not worry about the implications of the ban elsewhere.” That is not good enough. That is not the British way.

The question for us is how best to express that and how best to engage. There is a world of difference between wanting to debate directly with President Trump whether he has done the right thing, not just for his own country but for our world, and rolling out the red carpet and giving him the same treatment that we gave Nelson Mandela, or, indeed, the Queen Mother when we laid her in state. There is a world of difference between wanting to debate with someone and engage with him, and wanting to indulge him. Let me say this to Conservative Members: to many of us, it looks like indulging and endorsing President Trump if nothing changes now that we know of this ban—now that we know of his intention and his deliberate actions to target Muslims in our world. If nothing changes, that will say more about us as a nation than it says about him.

The question for all of us is whether we should use the power that we have, as elected representatives of people in positions of authority, to send that message. It is whether we should join our citizens who are not just on the streets tonight, and who have not just signed that petition, but who are asking what has become of us as a world. They are people who recognise that diversity is a strength. They are people who recognise the words of a former American President, Franklin Roosevelt, who argued that a nation does not have to be cruel to be tough.

I am proud of my country; I am proud to be a patriot; I respect the rights of other countries; but that does not mean that I must be silent when things go wrong. The silence of our Government, the mitigation, the quibbling, the laziness with which people are approaching this issue and the taudiness of the response do not reflect the best principles of being British.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The hon. Lady is making many pertinent points, but does she not think that it is good for British politics that we have a Prime Minister who thinks before she speaks, rather than spewing out whatever comes into her mind on Twitter? Is that not a good thing for British politics and, indeed, for the world?

**Stella Creasy:** As one who often goes on Twitter, I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was referring to that.

There are some things that should not take too much thought. Sometimes something is just wrong, and we need to say that it is wrong. We do not need to judge the angles. Of course we need a trade deal with America, but we should not be trading our values to secure it. Indifference to cruelty of this kind damages not just our nation, and not just our nation’s standing, but our world. It makes it harder for us to stand alongside those people in our communities tonight who are fearful of the division that we are seeing as a result of this ban. It makes it harder for us to advocate our values, and to take on other countries that also ban people. It makes it harder for us to do our job. We are people in positions of power. We need to hear the voice of our communities who are saying that this is not the world that they want, and act accordingly.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There are—four, five, six—nine Members wishing to speak. Let me explain to the House that each of the Front-Bench speakers should have an opportunity to speak for 10 minutes or thereabouts, and the Minister should conclude by 8.59 pm, because the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) has the right to reply at that point. We must work on that basis. If everyone speaks for three or four minutes, we shall be fine, but if Members speak for longer than that, they will be preventing others from speaking.

7.46 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): “We should seek to engage with our American friends,” the Foreign Secretary repeated over and over in his statement. He justified that, with no sense of irony, on the grounds...
that engaging with such powers is the most effective way to influence them—this from the man who led, with great gusto, a campaign to persuade us to turn our backs on our closest and largest economic relationship.

Our actions in this place are inherently passive. As we heard earlier, this is an echo chamber. Passivity is easy. Passivity means risking nothing. However, our passivity will weigh heavily on many others. It will weigh heavily on the people who are trapped, the people who cannot see their families, the people who are stranded, and the people who are fleeing with nowhere to go. This is not even just about the immediate physical ramifications of the policy. The atmosphere of hate, fear and anger that it feeds also stokes the flames of radicalism. It is not a policy that builds peace and security. We are told that this is a relationship that is worth holding on to, but a relationship in which one party stands by and watches with automaton-like levels of dispassion as another wreaks calamitous harm is not a healthy—never mind special—relationship by any stretch of the imagination.

The Government’s approach to the Trump Administration’s draconian policy is, perhaps, a product of their own making. “The only way you’re going to make a deal you want is if you are coming from a position of strength”. Those are not my words, but the words of the new leader of the so-called free world. Boxed into a corner by the Government’s self-imposed Brexit boundaries, we are forced to creep, cap in hand, to people whose values now run directly counter to those of their own making. “The only way you’re going to get anything is...” He has spoken approvingly of blanket surveillance of all Muslims and the idea of a registry of Muslims in his country. There are chilling similarities here with the Judenkartei: first words, and now actions.

In recent days, we have seen the attempt to put into place the ban on Muslim movement into the US. This is part of an initial package of measures designed to restrict the freedoms of migrants, and—let us face it—to demonise them. There is an escalating pattern of deeply unjust and very worrying behaviour, and it is clear from this debate that many hon. Members share my concern about where it might lead. Trump’s behaviour does not only affect US residents; it is a matter of justice, security, and basic dignity, for people here at home. Like many of my colleagues in this House, I am sure, I have received lots of messages from constituents worried that their ability to travel to the US will now be curtailed. If only it was only that, because these words and actions have had a much greater effect: they fuel fear, and provide perceived permission to acts of hatred. Global media coverage extends their reach; they simply cannot be contained.

We must stand up, with a clarity of purpose and in solidarity, in condemnation of these actions and the ideas that underlie them. They are already harming innocent people around the world, whether directly or indirectly by encouraging hatred, but I worry that they could do so more. They reflect, in their beginnings, the injustices that so many of us recently remembered and recommitted to prevent.

7.52 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to express my views on this issue on behalf of the many constituents who have contacted me in the last 48 hours to register their disgust at the actions of President Trump. The petition, which many of my constituents have signed, calling for Donald Trump to be prevented from making a state visit to the UK has to be one of the fastest growing petitions ever, with the number of signatures approaching 1.5 million. The popularity of this petition shows the disdain and horror that the people of the UK feel towards the US President and his hateful and bigoted policies.

When this House previously debated Donald Trump, I called him an idiot. The truth is that he is something far worse; he has in a very short time managed to prove himself an incompetent, unthinking tyrant who in less than two weeks in office has already caused massive disruption to thousands of people, mass demonstrations against his policies and untold damage to the reputation of the United States, a country that I love but whose chosen path is deeply worrying to the rest of the world.

Each and every day, families live in fear because they have had the audacity to flee a war-torn country. Victims of these hateful and poisonous acts look to authority
figures and lawmakers to help solve these issues and to protect them, not turn them away from the gates of sanctuary.

Trump’s immigration ban will send a message to bigots, bullies and racists the world over that their views are not only legitimate, but entirely correct. In other words, anyone who may look, speak or act differently is not to be trusted.

We need to be absolutely crystal clear in opposing the imposition of blanket bans on people on the basis of their birthplace, nationality or religion. This ban is divisive, and fails to distinguish between appropriate measures to deal with extremism and terrorism and the millions of people who wish to go about their lives in peace and safety, including refugees who are running away from the terrorists. It will lead to innocent people being detained at airports and, as many Members have said, will play straight into the terrorists’ hands.

The Prime Minister must be clear about our obligations as global actors under international law to oppose a ban based on people’s origin or faith. Securing exemptions for UK citizens is not enough, and if that is the limit of our ambition, I am ashamed.

It is our collective responsibility to speak up for tolerance, equality and providing refuge for those in the greatest need. I strongly believe that it would be wrong for a state visit by President Trump to go ahead while his Administration maintain a blanket ban on refugees and citizens of certain countries travelling to the United States. I commend everyone who has signed this petition and people protesting all over the UK against President Trump tonight.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), I feel the burn of shame at President Trump’s Scottish roots. I would have hoped that, in this Burns season, Trump remembered the words of Robert Burns in his famous verse, “A Man’s A Man for A’That”, which finishes with the refrain:

“That Man to Man, the world o’er
Shall brothers be for a’ that.”

The vast majority of people right across the UK are crying out for their Prime Minister and Government to exhibit a much stronger and more principled position on this Executive order. We have been told time and again from the Dispatch Box by Ministers that it is imperative that strong or special relationships are maintained so we can make direct representations to our friends on issues such as human rights violations. I disagree, but let us see the Government prove their worth. This so-called special relationship has never been so important. The Prime Minister cravenly rushed across the Atlantic at the earliest opportunity to be the first world leader to meet the President, a decision she was warned against, and one that looks worse and worse as each baffling pronouncement is made from the White House. If this relationship is to mean anything, let this House and the protestors both outside this building and right across the country send a strong message to President Trump that we will not stand in silence and bend a knee to hate, wherever, and from whatever building, that hate emanates.

7.56 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I also want to thank the right hon. and hon. Members who have secured this debate this evening.

Speakers at Hounslow’s civic commemoration of the holocaust this morning reminded us of the importance of compassion and refuge in the face of hate. Council leader Councillor Steve Curran celebrated the diversity of the people in that room—people from all backgrounds from all over the world—and made the link between Hounslow welcoming people in the room and all the people who live in Hounslow now from all over the world. They have included Sir Mo Farah, who arrived and was welcomed in Hounslow aged eight in about 1990.

We also heard from Susie Barnett, who was born in 1938 in Hamburg. She told us of her family’s moving and incredible story, of fleeing the hate and discrimination of Nazi Germany at the end of 1930s and arriving separately in the UK as refugees. That family story of personal relationships and tragedy brought home to us the link between world events and what happens to families and ordinary people in these circumstances.

After the service this morning, I thanked Susie for her moving story and was able to tell her about the petition demanding that the invitation to President Trump be withdrawn. I told her that while she was speaking the tally on that petition tipped over the 1 million mark. She said, “Right, when I get home this afternoon, I am going to sign it.” That petition is still being signed at the rate of 10 signatures every second, and by the end of this evening the figure could hit 1.5 million.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) referred to the rules on movement and the safety of refugees that emerged from the ashes of world war two. The President of the United States is trying to rewrite these rules. He is fuelling fears, and a local Muslim activist phoned me this morning worrying about the implications of the feelings that President Trump is spreading in the US: what will that mean for the Muslim community here in the UK and in Hounslow?

The Executive order was directed at Muslims and at refugees, but the President is also effectively demonising many others—Mexicans, women, refugees from all over the world and now, we hear today, green activists, who among other things are trying to save the American bald eagle, symbol of the United States. We have to stand up against this prejudice, before it leads to mass injustice.

I shall finish with a quote from Martin Luther King, written when he was in jail:

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

8 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What an extraordinary few days these have been, and what an unedifying tack this Government have taken. Every Member of this House will no doubt have heard from large numbers of their constituents who are appalled and concerned, and I am sorry that when the Foreign Secretary had the opportunity to respond earlier, he chose to minimise those concerns. The events in America are alarming. Even in the very recent past, it would have been utterly impossible to imagine this happening. The values that this Government tell us they espouse have been utterly lacking in the statements they have made, and where is the global leadership that they speak of?
If the special relationship is worth a jot, the UK Government should be using it to their full advantage. This Executive order is disgraceful. It is racist, inhumane and dangerous, yet the Foreign Secretary told us earlier that it did not discriminate against Muslims and that it did not constitute President Trump’s promised ban on Muslims. That is frankly ridiculous. What on earth will it take to make this Government really speak out, and why has the Prime Minister so failed to do so? We have heard today that the Prime Minister might in fact know about the Executive order before it was put in place. We have no idea whether the Foreign Secretary knew, because he repeatedly sidestepped that question here today. If the Prime Minister was aware of this disgraceful, racist Executive order before it was published, and her reaction was simply to say that it was a matter for the USA and, astonishingly, to invite President Trump for a state visit, that is utterly shameful.

To add to the many concerns that people already had about President Trump’s thoughts on groups including women, Mexicans and people concerned about climate change, he has now brought this order to bear. We have responded by looking the other way and inviting him for a state visit. It utterly beggars belief that that is the Government’s priority, when the Executive order is clearly so wrong and so illogical and has such horrible implications for the Muslims caught up in it, for those in peril who would have sought sanctuary and for people all over the world who are going to be affected by this order fostering Islamophobia. This is a disgraceful state of affairs.

To conclude, the national security arguments of the Trump Administration are simply wrong; they are nonsense. Rather than keeping America safer, this measure will make us all much less safe. A state visit in these circumstances is just not appropriate. Let us not look away from what is happening. We say that all the time in this place. Now, let us actually have the guts to stand up to this terrible, dangerous policy. We must do this.

8.3 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I should like to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing this debate. I agreed with the entirety of my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North’s speech and with much of what the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, although I disagree with his more fulsome praise for the actions of this Government over the past 48 hours. I would take issue with that, but I was very moved by his personal experiences and his personal reaction to the ban. I commend his speech and his efforts on this matter.

I want to return to a point made when the Foreign Secretary was taking questions earlier, following his statement, about the importance of recognising that this is a Muslim ban. Other Members have made that point as well, but it is so important that we send a clear message and that we call it exactly what it is. We seem to be living in an era when the truth and facts are challenged at every moment. I was struck by a recent film, “Denial”, which is the story of how Professor Deborah Lipstadt had to take the holocaust denier, David Irving, to court in order to prove the truth about the holocaust. It really focuses the mind on the importance of speaking up for the truth at every moment and calling out those who deny it.

Many people are trying to divert us from the truth by saying that this Executive order is about nationality. It is not about nationality. The President of the United States made it very clear in his campaign that he wanted to ban Muslims from entering the United States. Rudy Giuliani was on Fox News recently—not one of those organisations that the President likes to accuse of distributing “fake news”—saying that he had been asked by the President of the United States to put together a commission to work out how to enact the Muslim ban legally. These people are not hiding in plain sight; they are telling us in clear words on national television that is broadcast around the world exactly what they believe, exactly what they stand for and exactly who they are.

Sir Simon Burns: Does the hon. Lady also remember that, during the Democratic national convention in late July last year, Trump was tacky enough to attack a Muslim gold star mother whose son had died in the service of the US army protecting his fellow soldiers from certain death?

Shabana Mahmood: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that important point and reminding us about Humayun Khan. In normal circumstances, that action would have been enough to ensure that someone lost an election and received the opprobrium of everyone, everywhere. It is a sign of what we have come to that that did not happen.

It is important that we stick to our principles and that we hold the line in relation to the truth, because that is what is at stake here. Everyone in this House must be unashamed and unafraid to do that. We have to hold the line when people scream at us on social media that things are not as they seem and that the President suddenly changed his mind and does not think that it is a Muslim ban. We also have to hold the line when people try to divert us and when the “alt-right” go on the marches they are now so famous for. We have to hold on to the truth.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Shabana Mahmood: I will not, because of the time. I do apologise.

I want to make a point about British values. As a British Muslim parliamentarian, I have spoken a lot in this House about British values. I have also heard a lot from this Government about British values. In fact, I have often felt that the Government feel that the British Muslim community needs to do more to uphold those values. We have heard famous phrases such as “muscular liberalism”, and we have been told that we need to give strong and vocal support to our respect for democracy, the rule of law, equality and tolerance for everyone and every group in this country. We are told that we as a community have to step up to the plate and call out behaviours that do not match with our British values. If we as a community fail to do that, we have the threat of the Prevent strategy hanging over us. As I watched the Prime Minister’s limp, weak and shameful response to
this Muslim ban, I hope I can be forgiven for wondering whether the British Government would consider referring themselves to their own Prevent strategy for failing to prevent this debate, vocal, musculously liberal defence of our British values.

I am reminded of the recent Casey review of integration in our communities, one of whose recommendations was held up by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. It stated that we could increase “standards of leadership and integrity in public office, by...ensuring that British values such as respect for the rule of law, equality and tolerance are enshrined in the principles of public life and developing a new oath for holders of public office.”

I wonder how many members of the Government would feel, if they had taken such an oath, that they had fulfilled that promise by calling out this behaviour on the part of the American President in the way that they should have done. I feel that they have not fulfilled any such promise, and that they have therefore undermined the very case that they make for our own values. That is a real shame.

I have a final point about the personal impact that the ban is having on Muslims around the world, particularly the almost 3 million British Muslim citizens. As a British Muslim, I can tell you, Mr Speaker, that people among my family, friends and community feel terrified. They fear that this is a portent of what is to come. We live in an age of supremacists. Whether the Muslim supremacists of ISIL or the white supremacists who think they have achieved their life’s dream with the new Administration in the White House, supremacists are on the rise around the world. In this age of supremacists and their success, we have a duty to call them out, to stand up to them and to say, “Not on our watch.” We have a duty to provide comfort and security to all our minority communities. We will not let them down. We will not stand by. We will stand up and be counted.

8.10 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for securing this debate. Like so many colleagues, I agree that what President Trump has done is absolutely appalling. It is a prejudiced, xenophobic, Islamophobic policy and a horrible, sad episode in the history of a country with such a strong and proud record of welcoming migrants and refugees.

Remarkably, it has not even been six months since President Obama hosted his international summit aimed at encouraging states to pledge more resettlement places for refugees. The background to that summit was that more than 65 million people have been forced to flee their homes—the highest number since the second world war—more than 21 million of whom have had to flee their countries altogether. Presciently, President Obama warned world leaders that “if we were to turn refugees away simply because of their background or religion, or, for example, because they are Muslim, then we would be reinforcing terrorist propaganda that nations like my own are somehow opposed to Islam, which is an ugly lie that must be rejected in all of our countries by upholding the values of pluralism and diversity.”

That of course is exactly the disastrous mistake that President Trump has just made.

In 2015, the US accounted for 60% of global refugee resettlement places. With President Trump in office, it is now more imperative than ever that other Governments step up to the plate, reject the narrative that he has capitulated to, and send a message loud and clear that we will stand up for and defend to the hilt the precious international system for the protection of refugees established by the Geneva convention of 1951. The question is whether the Prime Minister and this Government will step up to the plate. It is fair to say that I have some doubts, but I dearly and sincerely hope to be proved wrong.

The Government can start proving me wrong today by putting on the record their unequivocal backing for the refugee convention, by abandoning talk of redefining the convention’s fundamental terms, by emphasising their commitment to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Syrians. If possible, which it is, they should do more and expand the scope of refugee family reunion and provide safe legal routes for those escaping persecution. Most importantly of all, will the Government commit today to ensuring that the Dubs scheme for relocating unaccompanied child refugees from Europe will remain in operation in the long term while the refugee crisis continues to unfold? What could be a stronger and more fitting rebuke for such a terrible and divisive decision?

8.13 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I begin by saying: “I am heartbroken that today President Trump is closing the door on children, mothers and fathers fleeing violence and war. I am heartbroken that America is turning its back on a proud history of welcoming refugees and immigrants—the people who helped build your country, ready to work hard in exchange for a fair chance at a new life.” Those are not my words, but the words of a Nobel prize winner. Her name is Malala. She probably knows more than anyone here the difference between true Islam and the poisonous perversion that we see in the hatred of Dushy and others. It is heartbreaking beyond words that the leader of what was once the free world does not know the difference between them.

Make no mistake, however much his supporters and apologists may want to dress it up, Donald Trump has explicitly made the connection between being a Muslim and being much more likely than anybody else to be a danger to fellow human beings. That is offensive not only to Muslims; as a Christian, I find it an offensive, repugnant way of running a country. I have heard people praise Mr Trump for his Christianity. I am sorry, but I was brought up to see the best in everybody, and I cannot see any Christianity in the early days of his presidency. If the lord and saviour whom we both follow was to turn up today at the American border, he would not be allowed in. He would have a Palestinian passport and no valid birth certificate and would not be able to prove that he was a Christian because he had not invented Christianity yet. That is the extent to which the depraved, racist ideologies of one man have poisoned a once great nation.

I heard Government Members complain about repeated references to the Holocaust, but the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) nailed that point perfectly. There are similarities between how Trump has been talking about Muslims for years and how others talked about Jews in the 1930s. If those similarities are not clear enough for anyone in here to understand, they should...
not be involved in politics at this or any other level. I found the comments of the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) immensely powerful and I want to say something in response to her quote. They came for the Muslims, and I am not a Muslim. They will come for Jews, and I am not Jew. They will come for the gays, and I am not a gay. They will come for the Mexicans, and I am not a Mexican. But, by God, I will speak up and I will join, hand in hand, with the thousands who are in Whitehall right now and in towns and cities the length and breadth of these islands and across the world.

America is our friend, but Donald Trump will never be my friend unless he mends his ways enormously. Friends sometimes do things that are so abominable that we have to say, “You stop that right now or our friendship is over.” We have to ask the Government what is the price of the continued friendship. If we are not prepared to stop that friendship now, how far down the slippery slope does he have to take us before we say, “No more”? If we go too far, it will be too late to stop.

Last week at Prime Minister’s questions, I quoted prose by Robert Burns, but I never thought I would have to quote the same words again. He said that whatever and ever damages society, or any least part of it, “this is my measure of iniquity.” This is an iniquitous action by an iniquitous President, and I will never cease to speak out against it.

8.17 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I join the others who have commended the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for the way in which they secured and introduced this debate. Many important points have been made and much has been agreed on, but there is clear disagreement on some points.

My issue with the Prime Minister is not so much that she was holding Donald Trump’s hand when she met him on Friday; it was that she stayed her hand when it came to responding to the Executive order. A clear, unequivocal response should have been given and none was available. That sent a dangerous signal to many people who are worried, fearful and angry, both here and across the world. We have heard hon. Members refer to the fact that the Prime Minister visited the Republican congress before she visited the President. I do not believe that the terms in which she spoke as Head of Government in such a partisan setting were appropriate. She commended them for having swept all before them and for renewing America with strength. Donald Trump’s idea of renewing America with strength was demonstrated the next day by this Executive order. This is the drive-by prejudice, xenophobia and racism that pass for governance in the Trump age, and this President now has the fastest-ever invitation for a state visit, which appals and disgusts many people. None of the excusers here today can answer that point.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if this country goes ahead and welcomes Donald Trump with all the pomp and ceremony of a state visit, that will be seen in the eyes of the world as appeasement of a President whose policies directly discriminate against our constituents? When we come to consider the massive public petition about this visit, we should have the conviction to review and rescind that invitation if circumstances do not change.

Mark Durkan: I fully accept the hon. Gentleman’s point. To those who are saying that we cannot reconsider the invitation, I say that we should. We should not be afraid of offending the narcissism of this man when we are prepared to offend the fear and disgust that we know many, many people feel about this Executive order and other statements and practices of the early Trump presidency. Let us be very clear that it is about the signal that is sent if it goes ahead as a state visit, with all the pomp and ceremony that that allows. It is not just about the message that it sends to Muslims or to the countries that are subject to the ban; it is about the message that it sends to people here and in America.

It is also about the signal that it sends to the people in America who have honestly been trying to stand up and be progressive and supportive of refugees. President Trump is almost indicting the sanctuary cities in the States. He is now listing them as almost un-American for the support they are prepared to accord refugees and the stand that they are prepared to take on human rights. He is criticising civic and pastoral leaders in America. What signal do they get if Donald Trump is received and applauded here?

How many of us have stood at different events in this House and said, “We will show racism a red card. We will show sectarianism a red card”? Well, we are not showing them the red card by inviting President Trump here on a state visit. The invitation should be reversed if we want to send a straight and clear message.

Mr Speaker: I call the Front Bench speakers to wind up. If each could take no more than 10 minutes, or thereabouts, that would be excellent.

8.21 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for securing this debate.

As we stand here this evening, we should remember that, across the country, our fellow citizens have been protesting President Trump’s decisions. It would be remiss of the Government not to take note of the strength of feeling on this issue or of the petition, which now has around 1.5 million signatures.

We heard moans and groans from some Government Members when it has been mentioned that the Executive order was signed on Holocaust Memorial Day, a day when millions join together to remember the Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, disabled and others killed by the barbaric Nazi regime. The Foreign Secretary said earlier that to refer to the events of the 1930s and ’40s in this context was to “trivialise” that tragic period of world history. Well, here is what the Anti-Defamation League, which was set up “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all” said of Trump’s actions this weekend:

“More than most, our community knows what happens when the doors to freedom are shut.”
The holocaust did not begin with mass murder; it began with the demonisation of communities based on their religion and beliefs. It began with “othering” minorities, and it began with institutional racism in the laws of the land. To ignore those facts would be a real insult to those who strive so hard today to uphold the values of inclusion, tolerance and freedom in the face of oppression.

Imagine how it feels to be a Muslim on this day, anywhere in the world. Imagine how it feels to be a young Muslim, a Muslim child, in these days, looking at the television wondering about the President. “Is he speaking about me?” Yes, he is. It would give such people great comfort to hear so many of the wonderful speeches that we have heard from both sides of the Chamber today, and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), who is now in her seat, for her personal perspective of Islamophobia and hijabs. I am pleased to have secured an Adjournment debate this week on World Hijab Day, which should be celebrated, and on the right of women to wear or not to wear a hijab as they please, without fear or favour. In any event, women should be able to wear what they want, regardless. That is how it should be.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, who said that he would welcome President Trump as soon as possible and that he hopes for a change in President Trump’s stance. I appreciate those sentiments, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that we had a debate in Westminster Hall when Mr Trump was a Republican candidate. At that time, many well-wishing Members on both sides of the House suggested that it would be all right and that he would change his ways: “Let’s get him to the United Kingdom, take him for a curry and take him to the mosques, and his attitude will change.” I fear that I do not share the hon. Gentleman’s sense of optimism.

The Government have an opportunity to demonstrate true leadership. Remember that we are speaking up for what is right. It is President Trump who is wrong, so what are we afraid of? What is the point in any of this if we cannot use this platform to say what we believe is the right thing to do? And standing up against what he has done is the right thing to do.

Scotland has taken in more than 1,200 Syrian refugees through the Syrian resettlement programme, and that is more than a third of the total number taken in by the whole United Kingdom. The response by Scottish national and local government and by our third sector to the refugee crisis has been exemplary. In my constituency, Syrian refugees have been involved in Burns suppers and have attended local football matches. That is what this country should be about.

We should compare the Prime Minister’s lack of immediate reaction with the reaction of Angela Merkel or Justin Trudeau, or with the strong statements by the First Minister of Scotland. As I have said, the Prime Minister has failed the important first challenge that she faced.

Over and above all of that, the Executive order does not make the US or the UK any safer; quite the opposite. To quote John Kerry’s remarks prior to the ban, when Trump announced his policy in 2015:

“It exhibits an attitude by one American who is running for the highest office of our land about a willingness to discriminate against a religion... It says to those in Islam who are trying to exploit people and recruit foreign fighters and otherwise, it says look, look at America. Here they’ve got a guy running for president who is waging war against Islam.”

Of course, President Trump’s words have been picked up by the leader of Daesh, who quite disgustingly is referring to this as a “blessed ban”. How appalling.

That is why the Government need to answer the questions from earlier today. What are the national security implications for the UK of this Executive order? Does it make us safer or, as so many experts have stated, does it make us more likely to be at the other end of terrorists whose ideas will be bolstered by Donald Trump’s remarks?

Lastly, I am hugely concerned about the impact of the order on the work of international organisations like the UN and the work to uphold international treaties like the Geneva convention. As Chancellor Merkel said:

“The...refugee convention requires the international community to take in...refugees on humanitarian grounds. All signatory states are obliged to do so. The German government explained this policy in their call yesterday.”

What action have the Government taken to uphold these vital international treaties?

President Trump’s actions are inhumane, racist and immoral, and let us tell him that they are. I welcome the fact that the House is now treating the threat posed by him with seriousness, which is what it deserves, but without leadership from this Government in standing up to these despicable policies, I fear that we may have some very deep and dark times ahead of us. I hope that the Minister will attempt to change my mind.

8.28 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): This has been an extraordinary debate, in which we have seen the House at its best. Let me begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing it, and on the immensely powerful and important statements they have both made, not just today, but since this hateful policy was announced on Friday night. Tellingly, they and others, from Chancellor Merkel to Sir Mo Farah, were able to see immediately that this policy is abhorrent and reprehensible, and to condemn it, whereas as far as the British Prime Minister was concerned it was not a matter for comment, and almost three days later she has still not condemned it. She has only told us that it is not a policy she would pursue—that is not condemning it. As my right hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman both know, this is not a time for cowardice. It is not a time for staying silent or for going for trade deals at almost any cost; it is a time to stand up for what is right. So many Members have talked tonight about the desperation that forces people to flee from war, terror and persecution, and the terrible consequences that befall the world when we bar the door and turn our backs on those most in need.

Many have pointed out that it added grotesque insult to grave injury for President Trump to announce this policy on Holocaust Memorial Day. On that day, we among millions of others remember the 900 Jewish refugees on the MS St Louis who were turned away from the United States and forced to return to Antwerp, plunging them back into the holocaust from which 254 of them would never emerge. It was of course in the aftermath of those
horrors that the 1951 Geneva refugee convention was agreed, which was renewed afresh and signed by the United States in 1967. That convention enshrines the principle that all signatories should give shelter to those fleeing war and persecution, regardless of their race, religion and nationality. The Executive order could not be a more calculated demolition of that principle.

We learned on Saturday that Chancellor Merkel had to explain the convention in her phone call with President Trump, but we have to do more than explain it. It is incumbent on every other signatory to that convention to press the United States to live up to its commitments and its obligations, so I support my right hon. Friend’s call for a European Heads of Government meeting to consider a united response to this Executive order and to the breach of the refugee convention. I urge the Minister to respond to those calls when he speaks.

Given the response of the Minister’s boss to my earlier questions—perhaps, more honestly, I should say the lack of response—may I ask him to address urgently the issue of the position of UK residents who are foreign nationals and not passport holders but residents? I am thinking in particular of those with indefinite leave to remain, thousands of whom will now find themselves discriminated against simply because of their country of origin, even though many are here precisely because they have fled the terror and religious extremism that the Executive order purports to prevent. Whether these people are Somali or Sudanese, Syrian or Yemeni, Iraqi, Iranian or Libyan, they are our constituents. They work hard, they pay their taxes, they are raising their families here and they call the UK their home. They are part of our communities and we have a duty to stand up for their rights as well. So may I ask the Minister as a first step to tell us how many UK residents he believes will be affected in this way, and what advice his Department and the Home Office are offering them?

Frankly, this is a debate I never thought we would need to have; the very idea that we would be looking at a new American President, just a few weeks into the job, not just aghast at what he has already done, but debating how much worse things could get from here. How long ago it seems since the Foreign Secretary was telling us to be optimistic about the new presidency and was saying that this President shared our values and we were being premature in judging him. How naive that looks now.

Yet this is the President for whom the Government are preparing to roll out the red carpet and welcome on a state visit. I was checking the figures today and I found that since the first state visit of President Reagan in 1982 the quickest period between inauguration and making a state visit to Britain was 17 months—that was for President Obama. The average has been 25 months, with both President Clinton and President George W. Bush having to wait almost three years. So why the indecent haste for this most indecent of Presidents?

This is a President who has made lewd and vile comments about the Duchess of Cambridge; who has said that he does not want to meet the Prince of Wales, because someone might finally stand up to him about climate change; and who has banned thousands of our residents and millions worldwide from visiting America simply because of their nationality and their religion. And President Trump thinks that we should put on a parade for him while that grotesque ban is still in place! If it goes ahead, it will be a national shame, which is why the Opposition will oppose having a state visit in such circumstances. We will certainly oppose any suggestion that President Trump is given the honour of addressing both Houses of Parliament.

Last week, the Prime Minister promised to speak frankly to President Trump and tell him where she disagreed with him, but we heard nothing of the sort from Washington. We heard nothing about climate change or respect for human rights and women’s rights. We heard nothing about punishing war crimes in Syria, the nuclear deal with Iran, or the illegal settlements in the west bank. We got the same stony silence from the Prime Minister when she was asked about the Executive order. Three times she was asked the question in Ankara, and three times she ignored it. Was she told about it by President Trump? There have been reports on “Channel 4 News” that she was. The Secretary of State ducked the question; perhaps the Minister will enlighten us and answer directly: did the President tell the Prime Minister about the Executive order when they met?

The Prime Minister referred in Washington to a special relationship based on our shared history and interests, but she has to realise, and needs to make President Trump realise, that it is also a relationship based on shared values. If the President is going to discard those values, whether by embracing torture or ignoring climate change, or by demonising people as aliens and terrorists based simply on their religion and nationality on the very day on which we remember the holocaust, the Prime Minister must be willing to tell him frankly: “Mr President, you are wrong. This is not who we are.”

The fact that, almost three full days after the announcement, we have yet to hear a word of condemnation from her own mouth is not just shameful, it is cowardly. Some iron lady she has turned out to be.

8.36 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): First, I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this special debate, even though it followed 90 minutes of questions to the Foreign Secretary on the same topic. It is important that we have been able to air our views. It is no part of my comment tonight to find partisan difference or to argue with the fundamental moral arguments that have been put to the House today.

I commend the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) for pressing this issue. The House has every right to speak out. We are seen throughout so much of the world as the voice of democracy and as a lighthouse of justice and decency. It is in that vein that we have witnessed a debate of the highest quality that I hope will be noticed and listened to, and I hope that all those who have participated will feel proud of the contribution they have made on a very important issue.

We witnessed the most deeply moving speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi). It was clearly a moment of deep personal emotion for him. It illustrated what has fired us up today, along with millions of other people. There is a moral dimension to this issue, as we have been discussing, but perhaps not quite sufficiently. There is enough the intensely personal dimension for the individuals whose lives are going to be affected. That is what we must understand when we debate this issue.
From my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns), with his encyclopaedic knowledge of US Presidents, we have learned about previous presidential visits to the UK. I acknowledge my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) for mapping out some of the broader strategic issues within which this very difficult issue has to fit. One of those is, of course, our relationship with the one superpower in the world, our closest historical ally, with which we have very close interests that affect all our constituents. I urge the House to appreciate that the Government have to see it from that perspective.

Perhaps, in addition to the fervent moral arguments we have heard, I can map out some of the practical side. On Friday, after the Prime Minister had left Washington, the President issued his Executive order banning the citizens of seven countries from entering the US for a period of 90 days. We know which countries they are: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Sudan. The order makes clear that no US visas will be issued to citizens of those states, and that anyone who already has a visa will be denied entry. I acknowledge the point made by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North that that is a significant extension of and is different from the list drawn up by the Obama Administration when those countries were withdrawn from the US visa waiver programme in 2016. What President Obama did in December 2015 was amend the visa waiver. From January 2016, it did not include individuals or dual nationals who had, in the previous five years, been to Syria, Iraq, Iran or Sudan. In February last year, the new provisions were extended—this is the origin of the list—to people who had travelled in the previous five years to Somalia, Yemen or Libya, but were not dual nationals of those countries. It is true that President Trump’s Executive order is more extensive and sweeping, but it is altogether of a different order.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): The House has yet to debate what Brexit means in practice, but after the events of this weekend can we at least all agree that the last thing that it should mean is biting your tongue in the hope of doing trade deals and thereby abandoning all the values that this country has long held dear?

Sir Alan Duncan: I fully appreciate what the hon. Lady says. Indeed, we have debated such issues on many occasions. I have been in the House for nearly 25 years, and I think I am well known as someone who has defended Muslims at home and abroad throughout that period. To turn on a sixpence, when I was Minister of State, Department for International Development, I had to focus more than £1 billion from the growing DFID budget on Syrian refugees; perhaps my one pleasure amid the challenges that we faced was being able to say that that was 25 times more than was provided by the French.

Let me concentrate on what the Government had to do in response to the announcement of the Executive order. It had a serious effect, and there were serious consequences for some British citizens. It is the Government’s duty to protect the interests of British citizens, and where we are able to do so, make sure that we get things changed so that they are not detrimentally affected. That is what we decided we primarily had to do, why the Foreign Secretary spoke to the US Administration, and why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke to General Kelly, the new Secretary of Homeland Security, to seek clarification.

One of the points that I ask the House to understand is that we did not appreciate right from the start all the implications of the Executive order. It was announced as the Prime Minister left Washington to fly overnight to Turkey, and during the next day it was full steam ahead in Turkey, so I think the House ought to row back from the personal attacks on the Prime Minister.

Let me make it clear what has resulted from those contacts: we have successfully protected British citizens. It would have been ill advised to be diplomatically offensive in a way that would have reinforced any detriment to British citizens. Instead, we have achieved something.

Andy Burnham: Get out of it! Achieved what?

Sir Alan Duncan: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman exactly what we have achieved. We have achieved an outcome in which all British passport holders remain welcome to travel to the United States, which would not have happened if my colleagues in Government had not made the contacts they did.

Yvette Cooper rose—

Sir Alan Duncan: No, I will not give way. I am going to explain this.

We have received assurances from the US embassy that the Executive order will make no difference to any British passport holder, irrespective of their country of birth or whether they hold another passport—[Interruption.] The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) has asked, “What about residents?” I am holding her back from intervening so that I can answer her question. We are advised that the only material change for the UK is that citizens of any of the seven designated countries who do not hold a British passport but are legally resident in the UK will still be able to apply for visas, but that they may face additional screening at their port of entry into the United States. I apologise for making the right hon. Lady wait to intervene.
Yvette Cooper: The Minister is making a thoughtful speech, and I welcome the work that Ministers have done to safeguard the interests of British citizens. However, may I ask him about the wider points? Has the Foreign Office made representations to the US Administration to lift the refugee ban in the interests of international refugee policy, and to stop the targeting of Muslims in the interests of our shared values and common security?

Sir Alan Duncan: Given that the emergency debate has had me rushing to the Dispatch Box at short notice, I have not been involved in any such discussions so I cannot give the right hon. Lady a categorical answer, but one can speculate on what political events might now unfold. Executive orders are, at least, limited for 90 days. They are a command from the president to instruct Congress to do something, so the order will now move to Congress within the democratic process of the United States. They have their democracy as we have ours, and this will ultimately be their political decision. I have no doubt that there will be strong political voices within the United States, as we have heard today in this House and, indeed, outside it.

I reiterate that the order is not the kind of policy of which this Government approve or would ever introduce. As the Foreign Secretary said in his statement earlier, we have already made very clear our anxiety about measures that discriminate on grounds of nationality in ways that we consider to be divisive and wrong. Indeed, it does not really help—although it is true—to say that, although all the countries listed are Muslim countries, the list does not include all Muslim countries. In fact, the vast majority—that interception? The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) might just listen to the point I am trying to make. Although the vast majority of the Muslim world is not mentioned in the Executive order, the political language around it is unacceptably anti-Muslim. As such, it is divisive and wrong, and will cause an effect in the entire Muslim community.

As the Prime Minister expressed during her visit to the States last week, the point of having a special relationship is to have frank and honest discussions on all issues, whether we agree or disagree. We do not hesitate to state that, although US immigration policy is ultimately a matter for the US Government, we do not agree with this kind of approach. It would be wrong to think that the relationship means that we agree on every issue. That has never been the case throughout the history of the special relationship. One could cite the example of former Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson not joining the US in fighting in Vietnam.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon clearly said—frankly, he has spoken in today’s debate with extraordinarily personal and moral authority—we should not forget the indispensable nature of this country’s alliance with the US. In defence, intelligence and security, we work together more closely than any other two countries in the world. America’s leadership role in NATO, which the Prime Minister was able to reaffirm and reconfirm in her visit, is the ultimate guarantor of security in Europe. The President told the Prime Minister of his 100% commitment to NATO. The trade relationship is one in which we export more to any other nation. The relationship is overwhelmingly to our benefit. I believe very strongly that the Prime Minister’s visit to the White House last week underlined the strength of that transatlantic alliance. Where we have differences with the United States, we will not shy away from them, and we will express them clearly, as I have done today, but I also echo the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister in repeating our resolve to work alongside the Trump Administration in our mutual interest.

Edward Miliband: First, I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for contributing to this debate. I thank you, Mr Speaker, for making the debate possible, because it showed a wish to make sure that this House was relevant to the issue of the day and the issue of the moment. I particularly commend the speeches—forgive me if I do not mention all the excellent speeches we have heard—by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), my right hon. Friends the Members for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and for Leeds Central ( Hilary Benn), and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South ( Alison McGovern), my friend, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon ( Nadhim Zahawi), spoke incredibly movingly and eloquently. We also heard from the right hon. Members for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) and for Broxtowe ( Anna Soubry), and the hon. Members for Colchester ( Will Quince) and for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). There were many other excellent speeches, including from the Front Benches—my own and others.

The main thing I take out of this is that we achieved our purpose, which is to show that on the merits of this issue there is remarkable unity across this House. There is no division on the Government or Opposition Benches about the fact that this ban is basically a repugnant, abhorrent thing. It is a very good achievement for the House to have set that out.

The second question, though, is what happens next? In a good contribution, the Minister came a bit closer to raising that issue. The question is whether we classify this a kind of normal, run-of-the-mill disagreement— “They do their thing, we do our thing”—or as something much, much more serious. I urge the Minister to take back to the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister the strong feeling across this House that this is not some run-of-the-mill thing— “They do our policy and we do ours”—but incredibly serious. It is incredibly serious because of the values that it speaks to, which offend this House of Commons, and because it takes us down a slippery slope. Someone pointed out that we are only two weeks into Donald Trump’s presidency. My goodness, it feels like a year, really, and we still have at least three years and a lot of a year to go. There is a real danger of a slippery slope.

Thirdly, this policy is going to make us less safe, not more safe—it is more dangerous for our world. I really hope that the Minister takes back the message that this is not run of the mill but deadly serious, and that we expect a response from the Prime Minister, including speaking to the President, that is proportionate to the feeling of this House of Commons.

I apologise for having briefly gone outside because I was due to speak at the event that was taking place, although I never quite made it to speak. There were tens of thousands of people, I think, or thousands of people. One must not get into crowd size estimates given recent experience; I do not want to do a Trump—[HON. MEMBERS:
“Millions!”] There were millions of people outside. I think there is a feeling across this country, from the petition to the people outside, that this ban is not in our name. This House of Commons has said that today and I hope that the Government will reflect that in the weeks and months ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered the need for repeal of President Trump’s discriminatory, divisive and counterproductive ban on entry to the United States for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries and the indefinite ban placed on Syrian refugees.

Mr Speaker: For the record, that was passed unanimously.

Pension Schemes Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

8.55 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Let me start by placing the Bill in the context of the Government’s overall record on pensions. This Government have delivered radical and much-needed changes to our pensions system to make savings easier, fairer and safer for all. Since 2010 the pensions landscape has seen a revolution not only in state support, but in the ways in which people can save and access their pension savings.

We have removed the default retirement age, helping people to live fuller working lives. That is good for people’s wellbeing and their retirement income, and it benefits individuals, employers and the economy. We have made it easier for them to understand their state pension, and by setting the full amount at £155.65 a week we will lift more pensioners out of means-testing in the future. Together with the reviews of the state pension age, those changes are creating a sustainable system as a foundation for people’s private retirement saving.

We have increased private long-term savings by introducing automatic enrolment. More than 7 million people have already been automatically enrolled into a workplace pension, and more than 370,000 employers have declared that they have met their automatic enrolment duties. This is the cornerstone of our private pension reforms and it reverses the decade-long decline in pension savings prior to its introduction. It is a programme that works and it helps people achieve a more financially secure later life.

I am grateful to the many independent observers who have commented on the success of the policy. The Work and Pensions Committee has recognised that automatic enrolment has been a “tremendous success”. The National Audit Office, reporting on automatic enrolment in November 2016, found that the “programme is also on track to deliver value for money in improving retirement incomes in the longer term”.

Findings of a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which was also published in November 2016, suggest that automatic enrolment is having a huge relative impact on those with the lowest participation rates in workplace pensions before its introduction, in particular those aged between 22 and 29 —a group that has seen a 52.1 percentage point increase in pensions saving—and those in the lowest incomes quartile, who have seen a 53.9 percentage points increase. Moreover, the institute found that automatic enrolment is having an effect well beyond our target eligible group, in particular those earning under the £10,000 threshold, and that some employers are paying above minimum contribution rates.

Women are benefiting, too. In 2011, only 39% of eligible women employed in the private sector were in a workplace pension; by 2015, the figure had increased to 70%. By 2018, we estimate that 10 million workers will be newly saving or saving more into a workplace pension as a result of this change, generating about £17 billion in additional pension saving each year by 2019-20.
The Government’s introduction of pension freedoms in April 2015 allows those aged 55 and over to access their pension savings with more flexibility. People with defined contribution pension schemes can now choose to use those funds in the way that is most suited to their circumstances, whether by drawing down the income, taking out an annuity, taking a lump sum or using some combination of those options. Since the introduction of pension freedoms, more than 1.5 million payments have been made, with £9.2 billion withdrawn flexibly in the first 21 months.

That is the landscape; let me turn to the Bill. Our focus now is to make sure that the regulatory landscape continues to be effective in protecting members so that everyone can have confidence in their pension scheme. Automatic enrolment requires employers, small and large, to provide pensions for their workers, in many cases for the first time. Automatic enrolment is helping to ensure that tomorrow’s pensioners have greater security and an asset base in later life. Many employers have selected master trust pension schemes because they can offer scale, good governance and value for members.

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way and for his earlier comments. Although we may have differences on the adequacy of the Department’s responses to some of the Select Committee’s reports, its response to our report on this issue is immensely encouraging. I think that some Members of the Committee will want to endorse the Secretary of State’s proposals, which implement some of our recommendations to defend the hard-earned savings that many people are making, sometimes for the first time, by auto-enrolment. We do not want the cowboys to get hold of those funds.

**Damian Green** (Birkenhead) (Lab): I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his words. Throughout his intervention, I was expecting “but” to appear at any moment, and it did not. We can be as one on the matter, and I will seek to improve our responses to future reports of the Committee that he chairs.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): I am grateful to the Secretary of State, but—if I may use that word—would he accept that the Bill is a missed opportunity to put right the severe problems in the plumbing and mechanical services industry pension scheme? For example, my constituent Chris Stuhlfelder wants to pass on his business to his employees after a lifetime of work in the industry, but he risks losing the lifetime rewards of that work just in order to secure the pension scheme for liabilities that are not directly his. Will the Minister table amendments to deal with that?

**Damian Green** (Birkenhead) (Lab): I acknowledge the problem faced by the hon. Gentleman’s constituent and others in the same scheme. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), has met the hon. Gentleman’s constituent. We are looking, with representatives of the employers and the scheme, to see what we can do about the issues that they have raised, and we are exploring alternative methods to help employers in such schemes to manage their employer debt. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that this is a complex area of legislation, so it is important that we get it right. As I hope he knows, we are on the case.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I really welcome this legislation, but I am not the only one. I do not know whether the Secretary of State is aware of the comments of Morten Nilsson, the CEO of NOW: Pensions, a huge master trust. He has said:

“When we entered the market we were shocked at how easy it was to set up a master trust. It was simply a case of sending a form off to HMRC and The Pensions Regulator, nothing more.”

I am very glad that the Government are looking to address that serious issue.

**Damian Green** (Birkenhead) (Lab): My hon. Friend raises an important point, which is at the heart of the legislation. The strong and quick growth of master trusts in response to the success of automatic enrolment has been in danger of running ahead of the regulatory system. In the Bill, we are catching up and making sure that the regulatory system is adequate to deal with these trusts, which will be hugely important in 20 years’ time. We hope and expect that auto-enrolment will carry on, so the funds under management will increase hugely in the decades to come. It is really important to have the regulation right from the early days of the new system.

Automatic enrolment requires employers to provide a pension for their workers. It is, as I have said, helping to ensure that tomorrow’s pensioners have greater security and an asset base. Many employers have selected master trust pension schemes because they offer scale, good governance and value for members.

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): As well as being equitable for employees, will the schemes be equitable for employers? In the past, one of the problems of pooled defined benefit funds was that employers had ongoing liabilities beyond their initial contributions. Will the master trusts include only defined contributions and limit employers’ liability in the longer term, so that it is just an amount that will be put in, rather than an ongoing liability?

**Damian Green** (Birkenhead) (Lab): The purpose of the regulatory system we are introducing in the Bill is precisely to ensure that there are checks and balances to avoid some of the problems we have seen in traditional schemes. My hon. Friend may be aware that we are about to produce a wider consultation on defined benefit schemes, so some of the problems he rightly identifies will be addressed in that consultation.

There has been very fast growth in the use of master trust schemes. In 2010, there were about 200,000 members in master trust schemes in the UK. By December 2016, there were over 7 million members, and £10 billion of assets in 87 master trusts. The schemes are regulated by the Pensions Regulator in accordance with occupational pensions legislation, but that legislation was developed mainly with single employer pension schemes in mind. The master trust schemes have different structures and dynamics, which give rise to different risks. We have worked closely with the Pensions Regulator and engaged with other stakeholders to see what essential protections...
are needed. We believe that the measures in the Bill, while proportionate to the risks, will provide those protections.

The Bill introduces a new authorisation regime for master trusts. Under the new regime, the trusts will have to satisfy the regulator that they meet certain criteria before operating, or achieve those criteria if they are already operating. The criteria have been developed in discussion with the industry, and they include the same kind of risks that the Financial Conduct Authority regulation addresses in relation to group personal pensions, with which master trust schemes have some similarities.

Master trusts will now be required to demonstrate five things: that the persons involved in the scheme are fit and proper; that the scheme has financial sustainability; that the scheme funder meets certain requirements; that the systems and processes relating to the governance and administration of the scheme are sufficient to ensure that it is run effectively; and that the scheme has an adequate continuity strategy. The Bill sets out these criteria so that it is clear to master trusts and other stakeholders what the new regime will entail. Schemes will have to continue to meet the criteria to remain authorised. The regulator will also be given new powers to supervise master trusts, enabling it to intervene where schemes are at risk of falling below the required standards.

The Bill also places certain key requirements on master trusts and provides additional powers for the regulator where a master trust experiences key risk events, such as the scheme funder deciding to withdraw from its relationship with the scheme. The Bill requires a scheme that has experienced such an event to resolve the issue or to close. This requirement, along with the regulator’s new powers, supports continuity of savings for members, protects members where a scheme is to wind up or close, and supports employers in continuing to fulfil their automatic enrolment duties.

On the introduction of the Bill in the other place, the Pensions Regulator said:

“We are very pleased that the Pension Schemes Bill will drive up standards and give us tough new supervisory powers...ensuring members are better protected and ultimately receive the benefits they expect.”

In welcoming the Bill, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association commented that

“tighter regulation of master trusts is essential to protect savers and ensure that only good master trusts operate in the market”.

It went on:

“This is an important Bill that will provide the appropriate safeguards for the millions of people now saving for their retirement through master trusts.”

As I have said, we continue to engage with stakeholders on aspects of the detail to be made in regulations. We anticipate the initial consultation to inform the regulations will take place in the autumn, and it will be followed by a formal consultation on the draft regulations. Our intention is to lay the regulations during the summer of 2018, and the authorisation and supervision regime is likely to be commenced in full that year.

However, the Bill also contains provisions that, on enactment, will have effect back to 20 October 2016, the day on which the Bill was published. These provisions relate to requirements to notify key events to the Pensions Regulator, and constraints on charges levied on or in respect of members in circumstances relating to key risk events or scheme failure. That is vital for protecting members in the short term and will ensure that a backstop is in place until the full regime commences.

The Bill makes a necessary change in relation to the existing legislation on charges. We are keen to remove some of the barriers that might prevent people from accessing pension freedoms.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has come to the section about charges. He will know of the transparency campaign I have been pushing. I am extremely grateful for the efforts that he and the Under-Secretary of State for Pensions, who is sitting to the left of the Secretary of State, have made in introducing more openness into pensions schemes. I should be grateful to hear more on how he will approach that.

Damian Green: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his campaign. Transparency is a key area. Hidden costs and charges often erode savers’ pensions. We are committed to giving members sight of all the costs that affect their pension savings. He asks for more detail. We plan to consult later in the year on the publication and onward disclosure of information about costs and charges to members. In addition to the Bill, other things are clearly required to give greater confidence in the pensions system. Greater transparency is clearly one of the steps forward. I completely agree with him on that.

As I was saying, we are keen to remove some of the barriers that might prevent people from accessing pension freedoms. The Financial Conduct Authority and the Pensions Regulator indicate that significant numbers of people have pensions to which an early exit charge is applicable. The Bill amends the Pensions Act 2014 to allow us to make regulations to restrict charges or impose governance requirements on pension schemes. We intend to use that power alongside existing powers to make regulations to introduce a cap that will prevent early exit charges from creating a barrier for members of occupational pension schemes who are eligible to access their pension savings. The FCA will introduce a corresponding cap on early exit charges in personal and stakeholder pension schemes in April this year.

The Government intend to use that power together with existing ones to make regulations preventing commission charges from being imposed on members of certain occupational pension schemes when they arise under existing contracts entered into before 6 April 2016. We have already made regulations that prohibit such charges under new or amended contracts agreed on or after that date. That will fulfil our commitment to ensure that certain pension schemes used for automatic enrolment do not contain member-borne commission payments to advisers.

In conclusion, we believe that the Bill is an important and necessary legislative step to ensure that essential protections are in place for those saving in master trust pension schemes. With many millions of members enrolled in such schemes, it is important that we act now to ensure that members are protected equally whatever type of scheme they are in. The measures proposed in the Bill have been developed in constructive consultation with the industry and other stakeholders, so we have confidence that they are proportionate to the specific risks in master trusts and will provide that necessary protection. In turn, that helps to maintain confidence in
pension savings, and particularly in automatic enrolment. By making it easier for people to save through a workplace pension, the Government are building a culture of financial independence and long-term saving.

The Bill will also ensure that people are not unnecessarily dissuaded from taking advantage of the pension freedoms by high early exit charges. The Government have given people greater flexibility to take their pension savings, rewarding those who have worked hard and saved for their future. This is a focused Bill that specifically concentrates on the action we must take to cement the reforms we have already made, and I commend it to the House.

9.13 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for outlining the content of the Bill. In addition, I pay tribute to my colleagues in the other place who have already scrutinised the Bill.

The Opposition recognise and support the need to ensure that there is adequate regulation for master trusts as they have developed since the introduction of auto-enrolment, but the point made about the missed opportunity was right.

As the Secretary of State set out, the Bill focuses on defined contribution occupational pension schemes alone, defining regulation of master trust schemes which provide centralised workplace pension funds for several companies at the same time and have largely emerged as a result of the development of auto-enrolment in pensions. It gives the Pensions Regulator responsibility to authorise those schemes that meet certain criteria. It also provides for a funder of last resort in cases where a master trust fails. Sadly, this is something we hear too much about with too many other pension schemes. Finally, the Bill gives the Pensions Regulator the ability to withdraw authorisation from a master trust and sets out the criteria for triggering such events should a master trust face difficulty.

As I said, the measures in the Bill are slightly overdue. In April 2014, it was estimated that master trusts accounted for two-thirds of people who had been auto-enrolled. Master trusts operate on a scale that is unprecedented in occupational pensions and most are run on a profit basis. Currently, however, they are not subject to the same regulation as contract-based workplace pensions. There is no requirement for a licence to operate and limited barriers to entry. There is also little guidance on who can become a trustee and no infrastructure in place to support the wind-up of a failed trust.

Given that the savings and pensions of millions of employees and their employer contributions are at risk, we cannot allow this to continue. We support the Bill, which is vital to putting the auto-enrolment system on the strongest possible footing, but we will look to strengthen it where we can, for example by building on our amendment on the funder of last resort. By protecting members from suffering financial detriment, while promoting good governance and a level playing field for those in the sector, the Bill should ensure that the system is a secure and trusted means of saving in the future.

Before I come on to specific elements of the Bill, I would like to expand on how disappointed I am, and how millions of others will be, with how limited the Bill is. Perhaps the Secretary of State will surprise us, but I think this is likely to be the only pensions Bill in this Parliament. Significant issues are already arising relating to both state and occupational pension provision. It is therefore disappointing, if we are to see no other Bill, that those issues are not being addressed.

One key issue is that of the WASPI women: the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign. These women, and some men, have been left behind by the Government’s poorly managed accelerated equalisation of the state pension age. Over 2.5 million women born in the 1950s made their plans for retirement only to find that their retirement age had been quietly pushed back by the coalition Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I gently remind the hon. Lady that we are discussing what is in the Bill, and not what is not in the Bill. It is quite a narrow Bill.

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful for that ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker. It was a debating point in the House of Lords. As I said, it is not likely that there will be another pensions Bill in this Parliament, so I hope you will give me some latitude.

Frank Field: There was a hope among some of us on either side of the House that the Bill might be blocked tonight, temporarily, until we got justice for the WASPI women. Unfortunately, as I understand it, Labour was not willing to do that and the Scottish National party in particular was not willing to do that, as they are pleased with the Bill and want it to go through. May I make a plea to my hon. Friend that, should the next pensions Bill come, as it assuredly will, and before all the WASPI women are taken up to the new state retirement age, Labour thinks tactically about trying to get them justice, rather than merely talking about it, as I have to?

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks. We recognise the importance of the Bill in tightening the regulation—or lack of it—on master trusts and the vulnerability that that lack places on the millions of people who are being auto-enrolled. It is therefore important that the Bill goes through. My point is that if it is the only pensions Bill in this Parliament, it has serious omissions. Those omissions should be on the record, as should our objection to the fact them. If I could just have a few moments to mention—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has made the point that she feels those issues have been omitted, but they are not in the Bill. If she could now move on, I would be very grateful.

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful for that ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker. Although we have made significant improvements in terms of pensioner poverty, I have to say it is a disappointment that there are still outstanding problems. Under our pension system, of which we should be guardians, one in seven pensioners still unfortunately lives in poverty. We are the fifth richest country in the world, so we should be able to ensure that our pension system provides dignity and security in retirement. Currently, it does not. For me, this a significant failure of our pension system and highlights a particular failure in the Bill.
I could also talk about the missed opportunities surrounding the Cridland review of the state pension age, which has not been brought to this place, and there are lost opportunities when it comes to the defined benefit Green Paper. It was due later this year, but it has now been decided that it will not be brought to this place for scrutiny in connection with this Bill.

I will move on, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know I am testing your patience. [Interruption.] That is a bit unkind. Closer to home and in relation to the Bill, it does very little to build—[Interruption] Do any Conservative Members want to intervene? Okay, I will carry on.

The Bill does very little to build on the success of Labour's auto-enrolment policy by ensuring that saving into master trusts is accessible and encouraged for a number of groups currently excluded from auto-enrolment provision. I recognise that the Government have announced a review of auto-enrolment, but again, why is this not in the Bill?

Let me speak briefly about the issue of low-income savers’ access to saving in master trusts. Under the policy of auto-enrolment developed by my party, working people would be automatically enrolled in a master trust scheme once their earnings hit the trigger of just over £5,000. The logic of this proposal was that people would begin to save towards an occupational pension at the same earnings level at which they began to pay national insurance contributions. The coalition Government increased this earnings threshold to £10,000, denying millions of low earners the automatic right to save towards a relatively low-cost occupational pension through a master trust.

Given the generational crisis developing in our pension system, we believe that more needs to be done to include low earners in savings provision and encourage retirement planning.

That is also true for the self-employed. Self-employed people currently make up to 15% of the workforce, and since 2008 have accounted for over 80% of the increase in employment. There is much evidence to suggest that the self-employed are not saving as much as other sectors of the workforce. Research by the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed found that four in 10 self-employed people did not have a pension. Despite that worrying evidence, there is little obvious means by which a self-employed person could begin to develop a savings pot within a master trust. Once again, this is not sorted out in the Bill. There are other examples, such as people with multiple jobs and carers, of those who do not have access to, and the benefit of, an occupational pension scheme.

The Secretary of State has just announced that there are gaps in the Bill, relating to its failure on a number of different issues. We are shocked by the vast amount of detail missing from the Bill, when that detail is necessary to achieve what the Government have set out to do. The Secretary of State mentioned that secondary regulations to achieve what the Government have set out to do. The detail missing from the Bill, when that detail is necessary to achieve what the Government have set out to do. However, it does not address a number of core principles, the first being scheme member representation.

Unlike defined benefit schemes, defined contribution schemes provide for the risk of saving and investment to be borne by the scheme member. On that basis, we believe that scheme members should be represented among the trustees of master trust pension funds. It is, after all, their money, and they have a direct interest in ensuring that a sound and sustainable investment strategy is delivered at good value. That surely stems from the basic democratic principle that those on whose behalf decisions are being made should have a say in those decisions. It would also be a necessary step towards greater transparency in the pensions system, which the Under-Secretary of State for Pensions himself confirmed that the Government would pursue following Labour’s campaign.

Furthermore, providing for a certain number of member-nominated trustees would not be a particularly new or unique arrangement. Mandated member representation already exists in the pensions system: trust-based pension schemes are required to ensure that at least a third of the board of trustees is member-nominated. Why should master trusts not be subject to the same requirement, especially in the light of the increased risk borne by scheme members?

Let me say something about transparency. For too long, people have been encouraged to put their faith—and, perhaps more important, their money—in a distant savings pot, and have been given very little information about where the money is invested, the performance of their savings, and, importantly, how much the investment is costing, in terms of the costs and charges that they will incur. Neither the scheme trustees nor the scheme members have been able to ascertain adequately whether they are getting value for money. I remember that in 2015, the former Financial Secretary to the Treasury promised the Work and Pensions Committee that if there was not openness about costs and charges, the Government would introduce legislation. Well, it has come a little bit late. Why has it taken so long?

In almost any other market, people wishing to purchase goods or services are given basic information about performance and costs before they do so. That basic principle is a necessary requirement to ensure that they receive value for money, but it is not operating in our pensions system. The Financial Conduct Authority has therefore published an interim report, which recognises a number of significant failings in the competitiveness of the asset management market. Its recommendations have important implications for the transparency of pension funds, especially in relation to the costs and charges being extracted from pension savings by investment managers.

We are pleased to see that part 2 of the Bill attempts to prevent excessive fees from being applied should a scheme member wish to take advantage of the Government’s pensions freedom reforms. However, the Bill does not refer to transaction costs, the charges applied by asset managers when they are making new investment decisions. There is a great deal of work to be done to tackle the problem of opaque and excessive
costs and charges being extracted from workers' savings by investment managers. Currently, the Bill merely scratches the surface. It must become a stronger vehicle for change in this regard.

We believe that, alongside member-nominated trustees, a member engagement strategy is required to ensure that master trusts are communicating properly with those whose money they are investing, and that they play their part in driving informed saver choices on a bedrock of transparent information. The Pensions Regulator's voluntary code of practice for defined contribution schemes asks trustees to provide "accurate, clear and relevant" communications for scheme members as good practice. We believe that proper member engagement should not merely be a voluntary requirement placed upon trustees, but should form part of the regulatory framework. That would help to ensure that scheme members can make rational and informed choices about their pension savings, creating a more sustainable system.

There are other elements in the Bill whose purposes we want to strengthen or clarify: for instance, the definition of the scope of a master trust, what happens to non-money purchase benefits under this Bill, a number of issues relating to the pause clause, and the status of the scheme funder as a separate entity.

We welcome the Bill, but we see it as a wasted opportunity. So much is being introduced after the scheme funder as a separate entity.

There are other elements in the Bill whose purposes we want to strengthen or clarify: for instance, the definition of the scope of a master trust, what happens to non-money purchase benefits under this Bill, a number of issues relating to the pause clause, and the status of the scheme funder as a separate entity.

We welcome the Bill, but we see it as a wasted opportunity. So much is being introduced after the scheme funder as a separate entity.

We need to develop a sustainable and secure pension system that drives down pensioner poverty and delivers dignity in retirement for all, and I am afraid that this Bill falls well short of that.

9.30 pm

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams). It is probably a fair sum-up to say that we might have liked the Bill to address most of the things that she complained about and most of the things that I might not like, rather than the measures actually in it, which I think get a broad and generous welcome. None the less, this is a necessary Bill that contains the right measures, and we hope it will have a speedy passage through this House.

I want to start by saying that the master trusts, or the more extensive use of them, are a welcome development in the pension landscape. It is hard to see how auto-enrolment would have worked if we had not had the extensive use of master trusts, because what we would not have got is especially small employers setting up their own pension scheme and trying to manage and administer it, or at least act as trustees of it. What we had to see in this situation was much larger trusts in the market that employers could effectively sign up to but not incur the ongoing costs and complexity of trying to be involved in their day-to-day running. So these things are attractive, but it is right that we make sure they are well regulated and we do not create situations where savers are disadvantaged by them.

It is probably quite brave in the pension world to have tried voluntary regulation or self-regulation, but that is effectively what we have had since 2014 with the master trust assurance framework. I perhaps should declare a sort of interest. The framework was drawn up by the Pensions Regulator with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, of which I am a member. It is disappointing that, having had that assurance framework in place, so few of the master trusts in the market signed up to it and followed all the requirements. Indeed, very few of them went through the full audit process required. So it was clear that we had to move to full and proper regulation set out in statute for these master trusts.

This is particularly important in a situation where effectively we in Parliament and the Government are perhaps not quite forcing people to save into these trusts, but strongly encouraging that, and two thirds of those who have been auto-enrolled have ended up in one of these trusts. It is therefore key that we make sure they are in high-quality schemes that look after their interests and we do not let them either be ripped off or just be a victim of a poor-quality trust that delivers poor returns. While there has perhaps been no sign of that from the major master trusts, anyone who has experience of the pensions industry will know that if we do nothing they will eventually become a problem. So it is absolutely right that the measures in this Bill ensure that trusts are set up and operated by people who have the skills and expertise to do that, and that there is a process for managing trusts, checking their performance, and making sure no issues arise as the years go on. That is because it is not realistic to think that either the employers that have signed up their employees for these schemes or the members themselves will have the skills, the ability, the time or the inclination to be doing that ongoing monitoring. That needs to be done by qualified people. That again is an advantage that master trusts have over insurance-based products. There are some skilled people here whose job is to represent the members. The advantage of having a trust is that there is at least that protection: when decisions need to be taken, there are some people who should have the right skills to act in the savers’ interests.

It is timely to be moving forward with these proposals as we suspect that by the time we get them fully in place we will have completed the first phase of auto-enrolment. We might find in the industry that people have set them up but do not have the number of members they thought and therefore not the level of income they thought. Perhaps the charge cap means that they do not have the income to be sustainable, or perhaps the changes that give people choice when they retire mean that they will not hit retirement date and then move their money into an annuity—that they will just leave the pot and not draw it down for a while. That would still be a cost on those schemes which needs to be addressed.

Julian Knight: My hon. Friend is making the important point that we have to avoid zombie funds being created as a result of the master trusts, and one way of doing
that is through the role of the Pensions Regulator. Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that a master trust will have to prove that its business model is sustainable is key to that interaction with the Pensions Regulator?

Nigel Mills: Yes, that is the point I was trying to make. Even master trusts that have been set up entirely properly and with the best of intentions could find, by the end of auto-enrolment, that they were not going to be viable in the long run. We need to ensure that there is a clear, well managed route so that, rather than having zombie funds sitting around delivering a poor return, we can get them moved into the higher quality, better performing ones. We need to ensure that this market works for everyone.

One element that people might not have considered is that we have not yet found a solution for people who end up with multiple very small pots spread across the landscape. I suspect that that could present a cost to the system that we will want to manage our way out of in order to create a sustainable situation. Overall, master trusts are a good thing, but they will need to be well regulated if they are to create confidence in the system and ensure that savers do not get a bad deal.

There are a few other things that I think I can just about sneak in as being within the scope of the Bill. We have ended up with slightly different arrangements for master trusts and insurance-based products, and I wonder whether it is sensible to have so many different regulators in the industry trying to do the same thing. Should the Pensions Regulator really be responsible for regulating all pension schemes, however they are structured, rather than letting the Financial Conduct Authority do some? Should we try to get equivalence between schemes that are trying to do the same thing but end up having subtle differences? Perhaps it would be better to say to all savers and all members of pension schemes, “Your scheme is regulated by the Pensions Regulator. Yes, there will be a cut-off with the FCA at some point.” That would be better than having uncertainty about who is responsible for which scheme.

Looking at master trusts more generally, there is a need to think through the position in the decumulation phase. The market might already be seeing that master trusts can be used for decumulation as well as accumulation. Decumulation is a very different model, and it is perhaps harder to see the business case for that than for the accumulation phase, with its ever-growing pots and more income. With decumulation, we have ever-dwindling pots and seemingly less income from the fees. We need to think through whether master trusts are intentionally aimed at the decumulation phase where members treat them as a kind of bank account from which they can draw money when they want to. The secret will be to ensure that savers have access to the right advice, and it is a pity that the Bill does not address the future of the various advice schemes, but I am sure that we will get to that at some point. In summary, this is a welcome and necessary Bill, and I am sure that it will be very effective. I look forward to its making progress in the House.

I welcome the Government’s initiative in bringing forward the Bill. A desire to create trust in pensions savings should unite us across the House. We want all workers to be able to attain a standard of living that will be consistent in allowing them to save while in work in order to have dignity in retirement, secure in the knowledge that a regular income from a state pension and a workplace pension will allow them to enjoy their retirement without financial worry and without living in pensioner poverty. In our view, pensions savings are the best way for most workers to achieve that dignity in retirement. We need to deliver the appropriate level of protection for savers, and the Bill is an important step forward in that regard, albeit one that could be enhanced through constructive amendments in Committee.

Given the growth in master trusts and the desire to ensure that we protect savers’ interests, the Bill is overdue in some regards. Auto-enrolment has led to a significant increase in the use of master trusts. The impact assessment published this month informs us that some 200,000 savers were in master trusts in 2010, increasing to 4 million by 2015. According to estimates from the Pensions Regulator, that may now have risen to 4.3 million savers with around £8.1 billion of assets in master trusts. When we take into account the Government estimate that 10 million workers will be in auto-enrolment schemes by 2018 and that they will be saving as much as £17 billion by 2019-20, with the vast bulk of them in master trusts, the need for robust, effective protection is clear.

The master trust market has grown rapidly, with as many as 84 such trusts in operation today. While there are a small number of larger trusts, it is clearly a fragmented market, with risk of failure in certain cases. Indeed, the Work and Pensions Committee called for stronger regulation in March 2016 when it concluded that: “Gaps in pension law and regulation have allowed potentially unstable trusts onto the market. Should one of these trusts collapse, there is a real danger that ordinary scheme members could lose retirement savings. There is a risk that faith in auto-enrolment as a whole will be undermined.” That is a stark warning and underscores the requirement to take this Bill forward. We need to regulate to remove the prospect of inadequately resourced schemes collapsing and to offer protection against scammers entering the marketplace. The warning signs are already there. Two small schemes have already collapsed, affecting 7,500 members. It is currently extremely easy for anyone to set up a master trust and accept savers’ funds, and there is no established mechanism for responding to the collapse of a master trust.

The rules of many schemes currently allow the use of members’ funds to wind up a scheme should it collapse. That is simply not acceptable. As a consequence of the Bill, there will be a requirement for master trusts to be approved, requiring minimum standards of trustees and obliging schemes to prove access to capital that can be used in case of wind-up. There has been widespread support for the need for such a Bill. The Pensions Regulator welcomed the announcement of new powers to regulate master trusts and said:

“We have been calling for a significantly higher bar regarding authorisation and supervision, and we are pleased that today’s announcement proposes to give us the power to implement these safeguards."

The ABI has said:

“We have previously called for tighter regulation of Master Trusts, and are supportive of the proposed direction set out in the Bill.”
The Pension and Lifetime Savings Association welcomed the Bill as “essential to protect savers and ensure that only good Master Trusts operate in the market.” I concur with all those remarks.

Some of the Bill’s requirements may have unintended consequences and require further attention. As the Bill represents a significant change in the role of the Pensions Regulator, the Government must ensure that the regulator is adequately resourced to deliver accordingly. Addressing some of the following concerns could go some way to getting the Bill watertight and satisfying the concerns of many stakeholders. My first point relates to clause 8. If a scheme funder is an FCA and PRA-authorised insurer, the ABI contends that it will already have to comply with solvency II and therefore the regulations under clause 8 should not apply as they would be onerous and costly. The Government should clarify whether they have assessed that potential impact and whether the additional regulation adds a further safeguard, making the provision necessary.

Clause 9 requires the Pensions Regulator to be satisfied that a master trust has sufficient financial resources to meet the costs of setting up and running the scheme and to protect members in the event of wind up. A master trust must therefore hold capital equivalent to six to 24 months’ worth of running costs. However, it is argued that there is little clarity over how that provision would be applied. The TUC argues that there is an assumption that other master trusts would have an appetite to absorb a collapsed rival’s book of business, but that may not always be the case, particularly if costs are involved. Some savers are more attractive to providers than others. In the absence of greater clarity over the robustness of the proposed capital regime, the TUC contends that clause 9 should be retained. It was accepted in the Lords and provides that the Secretary of State can “make provision for a funder of last resort, to manage any cases where the Master Trust has insufficient resources to meet the cost of complying with subsection (3)(b)” after a triggering event. I would support that as a principle.

On clause 10, concerns have been expressed about the additional costs that master trusts could face, such as those offered by insurers due to duplicated regulation enforced by the Pensions Regulator. The ABI has said that that would be to the detriment of existing scheme members, as these schemes already operate under stringent FCA and PRA regulation.

The key issue raised by the ABI is the definition of a “scheme funder” in clause 10. Concerns centre on the fact that the Government state that the clause is intended better to enable the Pensions Regulator to assess the financial sustainability of the scheme by increasing transparency on the assets, liabilities, costs and income of the master trust. The ABI is concerned that the clause does not meet the policy intent of providing transparency because, as a separate legal entity, master trusts can still transfer risk to other entities.

That issue was raised in the Lords, and the ABI continues to ask that, in order to protect the benefits to scheme members and minimise costs, the requirements under clause 10 should not apply where the scheme funder is an FCA and PRA-authorised insurer. There is also a need for greater transparency on fee charging, which needs to encompass transaction costs as well as any ongoing administration fees.

It is welcome that the Government are placing a 1% cap on exit fees for current members and no exit fee for new members. We know that large fees have been charged on exit in the past, and it is clear that we need to protect savers, although if new members are to be excluded from exit fees why should it be permissible for exit fees to remain in place for existing plan holders?

Under clause 12, at least one third of trustees of single-employer workplace pension schemes have to be member-nominated. There is no such obligation on master trusts. The Bill presents an opportunity to explore member involvement, and I hope we can pick up that topic in Committee.

Clause 32 creates a new power enabling the Pensions Regulator to make a pause order requiring certain activities to be paused once a master trust has experienced a triggering event. That includes accepting new members, making payments, accepting contributions and discharging benefits. There is concern about the impact of a pause order on a member’s savings, as there are no mechanisms in place to allow ongoing contributions to be collected and held on behalf of a saver. It is unacceptable that a member should be penalised and, in effect, lose wages in the form of employer contributions due to events out of their control. The Government should clarify whether they intend to take action to protect savers in that area.

We look forward to clarification from the Government on those issues, and we will work in the next stages, where necessary, to improve the Bill. This is therefore a pressing matter and, on behalf of the Scottish National party, I signal our intent to work with the Government to deliver a Bill of which we can all be proud.

The Bill, however, is a missed opportunity to undertake much-needed major reform of the pensions system, rather than patchwork attempts to plug holes in the system. We need a fundamental overhaul of the pensions system, and the UK Government need to introduce more ambitious plans on pension reform. We are disappointed not to have a Bill that looks at the issues with the state pension, particularly the need to address state pension age inequality for the WASPI women.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I take your comments about the WASPI women but, given that the SNP was traduced by the Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, I make the point that the SNP has raised the issue of the WASPI women at least 44 times in this House and has commissioned independent research. It is completely disingenuous for anyone to suggest that the SNP has refused to support the campaign. A reasoned amendment to kill the Bill was suggested. However, that would help no one and would only remove the Bill’s helpful regulation provisions relating to master trusts.

Frank Field: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. The plan was not to kill the Bill but just to hold it up for a bit so that we could hopefully highlight the position of WASPI pensioners, for soon they will all be retired and the horror will have been completed. We have no other weapon against the Government, because they have made it plain that they are going to sit out this issue. The Scottish nationalists were not prepared to
form an alliance with those of us who want to block the Bill in order to actually raise this issue and perhaps implement the recommendation of a previous Select Committee report.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman is Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee—

**Frank Field:** I am not going to be speaking tonight.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I also appreciate that he is not going to be speaking in tonight’s debate, but I just want to say that it is a very narrow Bill about something very specific and this is not the forum for discussing all that. People might be very disappointed that we are not debating transport policy, but we are not; we are debating master trusts, so I ask the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) to keep just to that. I know he is trying to skim over things, but if he could skim away from other issues and get back to the main point, we would all be very grateful to him.

**Ian Blackford:** I will endeavour to skim away, Madam Deputy Speaker. You made the point that this is a narrow Bill, which is exactly why it would have been impossible to amend it to take account of the WASPI case. The right hon. Gentleman should know that an attempt to kill the Bill would have done exactly that, and we do not solve the problem faced by WASPI women by defeating this Bill, which is so necessary to protect pension savers. Frankly, he should be thoroughly ashamed of himself; he does no justice for the WASPI women with his campaign and the remarks he is making.

Let me conclude the remarks I was making. The sheer fact that the Cridland review is currently looking at the state pension age, without looking at the existing problems with auto-enrolment, demonstrates that we need now to review and enhance auto-enrolment. The pension system. The entire pensions landscape is in need of fundamental reform, particularly with a pressing need now to review and enhance auto-enrolment. The Government are set to review auto-enrolment this year, but reports seem to suggest there may not be substantial changes from the review, and with many missing out on auto-enrolment we need to ensure that this policy is moved forward. Although 7 million workers have been auto-enrolled, a further 6 million workers have missed out. The Pensions Policy Institute revealed that 3.3 million of the people excluded from auto-enrolment had been excluded because they earned less than £10,000 a year. It also found that three quarters of the employees earning less than the auto-enrolment trigger were women.

We believe that lowering or removing the auto-enrolment trigger would significantly increase the number of people saving through auto-enrolment and in master trusts. It would also go some way to alleviating some of the historical inequalities women face, whereby their occupational pension savings are already well below those of men. There are clear disadvantages here, particularly for part-time and the low-paid workers. For example, somebody earning £10,000 per annum will not benefit from the 8% contribution; they will benefit by only 3.4% because over half the earnings are excluded. Although self-employed workers are growing vastly in number, they have fewer incentives to save. If the Government were to review auto-enrolment sufficiently, they could consider moving to a flat rate of pension tax relief and allowing self-employed people to deduct pension contributions from profits to end the disparity.

Looking at the age at which auto-enrolment is triggered could also be more progressive. Just on 26 January, Zurich Insurance called on the Government to take “a steady approach to increasing minimum auto-enrolment contributions above 8%”. While there is an acceptance that the levels need to rise, it must be done in a way whereby workers do not opt out.

In conclusion, I welcome this Bill. It contains much we can support and we will work constructively with the Government to enhance it further. I hope that when the Minister winds up he will join with us in that spirit of consensus.

9.53 pm

**Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con):** I hope that Members will forgive me for not going into as much detail as the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). My comments will be considerably shorter, which will give people some comfort tonight.

If we are able to have the financial resources in the future to spend on things our constituents rightly take for granted, such as our NHS and our children’s education, one challenge for the Government is to rebalance the economy away from an over-reliance on the state. Where it is possible and appropriate to do so, the individual and their employers should take more responsibility for their future financial security. The national living wage, which was introduced by this Government—and at a far higher rate than that proposed by the Labour party—has helped to shift the burden back on to employers and away from the state, which had found itself topping up wages through in-work benefits. Many in-work benefits did nothing more than subsidise hugely wealthy businesses at the expense of the British taxpayer. With the introduction of the national living wage, employers will now be required to take more responsibility for paying their employees properly.

I see automatic enrolment in a pension scheme in the same way as I see the national living wage. It is a way of helping working people to save for their future and a dignified, funded retirement. Auto-enrolment requires employers to pay into a pension scheme along with their employees, and the Government do their bit by giving tax relief on employee contributions. I expected employers to be less than enthusiastic about auto-enrolment and the additional costs it would mean for their business, but if anything I have found that businesses in my Southampton, Itchen constituency are very supportive. In fact, one business even suggested making auto-enrolment compulsory to ensure that its staff are saving for their future and not choosing to opt out, as up to 50% of them currently do.
As with all legislation, it is sensible to review how auto-enrolment operates in practice and to improve it where possible. The Bill does that. It contains particular provisions on the role of master trusts and those who operate them. Master trusts are the favoured financial product for investing employees’ pension contributions for the majority of small businesses in the UK. Many of them, including the National Employment Savings Trust, operate within the Pensions Regulator’s guidelines and have the quality assurance mark. However, there is widespread agreement that regulation for trust-based pension schemes in general is inadequate. The Bill aims to address that and, in so doing, give comfort to savers and protect their retirement savings.

There seems little in the Bill that anyone can disagree with, although some Members have said that it does not go far enough. We insist that our taxi drivers pass a fit and proper person test so that they can carry passengers, but until now there has been no such requirement on all those who operate master trusts and are potentially responsible for a worker’s entire retirement savings. The Bill will ensure that those responsible for running master trusts have to demonstrate their suitability to do so—not before time, in my humble opinion.

The Bill also requires schemes to prove their financial sustainability—something that most investors would assume was already a requirement—and will give the regulator new powers to supervise master trusts and intervene if a scheme is at risk of falling below the required standards. With more than 10 million workers estimated to be saving in auto-enrolment schemes by 2018 and more than £17 billion of extra workplace pension saving per year by 2020, it is imperative that master trusts, which will be responsible for much of that investment, are more tightly regulated than is currently the case.

Once the Bill is passed, a consultation process will begin. When he responds to the debate, will the Minister inform the House of any specific regulations that will be presented in the consultation document? How frequently will those regulations be reviewed by the Secretary of State?

9.58 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I can beat the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith) on length of speech, because, not wishing to draw the wrath of Madam Deputy Speaker, I have crossed out 95% of my speech.

As the newly elected chair of the all-party group on state pension inequality for women, I feel obliged to say to the Government that they have missed the opportunity to make provision for that women group of women we have come to know fondly as WASPI, although many other pressure groups with different names are also lobbying for the same cause. I have promised those women that I intend to work with every group to fight this injustice and give them a voice. I will come to the Chamber at every given opportunity to speak up for them until they get justice. All they ask for is a simple transitional payment to support them financially until they reach state pension age. I say to the Government that the problem is not going away. The Bill does not do what it should have done, which was look after the WASPI women, and I fear the Government will regret that.

9.59 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): The House will be rather pleased that I will focus purely on the Bill, which I very much welcome and have no hesitation in supporting.

It may be helpful briefly to explain the framework and history of master trusts. Such pension plans were historically designed primarily for single employers, or a group of related sponsoring employers with an in-built paternalistic and altruistic nature of management. However, the world of workplace pensions has changed rapidly and for the good, with the introduction of workplace pensions under auto-enrolment following the Pensions Act 2008. As we have heard from the Secretary of State, the latest figures suggest that more than 7 million employees are now enrolled across 370,000 employers. As we reach the final phase of the staging dates roll-out across smaller employers over the coming year, the number will expand massively, approaching 10 million people across possibly 1 million employers. The figure for current assets under management is at more than £10 billion a year and will grow rapidly. It could easily be the case that, over the next 30 years, master trusts contain assets exceeding £1 trillion.

The larger employer may already have had an employer scheme in place, but those are likely to have been contract based, whereby a pension provider—often an insurance company—is appointed to run an individual scheme. It is the smaller employer, under auto-enrolment obligations, that will be using the other possible course of action, which is the trust-based defined contribution scheme, whereby a number of employers—perhaps tens of thousands of smaller individual employers—will take part in an individual scheme. The new legislation will apply to those new trust-based schemes, ensuring that they are well run, financially sound and subject to appropriate oversight by the Pensions Regulator. It is essential that employees have confidence that schemes will protect their assets. After all, it is perfectly likely that an employee’s pension fund, after their house, will be the primary life asset upon which so much will depend.

The Select Committee on Work and Pensions, in its report of 15 May last year, devoted some time to highlighting the risks under the current limited regulatory arrangements for master trusts, amounting to little more than Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs registration that practically anybody could overcome—loose arrangements that suited the original purpose of trust-based schemes, but which are wholly insufficient in the new auto-enrolment world. I pay tribute to the work of former Pensions Minister, Baroness Altmann, who similarly highlighted the lack of regulation of master trusts.

Following investigations, including one by the BBC, there were reports of unregulated applicants to the master trust market—notably, a promotion by MWP Pension Ltd, a company owned by former sports fashionwear traders that formerly traded as Wide-Boys R Us. With that type of background, new legislation is urgently needed, otherwise this area could easily become the financial scandal of the future.

Far from being overdue, it is a tribute to the ability of our legislative framework that risks have been recognised and the Government have acted quickly. The market itself has recognised the risks of the current lightweight regime.

[Royston Smith]
The Pensions Regulator, working with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales—as my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), a chartered accountant like myself, mentioned—created the master trust assurance framework, with a list available to all on the Pensions Regulator’s website. The list now includes 13 institutions that are complying with good practice. Before the Bill becomes law, I urge smaller employers considering their options as their staging dates approach to use any of those recognised schemes; do not use any other.

I welcome other aspects of the Bill, as it proposes triggering events, pause orders and an appropriately draconian penalty fine of up to £10,000 a day for non-compliance. I welcome the proposals and, with others, will examine their extent in Committee. Finally, and to the delight of all, the Bill gives authority to the Secretary of State to restrict charges, mirroring in part the provisions applying to the charges structure introduced within personal plans under the Bank of England and Financial Services Act 2016, and extending the Pensions Act 2014. As all Members will know, it is purely due to the effect of compounding that, over 40 years, a fund can grow by 50% or more with a simple fee-charging difference of just 0.75%. I certainly hope that the Secretary of State will use these powers to reduce charges as appropriate.

This Bill comes at the right time before contributions under auto-enrolment escalate over the years come, and I will support it.

10.5 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I have recently taken an interest in the issue of pensions in this House, but I had already had a fair amount of interest in it for a fair amount of time. Despite being a fair distance off the state pension age, or general pension age, I would quite like to have a pension, and so would most people of my age. It is really important that younger people do take an interest in this and think about it going forward. That is one of the reasons this provision is really important. We need to ensure that young people realise that they will have access to good pensions. The Government did a study that produced results in 2013 suggesting that only just over half of people who are currently of working age will have a pension that will be able to keep up their living standards. That is not an acceptable situation. I appreciate that the Government have undertaken reforms such as auto-enrolment to ensure that those numbers can be increased. We do not want everybody to be hitting state pension age and realising that in fact they cannot afford to do all the things that they intended to do. It is therefore really important to make changes to this.

In order for people to continue not to opt out of auto-enrolment and for it to continue to be as successful as it has been so far, we need to ensure that there is trust in the scheme. People must know that their money will grow at a reasonable rate and that they will get the right amount of money that they expect to get when they hit pension age. In order for that to happen, the Government need to have appropriate regulation in place; because, in the main, people are not by themselves going to read all the clauses and schedules of the regulations that come with the scheme that they are enrolled into. They need to trust that the Government have appropriately regulated these schemes so that if they fail, for example, there is security for them. Otherwise, auto-enrolment will not continue to work at the rate that it has done. It is really important that we have things like the new regulation that is coming through, and that we have recognised the rise of master trusts and how important they are for people who are involved in auto-enrolment.

I am pretty supportive of a lot of this, but I want to raise a couple of things. At the tail end of last year, I held a couple of public meetings in Aberdeen to ask people about pensions, and I was really surprised at the strength of feeling about pension regulation. I was expecting them to talk mainly about some of the well-known issues such WASPI, the frozen pension, and the lifetime ISA, which is not a scheme that I am particularly supportive of because it has far too many shortcomings. I think we are going to see a lot of negative ramifications in future when the change to pension schemes that encourages people to draw down. There is also the fact that people who enrolled in pension schemes before 1997 are not entitled to an inflationary uplift in those schemes. That was brought up a couple of weeks ago in a debate in Westminster Hall. I was also expecting the ever-increasing rise in the state pension age to come up, because I know that people are worried about that. I will not be getting my state pension until I am at least 68, under the current projection.

I was expecting all those things to come up, but in fact the biggest issue raised was the lack of appropriate regulation around some of the private pension schemes that exist. I was really surprised about that, but this is a real issue for people of all ages. People are really worried as a result of high-profile issues relating to schemes not paying out the expected amount. It is important that the Government are increasing trust in pension schemes, so that people of my age know that they will pay out.

For all of auto-enrolment’s many benefits, it has a number of shortcomings. My hon. Friend for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) mentioned how it disadvantages women, purely because they tend to be on part-time contracts. There is also an impact on people with multiple jobs, who tend to be on lower incomes; they earn a small amount in each job, so they do not get auto-enrolled. Self-employed people cannot be involved in auto-enrolment, and only 14% of self-employed people pay into a pension scheme. That is not enough. If we expect those people to be able to support themselves when they hit retirement age, more of them need to be paying into a pension scheme and the Government need to make changes to ensure that they are more likely to do so.

Age is another big issue that has not been raised today. People are not auto-enrolled until they are 22 years old, but a number of people are leaving school, starting work and hitting full-time employment earlier than that. If they are enrolled in a pension scheme when they hit 22, they will get a shock and think, “Hang on a second.” If we enrolled them earlier, I think they would be more likely to continue with the scheme. The Government need to look at that big issue.

I appreciate that the Government are continuing to make moves. This year’s Green Paper on defined-benefit schemes will be really important and the review of auto-enrolment will be fundamental. We need to look at how the scheme has worked, because it has been
more successful than intended when the Government conceived it. It needs to be looked at with fresh eyes in the light of that.

At present, 24% of people have no pension scheme when they hit retirement age, but as a result of the changes that figure will be only 12% by 2050. That is much better and it shows that there have been positive developments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber and the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), have referred to clause 9, which provides a fall-back position in the event of a master trust failing. The issue relates to master trusts that may not be attractive enough to be taken on by other master trusts. The Government could have avoided the situation that that creates. It would have been easier for us to support the clause if, rather than saying that they will introduce the provision through secondary legislation, the Government had outlined their position and given themselves the flexibility to amend it with secondary legislation. As it stands, schemes have to have between six and 24 months’ worth of cash in the bank in order to cover themselves, but there is no clarity on how that would work and it is left to the Government to introduce secondary legislation. If the Government had provided more clarity, this would have been a better Bill and they could have amended it as circumstances changed.

I appreciate being given the opportunity to speak and I thank the Minister for taking the time to meet us last week to give us a briefing, which helped my understanding of the Bill.

10.14 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I am conscious that some Members may be worried that they will be collecting their pension before we have finished debating the Pension Schemes Bill, but I promise that I will not detain the House long. That is a light-hearted start to a speech on a serious issue. It is a great pleasure and honour to speak in this debate, and to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), who made the important point that for many years there has been a lack of saving and pension provision in society at large. Members of the public turn to pension saving later than perhaps they ought to have done, and—dare I suggest it?—some Members of Parliament may have done the same. That is what the Bill is designed to address.

This is an important and often neglected policy area, and the Government’s strides towards automatic enrolment have gone a great way towards putting wrong that right. There is a need for further work, however, which the Bill is designed to address. We have heard about the types of master trust available, and I will not take the House through them all again. They are important, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. I am made aware of that every time I go around my constituency and meet those in charge of small businesses, of which we have a great many in Witney. Their main concerns are regulation and the steps that they have to go through.

Master trusts give them a way to deal with those matters very quickly, because administration costs are pooled and one group of trustees manages a scheme. Not all employers will wish to set up their own scheme, so master trusts help them greatly. As has been said in the other place, master trusts are a neat solution for smaller employers, for whom setting up an individual scheme would be a burden.

We need the Bill, because the previous reforms have led to the master trusts being a great success. So far, more than 7 million people have been enrolled in a workplace pension by more than 370,000 employers, and total assets of £10 billion are being managed. As the programme rolls out to smaller employers during 2018, we expect that to increase so that an estimated 10 million workers will be newly saving, or saving more, in those workplace pensions. That will have generated £17 million per annum in additional pension savings by 2019-2020.

Action must be taken now, because the increased saving is taking place against a legislative and regulatory framework that was designed for 2010, when some 200,000 members were taking part in master trust schemes; now the figure is some 7 million. The regulatory framework was designed with single-employer schemes in mind, but master trusts operate on a different scale and with very different dynamics. The first part of the Bill, which I support, will help to deal with that.

The second part of the Bill deals with early exit charges. In 2014, the Government brought in major changes to pensions, which have allowed 232,000 people to access flexible payments and exercise their right to use their money in the way they see fit. More than 1.5 million payments have been made, with £9.2 billion withdrawn in the first 21 months. Some schemes impose costs on people when they withdraw their money to use as they see fit, and the Bill is designed to address that.

In conclusion, I support the Bill. It will, I submit, increase confidence in saving and confidence in pensions. It will protect savers, and it will enable them to take full advantage of the new pension freedoms that they have been granted by the Government. It is a reforming Bill that amends the existing framework, and it will be of benefit to all. I urge the House to support it.

10.18 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a great pleasure to join in the debate. May I say how nice it was to have two such constructive contributions from the SNP? My friend the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) spoke from the perspectives of considerable industry knowledge and the view of a younger generation, which were extremely valuable in tonight’s debate.

I rise to congratulate the Government on introducing a Bill with the simple and absolutely correct objectives of providing essential protections for people saving in master trusts and giving those people the same security as members of single-employer schemes. That is the key thing. Many people listening to this debate will wonder what on earth a master trust is. The simple way to explain it is that it is a multi-employer occupational pension scheme. The question that many people will be asking is: why do these things exist in the first place? The answer is of course that they have advantages of scale. That means that small employers do not have to create their own trust; they can join an existing master
trust, which can reduce their costs, administration and overall hassle, and that is incredibly important for a small employer.

The downside, unfortunately, is that master trusts do not, as a mandatory requirement, have to pursue the best interests of the scheme members. They can take a purely commercial approach to generating profit. Their trustees do not have to pass the fit and proper persons test, the master trust does not have to be authorised, and there is a question mark over what would happen to the assets in the case of the master trust failing.

For all those reasons, the Select Committee, under the chairmanship of my distinguished colleague the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), looked at this issue in some detail last year. In effect, it made three key recommendations: first, that a pensions Bill should establish minimum finance and governance standards; secondly, that there would be ongoing requirements for master trust schemes and for compliance; and thirdly, that there should be measures to protect member assets in the event of a master trust winding up.

The report, which was written last May, was accompanied by a letter from the Chairman of the Select Committee to the Chancellor at the time, asking him to make sure that there would be a pensions Bill in the Queen’s Speech. To be fair, the Government have delivered precisely that. In fact, the previous Pensions Minister said she wanted a pensions Bill to provide stronger regulation of master trusts, and the current Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions is now taking that forward and delivering the promised Bill.

I felt that the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) was a little curmudgeonly to say that the Bill was long overdue. In fact, it is being delivered surprisingly fast. As other Members have pointed out, although there have been a couple of cases of small master trusts failing, they have been taken over very swiftly and easily, and as far as we are aware, nobody has lost any money so far. The Bill is therefore slightly ahead of the curve in dealing, we hope, with the problem ahead and providing the necessary framework and structures.

The industry has responded constructively to the changes. If we look at the three main bodies that have responded—the Association of British Insurers, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association and NOW: Pensions, which is the snappily named pensions provider of Danish origin—we can see that all three have made constructive comments. Some of the comments will need to be taken up in the Public Bill Committee, but they have broadly supported the ideas that the Bill is putting forward.

In essence, the Government have focused on three separate items. First, there are the master trusts, which will have to be authorised. Secondly, there are the people—the trustees—who will have to pass the fit and proper persons test. Thirdly, there are the assets, which will have to be ring-fenced and protected. Those are all good things, although they raise one major question to which I hope my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will respond in his winding-up speech. They require the Pensions Regulator to do a lot of important work, and there is a question mark over whether that body has the right resources. He will no doubt be able to tell us more about his discussions with the regulator and what they have agreed on resources. Without the right resources, these important changes will clearly not be implemented effectively.

There we have it: it is a simple and important Bill that everyone should support. The tone of this debate has been constructive. There will, however, be details to go through at the next stage of the Bill’s progress. For example, the PLSA has raised questions about whether the requirement for the scheme funder to be an independent entity is too onerous. NOW: Pensions has noted that only four master trusts have actually passed the master trust assurance framework full audit, which is disappointing. The ABI has questioned whether master trusts attracting members not connected to an employer—in other words, those in what is known as the decumulation phase—should be regulated by the FCA. Those three issues can be considered at the Bill’s next stage.

In closing, I just want to say that the Bill is important, and I am grateful to the Government for bringing it forward. Some good issues have been raised, and I will support the Bill.

10.25 pm

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham)—what a speech! The speech of the night, I would say. Pensions are an issue of vital importance to my constituents in Brecon and Radnorshire, and to all, young and old, throughout the country. As we live longer and grow older as a nation, it is imperative that everyone in the UK can support themselves in retirement. That is something on which we have all agreed, and that is why I am pleased that the Bill is before the House.

There are three key parts to the Bill, which emphasise the need for it: the protection of consumers, the incentives for responsibility, and the ending of anti-competitive practices. There are several points in the Bill with which I take issue, but slight tweaks will make it totally perfect. I was going to go through those points, but time is against us, and I have the wonderful pleasure of having been invited on to the Bill Committee, so I look forward to bringing those matters to the Minister’s attention over the next few weeks.

Overall, the Bill seems much needed. We must ensure that our constituents have confidence in our pension system, and the Bill seeks to do that. As we have heard too often, and throughout the debate, we need to ensure that responsible master trusts that work in the interests of their members are supported, and again the Bill seeks to ensure that. We need to ensure that our constituents have security for their retirement nest eggs, and the principles in the Bill seek to do just that. I therefore support its Second Reading and encourage all right hon. and hon. Members to do the same.

10.26 pm

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): We have had a good, almost conciliatory debate, but we have also rightly focused on the opportunity that the Government have missed to bring forward an appropriate Bill that addresses the issues surrounding pensions. The Chamber again heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on the plight of the thousands of WASPI women left stranded by this Tory
Government, who selfishly and needlessly accelerated the state pension age, leaving many women no time to make alternative provision for themselves in their 60s. If one line was added to the Bill to extend pension credit to the WASPI women—that is our policy—it would have gone a long way to pacifying us this evening.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): The hon. Gentleman has got his mention in; let’s stick to the Bill.

Alex Cunningham: So I suppose, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you do not want me to mention the fact that we do not have clarity on the state pension age, either. The Government have already said that they do not have a long-term commitment to the triple lock; we would like to know what their plans are, both on that and, more importantly, for many of our people who work in the most demanding physical jobs, and suffer ill health much earlier in life than those who spend their life behind a desk.

I will not test your patience any further, Mr Deputy Speaker, but we have drifted away from the principles of an effective pension scheme to a muddled view of saving for retirement. Indeed, such is the political hostility towards pensions that they do not get a mention in the latest leaflet produced by the Treasury, “Ways to save in 2017”. There are lots of mentions of different types of individual savings account—cash, junior, help to buy, lifetime and stocks and shares—but not one mention of the word “pension”, or of auto-enrolment.

Although this narrow Bill needs improvement, it is much needed, and we will work with the Government in Committee to help make it fully fit for purpose. Labour is proud of its achievements with auto-enrolment, but we are a long way from finishing the job. The sluggish response of this Government and the last to the development of a regulatory framework for auto-enrolment has left people’s savings at risk for too long. Given what the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), said, our priorities for improving the Bill should be fairly obvious. There should be transparency: members must know what choices they are making, and how much those choices cost—and I mean all the costs in the investment chain. There seem to be conciliatory thoughts on that on both sides of the Chamber.

We also need improved governance and a pension system in which members are more engaged. I am glad to read in the media and published reports that in many cases the regulators and the Government agree with the Opposition. As I said on 9 January, I welcome the one-word commitment from the Under-Secretary of State for Pensions to implement the FCA recommendations to improve transparency in the pensions industry. We will hold them to account for that.

I repeat that members must know how much things cost—they must know how much each investment costs and how much transactions cost. It is not good enough simply to say that a default fund is capped at 0.75% and that people should be content. The industry tells us that it is moving towards greater transparency across all its platforms. We will be pleased to see what it comes up with. I have no doubt that we need to help the industry with appropriate legislation.

In the past, pension fund providers and others involved in fund management have often tried to dodge the issues when asked direct questions about costs, including by saying, “You should be happy to reward performance,” when we know that lower costs give a better net performance. Other hon. Members have spoken about that in the debate. They also say, “We are incentivised to manage costs, so when your funds do well, we get a bigger pay-off,” but we know that 80% of asset manager fees are based on just holding members’ money rather than making it perform well. When people realise that the average compensation of an asset manager, from the most junior to the most senior employee, is £225,000, people have the right to know how they are using the scheme’s money.

The Opposition favour a change in reporting to ensure that pension schemes must report to members on the three headings: administration, investment costs and transaction costs.

I know that the Minister values the cost-collection template, which has been negotiated with the Investment Association by the Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board. We must encourage its use by all pension providers. I hope the Minister will confirm his support for such an approach for master trusts.

On member governance, all the investment risk lies with the member and not with the sponsor or the provider. There is an argument to be made that, since the pot belongs to the member and the scheme-sponsoring employer bears no investment risk, governance by scheme members should prevail in number over employers. Some companies choose to operate a trust-based defined-contribution scheme, but most newer auto-enrolled members will not find themselves saving into one. Instead, the vast majority of people will find themselves saving into a master trust or a group personal pension arrangement. In such schemes, member representation on governance boards is far more rare.

We are in a new landscape—we have lost member-nominated trustees, which we had believed to be a clear fiduciary principle. A member perspective adds diversity, which prevents the risk of group-think within boards. Ian Pittaway, chair of the Association of Professional Pension Trustees, has said:

“They’re brilliant in so many areas, they ask difficult questions that other people might be frightened to ask, they’re great on member issues, whether it’s changing benefits of a death-in-service case or something like that.”

In the defined-benefit world, as long as the scheme was well governed and well administered, the member would end up with a reasonable replacement ratio, but in the defined-contribution world, a member’s outcome depends on a host of factors that are currently beyond their control.

There may be resistance to member representation from master trusts, with tens of thousands of schemes and hundreds of thousands or even millions of members, but the industry has proved that it is possible. We will address that more in Committee. Whatever the route to better representation, most in the sector agree that it can only be beneficial for the defined-contribution landscape. There is a clear argument and there are clear demands that the Bill is the best place to start. We look forward to working with the Minister to make it happen.
Yes, we could have debated equally if not more important measures in the Bill, but sadly we are not. It could be many years before we get a chance to pass legislation in those areas. The Bill can both protect and empower the people whose money is being invested on their behalf. The Opposition are therefore happy to see the Bill progress to Committee, where we hope the Minister will be open to the improvements I am sure we can make to the Bill.

10.34 pm

Richard Harrington (Richard Harrington): I should point out to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that your predecessor in the Chair, the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel), was very robust in her attempts to reduce the content of Members’ speeches to that which is relevant to the Bill. I will do my best to continue with that tradition.

I was expecting some excellent contributions to this debate and I have not been disappointed. I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for the general spirit of consensus on the basics of the Bill. A number of hon. Members raised issues that go beyond the authorisation of master trust pension schemes and administration charges, the two issues covered in the Bill, and I am itching to rebut them. However, I realise, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I would be deemed to be out of order as they are out of the scope of the Bill, so I shall not do that. The Government were criticised by Opposition Members on the grounds that the Bill’s scope was not wide enough. I will address two points in particular.

On the scope of auto-enrolment, we will announce shortly a statutory review in 2017. It is my intention to make that review wider than the limited definition within the Bill. That will report by the end of the year. It is not in the Bill, which regulates master trusts, but it has not been ignored by the Government and it will not be.

Richard Harrington: I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on continuing so well the leadership and robustness started by your predecessor in the Chair. I apologise for any offence caused to the Chair. I actually thought I was speaking within the scope of the Bill, but I will of course be led by the Chair and move on to the substance of the Bill.

As I said, the points raised in the debate by Members on both sides of the House have been broadly complimentary. The whole purpose of the Bill is for the Government to be able to respond very quickly to the phenomenal and exponential growth in master trusts over the past two years. That growth was not predicted by the Opposition, who take credit for auto-enrolment—in fact, there was cross-party consensus—and it was not predicted by either the coalition Government or this Government. It happened very quickly and I believe the Government are doing the right thing by responding quickly. I do not accept that the Government have acted too slowly.
I am pleased to say that many Members of all parties have explained that master trusts are an important part of the pensions industry. The Government are filling a gap between personal pensions and insurance-based pensions that are regulated on the one side, and on the other side the evolution of the trust system, for which there is ample pensions law and regulations. There is a significant gap in the market. We are pleased that master trusts have expanded in the way they have, but they need some regulation and attention because companies have been moving into this area simply because there is that gap in regulation. That does not mean that such trusts are a bad thing, and I am delighted to report that we are carrying out this Bill from a position of little failure. This is not a Government responding to catastrophe or calamity when people have lost money; what has happened has been successful, but we need to provide the correct regulatory framework for it.

I can do no better than conclude my speech by citing my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester, who said that the Bill was simple and important and that everybody should support it. For that reason, I commend the Bill to the House and support its Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

PENSION SCHEMES BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords]:

Committal

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

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 21 February 2017.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration or to other proceedings up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of any message from the Lords) may be programmed.—(Mark Spencer.)

Question agreed to.

PENSION SCHEMES BILL [LORDS] (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(Mark Spencer.)

Question agreed to.

PENSION SCHEMES BILL [LORDS] (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the levying of charges under the Pension Schemes Act 1993 for the purpose of meeting expenditure arising under any Act resulting from the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords] or any other Act; and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—(Mark Spencer.)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

EQUALITY

That the draft Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017, which were laid before this House on 6 December, be approved.—(Mark Spencer.)

Question agreed to.

BACKBENCH BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Dr Dan Poulter be discharged from the Backbench Business Committee and Robert Courts be added.—(Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)
Doncaster and Bassetlaw NHS Trust STP

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mark Spencer.)

10.44 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): At this late hour, I rise to talk about the South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw sustainability and transformation plan. Sustainability and transformation plans are a huge part of the direction of travel in the NHS, but I find that the general public know nothing about them and that consultation is not reaching people—unlike their implications, including the cuts that they are disguising, which are reaching more and more people.

When I heard about the plans and met people to discuss them, it struck me that this was a chance for people in our area to have a vision of an NHS fit for today. I thought that it would enable us to move beyond the clapped-out buildings and outdated technologies into a new era, perhaps without all the funding in place, but with a vision of what would be there in 10 or 20 years’ time if that money became available. I find myself dismally disappointed.

I expected a vision across South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw of what a new surgical hospital of the future would look like. I recalled that, 25 years ago, my own company was working at Addenbrooke’s hospital. During a “live time” operation, we connected with consultants from Japan so that they could give their precise view on what should be done to a patient many thousands of miles away. I expected that—the best expertise and the most modern technologies—to be part of the vision. I expected tomorrow’s technology, but what I see is yesterday’s technology.

I expected to see, beyond smartphones, smart health. I expected that if someone of our age, Mr Deputy Speaker, should require paramedics, today’s smart technology would enable his medical records to be accessible to them immediately on their arrival. I expected screening, testing and all the real “before and afters” of any operation, and any highly specialised input, to become increasingly localised. I expected both our brilliant universities in Sheffield to be in the middle of the new future of the NHS. I expected an area that had been blighted by the impact of the coal and steel industries on the health of people and families to be able to look to the future, with a clear vision of how health services would be configured and how they would be linked to the super new health provision. That is what I expected from the plan.

I expected to be able to challenge my local communities to become engaged in prevention—in education, sport, recreation and healthy living—and to use the NHS less because they were fully involved in a modern plan for a modern health service. I expected to see mental health services that were a support, not a stigma, in the community. I expected to see the integration of social care and the NHS. Let me say to the Minister—I have said it before, but I will say it again now—that I am happy for Bassetlaw to be the first area to hand over the entire social care budget to the clinical commissioning group to put the two together. Working together but delivering from a single budget, they can be much more effective. I hope that the Minister will oblige by making our area the pathfinder for change of that kind.

This dismal plan is a smokescreen for cuts. But there is an opportunity, because of those cuts, to engage the population. The population does not know about the STP, but it certainly knows about the breast care unit that, behind the smokescreen of these changes, is being cut at Bassetlaw hospital, possibly never to be returned. It is a state-of-the-art system as good as that anywhere in the country, brilliantly put together by Mr Kolar and his team, but it is being dismantled at this moment. Women who, previously, from first appointment to consultant were seen, diagnosed and in treatment in 24 hours are now waiting weeks. It is a system that even in the olden days of the last two decades has been prompt and to the point, but it has now shifted back 30 years in its thinking. I hope the Minister will look at precisely how this dangerous cut is being done, because the people of Bassetlaw are not happy about it.

The management of the hospital—the chief executive went on Friday and is still to be replaced, and a new chair was appointed at the turn of the year—has decided to pick on the children’s ward of Bassetlaw hospital, which is perhaps not the smartest of moves. The STP gets nobody other than me and one or two officials to participate in its consultation, but then there is the parents’ Facebook campaign against the overnight closure and the video blog—fancy words—that I did to expose it. Some 9,000 people watched my video blog within the first 24 hours, and 7,000 have joined the Facebook group in the first 24 hours. So there is some consultation feedback for the NHS. The people of Bassetlaw, particularly the mothers and grandmothers, are saying, “We do not want this children’s ward shifting or closing, as it has been; we want that reversed.”

What is their vision, and my vision, of an NHS? Let me give the Minister the views of some of the real people—not the theory, not the stats, but the views of humans. Let me tell the Minister about the twins Leon and William, with autism spectrum disorder, milk allergies and other food intolerances, and learning difficulties, poor eyesight and sensory processing disorders. William has had eight chest infections since birth, with each one becoming more serious. What does his mother Kelli say? Her twins “thrive on continuity of care and are routine driven and to take an unwell child who has no communication (non verbal) and understanding could be devastating.”

These twins are “not critically ill but suffer from an acute neurological condition so severe that they attend St Giles” special school in Retford.

Kelli says:

“My boys know Bassetlaw Hospital and it is all they have ever known, if they have to go elsewhere this will have a detrimental effect on their mood and stress levels. This also may mask a real problem and when a child is non verbal you rely on the subtle hints they give. Even the mother—“struggle to understand what their main cause of upset is when they are panicked.”

They need “continuity of care”, but what does this modern, new NHS offer us—this year, brought in two weeks ago? It does not offer continuity of care. If those twins go in in the daytime, they will go into Bassetlaw children’s ward, but if they go in overnight they are automatically transferred to another hospital, and asked to go back to Bassetlaw the next morning. I have
already got mothers who are told to go to Sheffield or to Doncaster and arrive there and, after an hour or two—having spent the night getting there, waiting at Bassetlaw for an ambulance, going in an ambulance, getting transferred—are then told, “You need to get back to Bassetlaw.” What a farcical, 1960s health system we are now having imposed on my local hospital.

That is not good enough for the twins Leon and William, and it is not good enough for the six-year-old asthmatic who is admitted to the children’s ward two or three times a year when he is struggling to breathe and requires nebulisers, oxygen and steroids. His parents say:

“The service has…been efficient and relatively quick, which as you can imagine is paramount when you have a child who is fighting for breath…My son gets the treatment he needs without us having to bother the ambulance service. However if we have to travel to Doncaster, which is over 30 miles away and have the nightmare of parking there too it fills me with complete dread. It stops us being able to access home as easily when he has to stay in sometimes for 3 days but also takes the security and familiarity out of the stay for my son, who is already quite poorly”.

Distance is a crucial factor, and it is total nonsense that the distance their son has to travel should be determined by whether he is ill at night or in the daytime.

A four-year-old from Beckingham was treated three times in the children’s ward at Bassetlaw last year. Her mother says:

“The care was absolutely fantastic. I was really scared that she was so poorly, but all the staff were so kind and couldn’t do enough to help. Other mums I spoke to said exactly the same. The thought of having to drive to Doncaster with a sick small child, particularly my own, fills me with dread…I couldn’t have driven her to hospital on my own with her as she was at that age and I asked if we could have an ambulance but it was going to be well over an hour before one could be sent.”

We struggle to get ambulances at any time, never mind during the middle of the night. Ambulances cost money, yet in my area parents will be expected to get into ambulances and travel vast distances—in some cases 40 miles there and 40 miles back. That is not sensible planning in the modern national health service.

Another parent told me:

“My daughter was born 3 months premature in 2012. Due to this she has several health issues, in particular problems with her lungs which has caused her to be admitted on to the children’s ward at Bassetlaw hospital on many occasions.”

Her parents described an occasion when they were told that

“her organs were shutting down as her lungs were not getting enough oxygen. The children’s ward staff were amazing and gave her high dependency care on the ward as she was too unstable to move her to Doncaster hospital. If it had not been for them our daughter would have died.”

She was too unstable to be moved, yet now she would automatically be moved after 8 o’clock at night. That is an abomination, and there are many more.

Another example is 16-month-old Isla, who went to A&E twice in November. Her parents said that

“with her already being distressed with feeling so poorly we felt that the added ordeal of waiting for an overnight transfer by ambulance was added distress and unfair on our daughter. We had been warned we could wait up to three hours for an ambulance to be available and this was on top of the time we had already spent there. For such a young child to be subjected to a seven hour wait and an ambulance transfer in the middle of the night is grossly unfair and doesn’t fit with the ethics and duty of care we believe the NHS should stand for.”

This is not theoretical; it is actually happening.

Mylor, aged 10, was also born prematurely at Bassetlaw hospital. He suffered a brain injury, periventricular leukomalacia. He has quadriparesis cerebral palsy and is unable to sit or stand independently. He has had major hip surgery and has complex health needs. Rarely a week goes by without his needing an associated appointment related to his health needs. His parents say:

“It is of great comfort and reassurance to have a children’s hospital 8 miles from our home with staff who know Mylor and his medical background, a hospital he is familiar with. The decision to cut back admissions on the ward will greatly impact on disabled children and their families—families who already face enough challenges and worry caring for their loved ones.”

The impact on those young disabled children is enormous. They know the children’s ward. They know the staff.

Courtney has autism and learning difficulties. The family said

“we have always been allowed an open door policy if Courtney has ever been very ill. It has been of great comfort to our family to have the reassurance of the excellent medical staff at Bassetlaw. The staff have got to know Courtney and her condition, and her illness has quickly been addressed and this— the open-door policy— “has often prevented her condition from getting worse.”

Dr Leonard Williams, a paediatrician at Bassetlaw for 30 years, pioneered this open-door policy. Most parents do not even go through A&E; they go straight into the children’s ward, technically through the back door, with their children and their conditions known. All of that has been thrown out of the window in the last two weeks. Charlotte has many issues and “contracted pneumococcal meningitis at 4 weeks of age which left her severely disabled, profoundly deaf and epileptic to name some of her conditions. She has spent many days/weeks on the Children’s Ward at Bassetlaw and the care has always been fantastic. We have always been allowed an open door policy if Charlotte has ever been very ill. It has been of great comfort to our family to have the reassurance of the excellent medical staff at Bassetlaw.”

There is a lot of repetition, but each of these is a different case.

Ollie is six. He has Hirschsprung’s disease and has had a colostomy. He has multiple problems and has had multiple surgeries. His family said

“you never know when you may need the hospital and it’s absolutely vital we have a local one accessible 24/7. It also is very distressing for families and children to be far away from loved ones when members of the family are poorly. Having a local hospital is very important”

to them. I can go on and on with example after example.

Chloe is a 13 year old with a huge number of issues. She has been to Sheffield children’s hospital because she is very ill. He has multiple problems and has had multiple surgeries. His family said

“you never know when you may need the hospital and it’s absolutely vital we have a local one accessible 24/7. It also is very distressing for families and children to be far away from loved ones when members of the family are poorly. Having a local hospital is very important”

to them. I can go on and on with example after example.

Chloe is a 13 year old with a huge number of issues. She has been to Sheffield children’s hospital because she has so many conditions, but she also regularly attends Bassetlaw, where she has grown to trust the staff. Being in hospital for her is not a one-off. Chloe has been treated in the children’s ward for more than a decade, and her mother says it is

“how we live our lives.”

Emily has an extremely rare condition. She has seizures and

“often stops breathing while having them.”
She frequently stays at the children’s ward for one or two nights. Her mother said:

“We moved into this area to be close to the hospital for this reason, and Emily’s illness has always been quickly addressed at Bassetlaw, and this has often prevented her condition from getting worse.”

There is a three-year-old with chronic asthma who is severely disabled, profoundly deaf and epileptic. There is a 10-month-old, born prematurely, whose father’s employment means that he will not be able to be there if she does not go to Bassetlaw. Zac was the one for whom we launched the campaign. He is three years old. He is blind. He is permanently in a wheelchair and cannot speak. Zac’s father is an industrial worker who works nights. How is he meant to get in with his son if he does not even know which hospital he is going to on his regular admissions to the children’s ward? Those are just some of the children. There are many, many more.

The staff say that seven hours for a non-blue light ambulance is the norm. We have seen cases already of kids waiting six or seven hours at night for a transfer after already waiting all day. There was a case in which a blue-light ambulance arrived at Bassetlaw at 8 pm, just missing the deadline, which means a blue-light transfer and the child still going through A&E in Doncaster at midnight—four hours later. In Bassetlaw that would have been minutes, not hours.

We know about the financial black hole across South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw. We are aware of the massive black holes in some of the health trusts and that not enough money is being put in. We are also aware of the additional cuts, with the latest one being the cutting of health visitors. Mothers have been told in the last week that they have to weigh their own baby. There have been eye tests in schools since the inception of the NHS—stopped in the last week. Height tests in school—stopped in the last week. Those are major and significant cuts, and they are going to have to be reversed.

“Weigh your own baby in the current national health service because we haven’t got any health visitors, and when they’re ill you can’t go into the children’s ward.”

“There is no ambulance waiting for you. Drive your own kid to another hospital.” That is what families in my area are being told.

The STP states:

“Improving our population’s health and wellbeing...means re-imagining, re-designing and re-forming our public services and public budgets to improve the health and wellbeing of our population.”

Those changes and this plan are not forward-looking, they are old-fashioned, unimaginative and consultant-focused. It is a 1960s solution to the health service, not critical interventions in the right place, not key operations by specialist surgeons and not decentralised local services. For the young, the old and the seriously ill, it is already traumatic.

The support of my neighbour, the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), for the children’s ward and breast care unit is on the record, in the traditions of his predecessor, and I thank him for his cross-party work in Bassetlaw and in this place to save our NHS, but there are a few local politicians who seem to think that they are cleverer than the rest of the world. Well, their ignorance is no excuse, and my message to each and every one of them is: “Will you hold your head up high and proud by joining us in fighting these appalling changes and this appalling plan?”

This month and this year, these children have been given a third-class ticket. My constituents and I demand that the children are given a first-class ticket and an equal chance to all other children in this country. They are being denied that chance. Every child in Bassetlaw will benefit from keeping the children’s ward fully functional and fully operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The kids in Bassetlaw are united, and if the kids are united, they will not be defeated.

11.8 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): I start by paying tribute to the passion with which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) laid his case before us this evening, and I share his welcome to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), who joins him here.

The hon. Gentleman’s remarks are clearly timely, and he started his contribution by laying out his vision for innovative technology to be brought to bear for the people of South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw through the emerging sustainability and transformation plan. He drew on his experience from across the world in his previous life to try to bring innovation to bear, and I will touch on the STP towards the end of my remarks.

The hon. Gentleman spent most of his contribution talking about the more immediate issue of the challenge of maintaining a 24-hour children’s ward in Bassetlaw hospital. He has given us many examples of the impact of the current closure—or the fear of the impact of the closure—on families in his constituency and their children who have had experience in the ward. He did so with considerable empathy and conviction, and I am sure his constituents will be grateful for that.

I wish to start my remarks by setting out the facts as they have been presented to me in preparing for this debate. It is the case that Bassetlaw hospital stopped providing an overnight children’s service today. Children who would have been treated at Bassetlaw overnight will now be treated at the Doncaster royal infirmary or Sheffield children’s hospital. The closure is being undertaken by the trust on safety grounds, as there are workforce shortages for both paediatric medical and nursing staff; despite attempts to fill the gaps with locum staff. This is a patient safety issue; the current situation does not offer a safe and sustainable service, which the hon. Gentleman would expect for his constituents. That is the fundamental premise on which this decision has been taken. The replacement service will be monitored to ensure it is safe and effective prior to any decision in October about the long-term future of the service.

In December 2016, the trust identified an emerging issue with safely staffing children’s nursing, as there were gaps of six whole-time-equivalent registered children’s nurses. The trust has attempted to source children’s nurses through locum agencies but has been unsuccessful. Additionally, there is currently a three-person gap on the junior doctor rotation at the trust. I am advised that the trust has undertaken an overseas recruitment drive for medical staffing through an agency, but this has also, unfortunately, not been successful.

The situation with the workforce and the unpredictability of the locum doctor cover has resulted in the ward being temporarily closed at night to new admissions on many occasions in recent months, but children admitted
earlier in the day who are stable have remained on the ward overnight. To put this into context, between 1 November and last Friday the trust had transferred 23 children out of the ward, averaging two per week. The total number of children remaining in the ward overnight from 1 September was 452, an average of three per night. I want to assure the hon. Gentleman that the trust appreciates that some children are admitted to the ward regularly—he gave us such examples from constituents’ emails—but due to the nature of their illness it is impossible to predict when this will be. The trust is contacting regular users of the children’s ward individually to discuss their particular care needs and how these can be best delivered under the new system. The trust will continue to provide a seven-day “hot clinic” service for ill children who need to be seen quickly for clinical diagnosis but are unlikely to need an admission for assessment. I understand that this clinic will also invite children discharged from the assessment unit on the previous day for a consultant review, if clinically necessary. This will offer parents confidence about their child’s progress if they have been in the assessment unit the day before.

The service that has become operational as of today is a consultant-led paediatric assessment unit, providing services seven days a week. The intention is that this will run from 8 am to 10 pm, with a cut-off time for the last admitted child for assessment of 8 pm each day. At the moment, the cut-off time for assessment is 7 pm, and that will move to 8 pm following a review after the new model has been operational for two months. As ever, the paramount consideration is the safety of the children.

Children admitted during the day who have been assessed by a consultant as “acutely unwell” will be rapidly transferred to a centre such as the Doncaster royal infirmary or Sheffield’s children’s hospital. I understand that the new model of care for the trust is consistent with Royal College of Paediatric and Child Health guidance, and represents the latest and safest national guidance.

The hon. Gentleman referred to long waits for non-urgent patient transport, and I can provide some reassurance on that. The trust and the CCG have, from today, jointly commissioned a dedicated urgent transport facility to be available from 4 o’clock in the afternoon to 2 o’clock in the morning, seven days a week, specifically to cater for any necessary children’s transfers. The trust is committed to providing the highest-quality care for children, as recently demonstrated when it invested around £250,000 to build the assessment unit and new children’s out-patient area.

We should remember that the decisions on how to provide safe care for children, which come into force today, are a matter for the local NHS. It is right for these issues to be addressed at a local level, where the local healthcare needs and demands are thoroughly understood and considered. The local NHS makes decisions to ensure the safety and welfare of patients. Although the decision may cause upset and disruption for patients and families, it is for the local NHS to ensure that the services provided are of the highest quality possible and are safe and sustainable. Above all, parents with sick children need to have confidence that their child will be treated at the safest level and by the most appropriately qualified staff. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is paramount.

Nottinghamshire County Council’s scrutiny committee has been informed of the service changes, and I understand that no decision was made to refer the changes to the Secretary of State.

**John Mann:** Part of the weakness of the structure is that not a single person from Bassetlaw sits on Nottinghamshire County Council’s scrutiny panel. Not a single person from Bassetlaw has been consulted, including none of the staff who work at the trust. Is it not time that the people of Bassetlaw, including the staff, were listened to? At my public meetings on Saturday, there will be an opportunity for the trust to come along and hear precisely what parents, staff and others have to say.

**Mr Dunne:** I understand that the hon. Gentleman has already held a meeting for the public to discuss this matter. I am also aware that, as would be expected, he has been in touch with the trust and the CCG to make his representations directly. I am sure that if he has not yet had the opportunity to discuss this matter with the scrutiny committee at the local authority, he will have every opportunity to do so.

The South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw sustainability and transformation plan covers an area that has funding in the current year of £2.7 billion. Under the current plans, funding will rise over the remainder of this Parliament by £400 million to 2021—a cash increase of just under 14%. The plan is one of 44 STPs that are being developed by local NHS leaders and local authorities, with providers, commissioners and other health and care services coming together to propose how, at local level, they can improve the way that health and care is planned and delivered in a more person-centred and co-ordinated way. That is the ambition, and one that I think the hon. Gentleman shared in his hope that the STP will generate an NHS fit for the future.

For all STPs, there will be no changes to the services that people currently receive without local engagement. If plans propose service changes, formal consultation will follow in due course, in line with legislative requirements and procedures. The Government are clear that all service changes should be based on clear evidence that they will deliver better outcomes for patients. Any changes proposed should meet four tests: they should have support from GP commissioners; they should be based on clinical evidence; they should demonstrate public and patient engagement; and they should consider patient choice. I am also aware of a consultation that is currently under way on children’s surgery and anaesthesia services in South Yorkshire, Mid Yorkshire, Bassetlaw and North Derbyshire.

I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the changes happening in the children’s ward at Bassetlaw hospital are unrelated to the STP or to the current consultation on changes to children’s surgery and anaesthetic services, which are not currently conducted at Bassetlaw. The decision was taken as a result of insufficient staffing to maintain patient safety.

In conclusion, I fully appreciate the concerns that the hon. Gentleman expresses on behalf of his constituents, particularly the families of the young children who have
been used to the service being provided 24 hours a day in Bassetlaw. I encourage him and his constituents—he has told us he is doing this—to maintain a proper, open dialogue over the coming weeks and months with Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and the Bassetlaw clinical commissioning group to ensure that there continues to be a safe and sustainable service for the children of Bassetlaw. That service should be provided in the hospital during the day and, for those who are stable, overnight. However, children who have an urgent problem that needs attention overnight must go somewhere safe for that service.

Question put and agreed to.

11.21 pm

House adjourned.
House of Commons

Tuesday 31 January 2017

The House met at half-past Eleven o’clock

PRAYERS

[MR Speaker in the Chair]

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts: Policing and Crime Act 2017 Wales Act 2017.

Oral Answers to Questions

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Science Funding

1. Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): If he will make it his policy to allocate 3% of GDP on science funding.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The first section of our Green Paper on industrial strategy sets out our ambition to make Britain the best nation in the world for scientists, innovators and technical inventors. In support of this, we have announced an increase of £4.7 billion in public research and development funds, which is the biggest increase in support of science for 40 years.

Lilian Greenwood: In evidence to the Education Committee last week, Professor Arthur, the president of University College London, spoke not only of the huge sums flowing into UK research from Europe—through Horizon 2020 and the European Research Council, for example—but of the need for a system to replace the then Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, and he will see in the Green Paper that we are candid about the need to maintain the pace. Indeed, we have increased public investment. He was right to mention the US, but actually the proportion of public to business investment is higher in this country than in Germany, Japan, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and other countries besides. We are building on strength, but we want to take things further, and I look forward to his contribution to the consultation.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): There is great concern about the future of fusion research after Britain pulls out of the EU and Euratom. Will the Secretary of State reassure us that he will continue to support and fully fund the Joint European Torus project and other joint research projects such as ITER—the international thermonuclear experimental reactor—after Britain leaves the EU?

Greg Clark: The collaboration between scientists and those in the nuclear sector is one of the important aspects of the continued co-operation that we want and intend to see continue.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Green Paper makes much of re-announcing the welcome increase in science spending which, following cuts of up to 50% over the last seven years, has finally returned it to the levels under the last Labour Government. Research and development funding, however, remains barely half the recommended 3% target that Labour has committed to. Does the Secretary of State agree that, given the impact of Brexit on UK science, the lack of any overarching vision and the focus on picking sector winners, rather than mobilising the whole—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady—[Interruption.] Order. I am sorry, but we have a lot to get through. The Front Benchers, on both sides, must be much more self-disciplined. It is not fair on Back Benchers.
Greg Clark: The hon. Lady does not have it right. She should know—the science sector has welcomed this fact—that we protected funding for science during all the difficult years in which we were recovering from the financial situation that Labour left us. There was a huge welcome for the £2 billion increase, which is the biggest since 1979. In other words, that is bigger than what any Labour Government ever offered.

Aerospace

2. Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the international competitiveness of the UK aerospace.

5. Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the international competitiveness of the UK aerospace.

6. Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the aerospace industry’s contribution to economic growth across the UK.

11. Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the international competitiveness of the UK aerospace.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): The UK has the second largest aerospace industry worldwide, with strengths in some of the most technologically advanced parts of aircraft—wings, engines and advanced systems. The sector has annual turnover of around £30 billion and exports of some £25 billion a year.

Fiona Bruce: Leading aerospace part designer and manufacturer Senior Aerospace Bird Bellows in my constituency speaks positively of the support from the Government’s Sharing in Growth scheme, which it says will be key in helping the company to realise its ambitious growth strategy. Will the Minister join me in congratulating the company on its plans and consider visiting its factory in Congleton to learn more?

Jesse Norman: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in congratulating the company on its plans and consider visiting its factory in Congleton to learn more.

Kelly Tolhurst: Rochester and Strood has a proud aerospace history, having had the Short Brothers iconic flying boats. It is now home to Aeromet, an important SME that is part of the supply chain for Airbus. Will my hon. Friend outline how his Department will ensure that the UK aerospace supply chain will continue to have unhindered access to major opportunities in our manufacturing industries?

Jesse Norman: As my hon. Friend will know, the aerospace growth partnership has been a great success, with the Government working closely with industry. As part of that, the Government made a joint funding commitment with the industry for nearly £4 billion of aerospace research between 2013 and 2026, so I think that the future is relatively well funded.

Drew Hendry: What guarantees will the Minister give to ADS, the group representing the UK aerospace industry, which states that it must have “Access to vital space programmes initiated by the European Space Agency, but funded by specific EU programmes”?

Jesse Norman: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already talked about the importance of our satellite programmes in this country. The European Space Agency sits outside the EU structure, so it will be handled separately from EU discussions.

Mr Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend see the signing of the contract in Turkey last week by the United Kingdom and Turkey on the new Turkish fighter jet as an endorsement of the skills and expertise of BAE Systems in this country, and does he foresee future deals with other countries?

Jesse Norman: I think that everyone concerned with the aerospace sector will welcome that transaction. It shows how BAE continues to be a global leader in this sector, and we must hope that it goes on to do further such work around the world.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): In the last two years, Glasgow has built more satellites than any other city in Europe, with 100 private and public sector organisations such as Clyde Space contributing more than £130 million to the Scottish economy. This is much credited to Scotland’s long-standing strength in engineering, science and technology. As we face the prospect of a hard Tory Brexit, will the Minister make a commitment here and now that Scotland’s aerospace sector will be protected and that there will be no detriment to this vital sector and its many jobs?

Jesse Norman: The success of Scotland has been part of a wider UK success. I absolutely recognise the point that the hon. Lady mentions. I was in Glasgow only last week, talking to high-tech companies at Glasgow University, and I can absolutely vouch for their quality.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): In my former career as an aerospace engineer—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] They have not heard the question yet, Mr Speaker. In that former career, I saw several examples of our aerospace competitiveness being diminished by the political enforcement of collaboration in engineering across Europe. Will the Minister ensure that future collaboration across Europe on aerospace happens where that is productive, not where it suits geopolitical objectives?

Jesse Norman: I admire the subtle and unobtrusive way in which my hon. Friend smuggled his personal experience into that question. I assure him that we will continue to take a thoroughly co-operative approach with European colleagues.

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): The recent “Steel 2020” report noted that steel is a key foundation industry for the UK that underpins our aerospace and automotive sectors, as well as many others. However, in the Government’s 130-page industrial strategy Green Paper, steel is mentioned just once. Can the Minister explain why he is neglecting this important industry?
Jesse Norman: I am surprised that the hon. Lady says that because the Government have had very productive discussions with the steel industry.

Self-employment

3. James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the self-employed. [908477]

4. Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the self-employed. [908478]

12. Victoria Borwick (Kensington) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the self-employed. [908489]

17. Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the self-employed. [908495]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James): The gov.uk website and the business support helpline provide information on starting and running a business. Growth hubs also provide access to local and national support. Some 4.8 million people are currently self-employed.

James Cleverly: When I started a business, I found that one of the most intimidating elements was employing my first member of staff. What more can the Government do to encourage and support the self-employed to grow their company and become employers in their own right?

Margot James: We will support entrepreneurs across the UK to ensure that they can access finance and wider support so that they can grow. British Business Bank programmes are already supporting £3.2 billion of finance to more than 51,000 smaller businesses, including start-up loans to 39 entrepreneurs in my hon. Friend’s Braintree constituency.

Robert Courts: This matter is particularly close to my heart, given that I was self-employed until a few months ago. Of course, there are many self-employed businesses in rural areas of West Oxfordshire. Can the Minister assure us that the Government will continue to make it easier to start and grow a business by deregulating, creating an attractive tax environment, and helping businesses to attract and seek the finance that they need?

Margot James: We continue to work hard to make the UK a great place to start and grow a business. According to OECD statistics, we are internationally the third best place to start a businesses, but we are 13th when it comes to the best place to grow a business, which is where my focus as small business Minister is going to lie. I very much welcome the support of my hon. Friend.

Victoria Borwick: North Kensington, an area that the Minister knows, has several fantastic initiatives through which new start-ups have access to shared space. Are there any plans to reduce business rates and provide relief for small companies using shared space initiatives?

Margot James: The Treasury has no plans specifically for shared work spaces, but at the last Budget, the Chancellor announced £6.7 billion of cuts to benefit all business rate payers. They include permanently doubling small business rate relief and increasing the thresholds from 2017.

Dr Caroline Johnson: Will my hon. Friend tell us how the industrial strategy will support disabled people who want to start and grow their own businesses?

Margot James: The disabled employment programme is an important part of our work in labour markets, and it is backed by many top retailers. We will continue to press this issue and work with the Department for Work and Pensions for greater access to work for people with disabilities.

Dame Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): In order to grow the businesses of the self-employed, they need access to good-quality training. When I met the Doncaster YMCA and its apprentices last week, an issue was raised about clarity regarding funding during the transitional arrangements for the Skills Funding Agency going to the Department for Education. Will the Minister take an urgent look at this?

Margot James: I thank the right hon. Lady for bringing this to our attention. A new approach to improving access to skills and apprenticeships is a fundamental part of our new industrial strategy. I will raise the matter that the right hon. Lady mentions with the Secretary of State for Education.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Many self-employed people recruit apprentices and others who are seeking employment. Given that the report recently produced by the Institute for Fiscal Studies cast doubt on the effectiveness of apprentices, the training scheme and the apprenticeship levy, what are the Government going to do about this?

Margot James: Last week the Government launched the new industrial strategy, and the new academies programme for improving skills and access to apprenticeships is working with the existing apprenticeship programme to improve both the quality and number of apprentices.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Given that further education colleges have an important role in providing skills and training and help many people to become self-employed workers, does it make sense to cut their budgets?

Margot James: Further education colleges remain an important part of our strategy to improve skills and access to apprenticeships, but they are not the only route to apprenticeships. The apprenticeship levy will increase funding for overall access to skills for our young people.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Compulsory quarterly digital tax updates cause real concern to self-employed people and small businesses. Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs says that support is available. Will the Minister tell us what support is available to self-employed businesses and how much money is set aside for that support?
Margot James: I am sorry; I did not follow all the hon. Gentleman’s question. However, I know that the Treasury is looking into the fairness of taxation as between self-employed people and the rest of the workforce. I will read the hon. Gentleman’s question in Hansard and write to him accordingly.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): The ranks of self-employed people are being expanded by an increase in independent working. Will my hon. Friend ensure that labour market regulations are updated so that employee rights are maintained?

Margot James: I very much agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend’s question. The Prime Minister has appointed Matthew Taylor to undertake a review of employment practices in the modern economy to ensure that while we embrace new technologies, we also protect workers concerned and a rip-off of HMRC?

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): What are the Government doing about the scourge of bogus self-employment, which too often is a rip-off of the workers concerned and a rip-off of HMRC?

Margot James: The Taylor review will also look into that very important issue. A worker’s contract with his or her employer is the fundamental basis on which he or she is judged to be self-employed or an employee, and that distinction will be closely scrutinised by Matthew Taylor.

SMEs: Kent and Medway

7. Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support the growth in the number of SMEs in Kent and Medway.

Margot James: First, I can reassure the hon. Lady that Kent and Medway is ably championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), who asked the original question, but apropos of her specific point, we are in the process of appointing a small business commissioner who would specialise.

Rehman Chishti: In view of the Government’s commitment to investment in infrastructure, which will assist businesses in Kent and Medway, will the Minister confirm their commitment to the Lower Thames crossing, along with extra investment for Kent roads, which will provide connectivity for local businesses?

Margot James: The Department for Transport will make an announcement, but my hon. Friend should be reassured that Kent County Council and the relevant business organisations are working closely with my Department to ensure that there are extensive improvements in the transport infrastructure in his constituency and the wider county.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential contribution of power generated by tidal lagoons to UK energy provision.

Mr Speaker: I trust that the question will not be on the matter of Linlithgow, but will focus purely on Kent and Medway, in which I am sure the hon. Lady keenly specialises.

Hannah Bardell: You can be assured of that, Mr Speaker. The SMEs in Kent and Medway need someone in government to fight their corner. In July 2015, they were promised a small business commissioner who would focus particularly on late payments. The Federation of Small Businesses and others have raised concerns about the lack of power that the commissioner will have, and the fact that 18 months after the position was created, there is no sign of a commissioner. Will the Minister tell SMEs in Kent and Medway, for which I have the greatest regard, and others throughout the country when the commissioner will be appointed, and whether he or she will have proper powers to ensure that companies that do not pay are taken to task?

Margot James: First, I can reassure the hon. Lady that Kent and Medway is ably championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), who asked the original question, but apropos of her specific point, we are in the process of appointing a small business commissioner at the moment; he will be in post by the summer and able to take complaints on the important issue of prompt payment in the autumn of this year.

Tidal Energy

8. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential contribution of power generated by tidal lagoons to UK energy provision.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): The Hendry review published its report earlier this month. The Government are considering its recommendations and the issues that would arise from a broader lagoon programme, including the potential contribution of power generated by tidal lagoons. The Government will publish their response to the Hendry review in due course.

Tim Loughton: As an MP with a coastal constituency, I am a big fan of tidal power, and following the Hendry review it has been estimated that building some 10 tidal lagoon power stations by 2030 could generate 10% of our electricity requirements. So when considering the economics of the Swansea Bay scheme, will the Minister take into account the wider benefits for British manufacturing and technology of becoming a world leader in this clean technology?

Jesse Norman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to recognise that the question must be considered in the round and not merely on the merits or no of the Swansea Bay scheme. It is the Government’s job to consider the advantages and disadvantages of tidal lagoons as a whole and to take a decision that includes not merely the financial elements, but also environmental elements, the capacity to generate power as part of a wider energy mix and ancillary elements.
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister surely knows that all kinds of alternative energy, including tidal power, need good recruits; they need trainees and, indeed, apprentices. Is he not hanging his head in shame this morning because of the report of the highly respected Institute for Fiscal Studies which says that this Government’s apprenticeship programme is a disaster and should be ripped up and started again? When is he going to get real?

Mr Speaker: But purely in relation to tidal lagoons; we are not talking about apprenticeships more widely or seeking to shoehorn a personal interest into a question to which it does not ordinarily apply. But the Minister is a philosopher and dextrous to a fault, so I am sure he will cope.

Jesse Norman: Heaven forfend, Mr Speaker, that I should entertain so unworthy a suspicion as to think the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) might have smuggled some entirely unrelated question into a question on tidal lagoons. May I simply reassure him that skills remain at the centre of the Government’s concerns, and that is why they feature so prominently in the industrial strategy?

Mr Speaker: Marvellous.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): The Minister is quite right to say that he will analyse this in the round, because while I think many of us will recognise the economic advantages, particularly over a long period such as 100 to 150 years, the environmental impact will be considerable. Can he perhaps amplify what sort of consideration will he give to ensuring that the energy generated by tidal lagoons to UK energy provision. My understanding is that a limited deployment of tidal lagoons to the Severn estuary alone would contribute about 8% or more of UK electricity demand. Can the Minister tell me if there is any other technology that can provide that sort of power in one location—as a clue, perhaps I can suggest to him that Hinkley C running full tilt without any outages is estimated to contribute about 7% to UK energy requirements?

Jesse Norman: I dare to suggest that the hon. Gentleman is misinformed. It is not quite clear what he thinks of as the lagoons in the scheme he describes, but Hinkley Point will be a bigger generator than, certainly, the first round of lagoons, as well as being a higher load and more reliable.

9. Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): What progress his Department is making on implementing the recommendations of the Hendry review on tidal energy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): The issues considered by the Hendry review are complex, and the Government will be demanding a period of time to assess the recommendations and determine what decision is in the best interests of UK energy consumers. I have already said that we will not be dragging our heels on this, and we will not do so.

Stephen Doughty: There is huge potential for tidal energy not only in the Swansea scheme but along the south Wales coast and the Severn estuary and along the north Wales coast. However, I am hearing worrying things about the Department dragging its heels on this. Will the Minister assure me that there will be strong ministerial leadership to take the recommendations forward and to get on with the Swansea scheme and others?

Jesse Norman: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman would say that, given that it was the Department’s expectation that the report might be published before Christmas and that it was in fact published only two or three weeks ago. There is no suggestion that the Department is dragging its heels, and nor will we do so, but we will, in the public interest, give the report proper, thorough consideration on value-for-money and other grounds.

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): In a previous answer, the Minister referred to advantages and disadvantages. Does he agree that the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon would not only meet energy needs but provide huge levels of investment in jobs in my constituency; that is absolutely right. The wider implications are being considered by the Government, and I remind him that the Hendry review asked for the issues to be considered specifically in the context of power generation, so those things go alongside the wider consideration we are giving to the report.

Jesse Norman: I salute my colleague’s proper concern for support and investment in his constituency; that is absolutely right. The wider implications are being considered by the Government, and I remind him that the Hendry review asked for the issues to be considered specifically in the context of power generation, so those things go alongside the wider consideration we are giving to the report.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): The question was about the potential contribution of power generated by tidal lagoons to UK energy provision. My understanding is that a limited deployment of tidal lagoons in the Severn estuary alone would contribute about 8% or more of UK electricity demand. Can the Minister tell me if there is any other technology that

being produced in Strangford Lough can be utilised for the benefit of the whole of Northern Ireland?

Jesse Norman: As I have indicated in a separate debate with the hon. Gentleman, that is a different, although related, technology. It was funded in part by the Government and has produced interesting results. This is a matter for close consideration by officials and we will continue to reflect on the matter. If he wishes to write to me further, I would be delighted to take a letter.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): One of the core objectives of the draft industrial strategy is to rebalance the UK economy, with engineering, construction and manufacturing making a larger contribution to economic growth. Does the Minister agree that if we are to achieve that objective, we will need to invest in major infrastructure projects such as the tidal lagoon?

Jesse Norman: I absolutely share my right hon. Friend’s view that major infrastructure investment is an important part, although only a part, of the wider overall investment that can be made in this country as part of the industrial strategy. He is right to suggest that those wider considerations must be balanced by a tempered assessment of value for money, and that is what we will be giving them.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): With all due respect to the Minister, may I tell him that his Department simply not dragging its heels is not good enough? The Hendry report recommends that Ministers “secure the pathfinder project as swiftly as possible”. I can promise that he will have the full support of the Members on this side of the House for doing that, although I am unsure that he would have the same support from those behind him. Will he therefore press the Chancellor for an agreement on the Swansea tidal lagoon, to be announced in the March Budget?

Jesse Norman: I admire the hon. Gentleman’s dexterity in turning three weeks into foot-dragging. Given his rabbinical scrutiny of the Hendry review, I shall simply remind him that it specifically asks the Government to “secure the pathfinder project as swiftly as possible”. I can promise that he will have the full support of the Members on this side of the House for doing that, although I am unsure that he would have the same support from those behind him. Will he therefore press the Chancellor for an agreement on the Swansea tidal lagoon, to be announced in the March Budget?

Leaving the EU: Research and Development (Scotland)

10. Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): What steps is he taking to safeguard investment in research and development in Scotland as a result of the UK’s decision to leave the EU.

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson): As the Secretary of State has already said, the Government are supporting research and development throughout the UK. We protected the resource budget at the 2015 spending review and committed an extra £2 billion in the most recent autumn statement—the largest increase in science funding since 1979.

Richard Arkless: A hard Brexit will threaten Scotland’s world-class university sector, and the price of the research development investment that we are discussing was a staggering £8.8 billion from 2007-2013. What representations are this Department making to the Treasury and the Brexit Secretary to protect that vital investment?

Joseph Johnson: Scotland is a powerhouse for academic research, and we want to play to one of this country’s great strengths, so we welcome the agreement to continue to collaborate with our European partners on major science and technology programmes in years to come. Britain will remain at the forefront of collective endeavours to improve and better understand the world in which we live.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The most important investment that we must safeguard is the people who work in science and research. What is the Minister doing to ensure that EU researchers in Scotland are sure of their place as we go through the Brexit process?

Joseph Johnson: The hon. Lady makes an important point. As the Prime Minister made clear in her speech the week before last, we greatly value the contribution that EU nationals make in our institutions. The Government have been exceptionally clear that during the negotiations we want to protect the status of EU nationals already living here. The only circumstances in which that would not be possible are if British citizens’ rights in other EU member states were not protected in return.

Life Sciences

13. Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): What financial support his Department is providing to the life sciences sector.

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson): We invest £2 billion a year in health life sciences research through our research councils and the National Institute for Health Research. Through funding for the biomedical catalyst, we are helping businesses to bring that research to market. We announced in the new industrial strategy that Sir John Bell will be leading work on a strategy to make the UK the best place in the world to invest in life sciences.

Kit Malthouse: Alongside that welcome support, private investment will be critical to the success of the industry. Will the Minister outline what suggestions he might make in his Budget submission to the Chancellor to stimulate such investment?

Joseph Johnson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Access to finance is key to a dynamic life sciences sector in the UK. In November, the Prime Minister announced a review of patient capital to identify barriers to access to long-term finance for growing firms, looking at all aspects of the financial system. We look forward to the review’s recommendations ahead of the autumn statement.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): The industrial strategy will have a major impact on speeding up Genomics England’s ability to sequence the genome. Will my hon. Friend confirm that he is working with the Department of Health to ensure that the Government’s investment will be spent effectively to encourage greater productivity?
Joseph Johnson: The industrial strategy Green Paper highlights work on a new strategy for life sciences, bringing together the health system, industry and academia and potentially leading to an early sector deal. The accelerated access review sets out a vision of the NHS embracing innovation, and the Government will respond in due course.

Local Economic Growth

14. Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps is he taking to encourage businesses to support local economic growth. [908492]

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): One of our most important reforms has been to devolve powers and resources to local areas through city deals, devolution deals and reforms has been to devolve power and resources to local government to be fully funded by business rates from 2020, all local councils will have to get far closer to their local businesses in order for local economies to function as best they can?

Lucy Powell: I welcomed most of the announcements in the industrial strategy last week, but the Secretary of State will welcome last week's announcement that half a billion pounds was devolved to northern local enterprise partnerships, including £130 million to Greater Manchester.

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that the needs of different places should be reflected in decisions that are made locally. Along with the centrality of skills and training, that is a big theme of the industrial strategy consultation, to which I hope she will respond. I look forward to her contribution.

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Business investment in science and technology is key to local economic growth and Britain's leadership of the fourth industrial revolution. Will the Secretary of State continue supporting LEPs to fund these key sectors and technologies?

Greg Clark: I will indeed. One of the big opportunities is to make sure that the excellence we have in science and research is married with local strengths so that we can have the products of that research, in manufacturing for example, as well as the discoveries themselves.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Northern Ireland has only one very small enterprise zone, which is up in Coleraine and has not really progressed. Can the Secretary of State give any support or assistance to the Northern Ireland Executive, when they are up and running again, for more enterprise zones within the Province?

Greg Clark: I have, as the hon. Gentleman would expect, conversations with Simon Hamilton, the Minister responsible in Northern Ireland. My colleagues and I are very happy to consider his suggestions and proposals when we meet him.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I declare an interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council. The borough of Kettering has had one of the fastest rates of business rate growth in the whole country in the last 10 years. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with local government to be fully funded by business rates from 2020, all local councils will have to get far closer to their local businesses in order for local economies to function as best they can?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and, as a councillor, he knows how important it is that that very direct connection is made. It is one of the measures going through the House that I was proud to have proposed when I was Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and it is something for which local government has long campaigned. I am delighted that it was this Conservative Government who were able to deliver it.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Bank lending is essential for local business success, and yesterday's HBOS convictions are a stark reminder of the way that smaller businesses were treated by some banks during the financial crisis. Does the Secretary of State accept that lending has fallen over the last year? What is he doing to give confidence in the banks, unlock support and increase lending?

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw attention to the misbehaviour of the banks, especially with regard to small businesses, when they were inadequately supervised as a result of the destruction of the supervisory regime under the previous Labour Government. That has now been put on a much sounder footing. He will know that the lending opportunities for small businesses have been transformed, but the industrial strategy Green Paper is very clear that we want to make further opportunities available, particularly outside London and the south-east.

Offshore Energy: Humber

15. Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): What assessment has he made of the effect of the offshore energy sector on the Humber region. [908493]

The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd): The UK is the world's largest market for offshore wind, and the Humber energy estuary is, in my hon. Friend's own words, "ideally positioned" to serve that sector. The Secretary of State and I saw that when we visited the new £310 million Siemens turbine blade factory, which has created more than 1,000 very valuable new jobs in the area.

Martin Vickers: This afternoon the Humber local enterprise partnership and Humber MPs are staging a showcase event to highlight the assets of the energy estuary. Can the Minister assure business leaders that the Government will continue to support the offshore centre, which is based in northern Lincolnshire, and the wider Humber region? Will he or one of his colleagues find time to visit the event this afternoon?

Mr Hurd: Yes to the event, and yes to the assurance that my hon. Friend seeks about continued support. On top of the growth deal, the city deal and the enterprise zone programme, he will be well aware of the very significant Government commitment to future contract
for difference auctions worth £730 million for less mature renewable technologies, including offshore wind. I hope he welcomes that.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What steps are the Government taking to ensure the highest possible UK content in the steel used to build the energy infrastructure in the Humber?

Mr Hurd: That is an extremely important point, and it is part of our calculation of the return on the investment made by the British taxpayer. Good progress is being made, and analysis shows that aggregated lifetime UK content in operating windfarms is 43%, against a track target of around 50%, and the proportion is higher for the value of operations and maintenance contracts, which run at about 70% of value at the moment. This will be a key area of our focus as we go forward with the industrial strategy.

Access to Finance

16. Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on improving access to finance for businesses.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had discussions with the Chancellor on building the Government's industrial strategy, which includes ensuring that businesses can access the finance they need. We already help businesses through the business finance and support finder on go.gov.uk, and we recently launched the finance platforms service, which offers small and medium-sized enterprises that have had finance rejected by the large banks the option of a referral to alternative finance providers.

Chris Davies: With many new online alternative finance companies springing up across the UK, what is my hon. Friend doing, first, to ensure that our small and medium-sized enterprises know about these alternative ways of accessing finance, and, secondly, to give them the confidence to borrow from such organisations?

Margot James: The British Business Bank has created the business finance guide, which is widely distributed and offers comprehensive information about the financing options available to businesses, including alternative sources of finance. The Financial Conduct Authority regulates peer-to-peer lending platforms and is currently reviewing its regulatory regime to ensure that it is robust and up to date.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of bank closures in town centres on the availability of business finance, to ensure that those such as my local one in Holywell, which is potentially losing three banks this year, will still have access to business finance and will still be positive town centres?

Margot James: The impact of bank closures is, to some extent, ameliorated by the Post Office’s announcement a few weeks ago that it will be enabling both personal and SME banking customers to have a massive increase in face-to-face banking services across the country.

Mr Speaker: I call Mike Freer. He is not here. We will take the last question on the condition that we have a reasonably short, single sentence supplementary, as I want to move on to the main business promptly today. If it is a long question, we will not bother.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote medical research.

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson): This year the Medical Research Council will spend £655 million on world-class research. Our commitment to the future of the UK as a world leader in biomedical research is unwavering. For example, in November, Her Majesty the Queen opened the Francis Crick Institute, and we will continue to invest in this kind of excellence throughout this Parliament.

Mrs Gillan: Autism is the most expensive medical condition in the UK, costing the economy more than £32 billion a year, according to the London School of Economics, yet we spend hardly anything on autism research compared with what we spend on research into cancer, heart disease and stroke, which cost the economy less. What can the Minister do to encourage more spending on autism research, which is so vital to people in this country?

Joseph Johnson: Between 2010-11 and 2014-15, the MRC spent £13.3 million on autism research, and it always welcomes high-quality applications for support on any aspect of human health. Such applications are subject to peer review and are judged in open competition. The Department of Health, through the National Institute for Health Research, also funds research in this area, and the MRC’s centre for neurodevelopmental disorders at King’s College London opened recently, in November.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) can always have her question framed and put up on the wall in a suitable part of her home, of her own choosing.

Topical Questions

T1. David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): Since our last questions, with the Prime Minister my ministerial team and I have launched our industrial strategy Green Paper, part of a cross-Government plan to build an economy that works for everyone. Efforts to secure global investment in British enterprise and innovation continue to meet with success, with the most recent example being the £115 million Novo Nordisk investment in Oxford, which is a further vote of confidence in Britain as a place to do both
business and science. Today we launch the next energy capacity market auction. Last month, I signed a memorandum of co-operation with the Government of Japan on civil nuclear activities, and on Thursday I announced that we have secured a second mission to space for Major Tim Peake.

David Morris: As always, my right hon. Friend has been extraordinarily busy, but may I ask my extraordinarily busy right hon. Friend to turn his attention to Morecambe and Lunesdale, as we now have a new link road going straight to the Heysham port and we would like an enterprise zone? Will he help me to get an enterprise zone?

Greg Clark: I am never too busy for Morecambe and Lunesdale, and I know what a passionate campaigner my hon. Friend has been for the business prospects in his area. If I may, I will talk to the Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse, who has responsibility for enterprise zones—I am sure he will be happy to have a meeting with my hon. Friend.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): The Secretary of State’s plan to impose arbitrary cuts on the pensions of 16,000 nuclear energy workers, 7,000 of them in Copeland, threatens industrial relations in a key sector. I urge him to take the opportunity, at this week’s meeting with trade unions, to end his attack on workers who power our country and abandon the raid on their pensions before the industry is plunged into chaos.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): I met the unions last week, and we had some constructive, although undoubtedly robust, conversations. The discussion continues and we hope it will end constructively.

T2. [908464] Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): European Commission state aid approval for the steel industry is still not in place. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that compensation under the energy industrial package will be provided by the UK Government until the exemption is finally introduced?

Greg Clark: As my hon. Friend would expect, my colleagues meet representatives of all kinds of businesses, both in the UK and those looking to invest here. We are clear, as the Prime Minister has been, that we intend to pursue our negotiations to secure the best possible access to the single market so that the manifest advantages of the UK continue to be available to companies, here, now and in future.

T4. [908464] Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): What discussions has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had with representatives of industry, particularly the steel industry, about the UK’s leaving the European Union?

Greg Clark: Of course it will continue. We are in discussions about the mechanics of that, as part of a broader conversation that the Secretary of State and I are having with senior management of the steel industry and trade unions about securing a sustainable future for the industry.

T7. [908469] Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): The Government’s recent industrial strategy Green Paper is to be warmly welcomed. I have spoken to the vice-chancellor of Loughborough University, and we see lots of opportunities for the Loughborough constituency, the university, the college and local industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has visited Loughborough; perhaps I can tempt him to come again to hear about those opportunities, or could we meet in London?

Greg Clark: I commend Loughborough University and its vice-chancellor, Robert Allison. It is a fantastic example of an excellent academic institution that makes a big impact locally. I am always happy to meet my right hon. Friend and the leadership of that fine university.

T3. [908465] Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): The removal of the renewables obligation and the decimation of the feed-in tariff have had a huge negative impact on my constituency, where renewables are the one tangible business area we have that can grow and that offers highly paid jobs. One year on from those draconian measures, what reassessment has been made of the policy’s effectiveness?

Mr Hurd: This country and this Government are on track to invest in excess of £8 billion a year by 2020 in continuing the transition to a clean energy system. We are talking about a low-carbon economy that is generating, at the last count, at least 450,000 jobs. As I made clear in an earlier announcement, there are new commitments to contract for difference auctions for less mature renewable technologies, so the Government’s commitment to clean energy is not in doubt.

T8. [908470] Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): May I again welcome the first two pillars of the proposed industrial strategy: investment in science and developing skills? Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how the work of the Science and Technology Committee can act as a road map in delivering the Government’s aims?

Greg Clark: I very much hope that my hon. Friend’s Committee will engage with the consultation. If we are to have a strategy that endures, it is important that it takes into account the views of all those on both sides of the House with an interest in securing our economic prosperity and future scientific excellence.

T5. [908467] Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is estimated that an ambitious approach to the circular economy could create half a million new jobs. Cities such as Bristol would be very well placed to take advantage of that. It is disappointing that there is little mention of resource efficiency, low-carbon growth and sustainability in the industrial strategy. Can the Government reassure me that they are taking this seriously?

Mr Hurd: Yes I can, and I take a strong personal interest in those matters. The hon. Lady says they are not mentioned in the industrial strategy, but they are. One of the clear pillars of the industrial strategy is a commitment to clean growth, within which are some explicit references to our desire to explore the opportunities attached to higher resource and energy productivity.
Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): It is 100 years since the destruction of Hallsands village following an act of environmental destruction and vandalism that saw the removal of protective shingle from the shoreline. Communities around our entire coast, including in Start Bay, face an even greater threat from climate change. Will the Minister assure me that he will protect us from an act of environmental vandalism—withdrawal from the Paris agreement?

Mr Hurd: As the Prime Minister said in Prime Minister’s questions last week, this country is fully committed to the Paris climate change agreement—as are all the countries that endorsed the Marrakech proclamation—and we hope that all parties will continue to ensure that it is put into practice.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): Since the EU referendum, the depreciation of sterling has boosted British manufacturing and exports, but, as we are leaving the EU, will the Government now start to use public procurement and necessary state aid to support the vital expansion of our industries and the promotion of import substitution?

Greg Clark: We want British business and British industry to compete on the basis that they are price-competitive. There are opportunities that come from being outside some of the bureaucracy, which affects small businesses in particular when it comes to public procurement, and those are opportunities that we will be able to take.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr David Nuttall. I thought that he was interested in this question. Has his appetite diminished? [Interruption.] No? Go on. Get in there, man.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): It had not planned to stand for topical questions, but may I urge my right hon. Friend not to be swayed by the arguments from the Opposition to spend a specific amount of our GDP on research for scientific projects? If the private sector is unwilling to fund those projects, we should ask serious questions about whether the public sector and my hardworking taxpayers should be asked to foot the bill.

Greg Clark: Happily, the private sector—British business—is an enthusiastic and increasing supporter of investment in science and research. Sometimes that is done jointly with important publicly funded institutions such as our universities, and that is one of our strengths as an economy.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): In November, the Secretary of State hauled energy companies into his Department to put pressure on them regarding claims that they were generating excess profits. This morning, at the Select Committee, Which? told us that energy companies are distal when it comes to customer service and prices. Does he agree with that assessment, and will he outline to the House what progress has been made to get a better deal for energy customers since that meeting in November?

Greg Clark: Yes. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. The Competition and Markets Authority report identified a huge detriment that consumers were facing. There has been some limited response from the energy companies. For example, they have deleted some of their more abusive tariffs, but there is further to go, and we will be making a response to the CMA report in the days ahead.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): It has been recently announced that the strategy for the midlands engine for growth will be announced soon. The midlands engine is vital for business in Derby and the midlands, so may I urge the Secretary of State to consider it sooner rather than later?

Greg Clark: The midlands engine is a very important part of the strengthening of the economy, and there is real momentum there. My hon. Friend can look forward to some very important announcements that will be made imminently.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Last week, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James), said that there had clearly been instances of the pubs code being flouted and that Members should bring such things to her attention. I have a case in my own constituency to bring to her attention, which also shows that the adjudicator is not doing his job. May we discuss this matter please?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James): I am very happy to discuss the case in my own constituency with the hon. Gentleman, but the Pubs Code Adjudicator is doing a good job. His line of inquiry has received 435 inquiries to date and 121 referrals for arbitration, but I will discuss the problem with the hon. Gentleman.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The industrial strategy makes a clear commitment that future rounds of infrastructure investment will take into account the balance of spending per head as between different regions. On the basis that there is a 60% imbalance between London and the rest of the country at the moment, what balance would the Secretary of State like to see going ahead?

Greg Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution to the consultation. We are very clear that we need to see infrastructure investment in all parts of the country. It is one reason why we have created institutions such as Transport for the North to be able to take those decisions locally.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Government’s industrial strategy has sector deals for a number of sectors, which is welcome. Given the vital cross-cutting foundational nature of the steel industry, will the Minister now commit to a sector deal for steel?

Greg Clark: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I have already been having discussions with the steel industry with precisely that purpose in mind.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We come now to the ten-minute rule motion. The hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) will be pleased that she has such an interested, large and expectant audience.
Crime (Aggravated Murder of and Violence against Women)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

12.30 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the aggravated murder of, and aggravated domestic violence against, women, who are citizens of the United Kingdom, outside the United Kingdom; to prohibit the use of the term honour killing in official publications; to require the Government to arrange for, and meet from public funds the costs of, the repatriation of the bodies of female citizens of the United Kingdom who are victims of aggravated murder outside the United Kingdom and the provision of assistance to female citizens of the United Kingdom who are victims of aggravated domestic violence outside the United Kingdom in order to enable them to return to the United Kingdom; to provide for the prosecution in the United Kingdom in certain circumstances of citizens of the United Kingdom who commit the aggravated murder of, or threaten or incite domestic violence against, women, who are citizens of the United Kingdom, outside the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

Language matters. The use of the term “honour” to describe a violent criminal act—sometimes committed against a man, but more often against a woman—can be explained only as a means of self-justification for the perpetrator. It diminishes the victim and provides a convenient excuse for what in our society we should accurately and simply call murder, rape, abuse or enslavement. I want us in this House to send a clear message that the excuses end here. Even more than that, the term assumes that violence, in particular against women, is culturally sensitive—a sensitivity that allows the perpetrator to use further coercion to prevent the victim from seeking help and to intimidate the agencies of the state to stop them pursuing and prosecuting these violent crimes. The principles that every victim should be treated equally and with dignity and that our law enforcement agencies should respond to every crime with equal vigour are threatened when a separate set of cultural norms and practices are accepted for some victims of domestic violence.

We have one law in our country—one law that applies to everyone, regardless of their heritage or faith. The Bill builds on the progress already made by the strategies on ending violence against women and girls, tackling female genital mutilation and forced marriage; by coercive control laws; and by the brave work done by our Prime Minister to introduce the Modern Slavery Act 2015. I want to place on the record my special thanks to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary, and their teams, for their continued support and time.

Between 2010 and 2015, 11,000 incidents of crime to which the term “honour” was applied were recorded in the UK. During their constituency duties, Members will have encountered cases in which the police and other agencies, including the Crown Prosecution Service, have been reluctant to tackle domestic violence in minority communities for fear of being accused of racism or of provoking community unrest. Indeed, the CPS has acknowledged that it needs to improve its understanding of and response and support to victims—victims such as Sarbjit. Sarbjit was abused throughout her marriage. She was battered by her husband and treated as a domestic servant. She was terrorised and went to bed not knowing whether she would be alive the next day. She was told that the honour of her family would be at stake if she complained and that the police would just treat her as a number. Sarbjit told me that she did not feel alive, but nor was she dead. When she summoned up the courage, she called Crimestoppers as well as the police. She risked her life in reaching out. But after statements were taken, she was returned home to her abusers because it was just a “cultural misunderstanding”; shockingly, the evidence of her abusers was believed over hers. Sarbjit was reduced to going to a temple, falling to her knees and begging for help from community leaders. It was a desperate act from a desperate woman. She was sent home again and told to think of her family’s honour. She was trapped and, once she had been let down by the authorities she trusted to protect her, she had nowhere to turn.

Fozia’s husband beat her and secured a second wife. Like many domestic violence victims, she was nervous about asking for help. She told me that when she did call the police—three times—she was treated with indifference as the situation was dealt with as a community issue and an honour crime, not as bigamy and assault as she had hoped. She wanted equal treatment and support under our law, not culturally appropriate interventions.

In what way does the term “honour” describe these crimes, except as the pathetic self-justification of the perpetrator? Is it a term used by those who see women as the property of men and who think women’s decisions, lives and loves belong to the family, community or religious institution. This Bill commits us to describing such crimes as they really are and being clear to the police, local authorities, community leaders, the CPS and victims themselves that cultural and religious sensitivities are not a barrier to justice.

We have no record of how many British women are taken overseas by family members to be abused or killed. However, we know that when it happens, their assailants believe that their crimes are beyond the reach of British justice. The Bill would change that, extending the provisions of the Modern Slavery Act, so that if someone is taken from the UK to anywhere in the world to be exploited, the offence can be investigated in the UK because the planning and part of the trafficking took place here.

Seeta Kaur was born in the UK, and she died in India. She was subject to domestic violence throughout her marriage, was terrorised by her in-laws and was told to give her eldest son to her childless brother-in-law in India. She was coerced into travelling to India and was forced to return home without her son. Seeta would beg until she was reunited with him. Her husband and his family saw this as a question of honour. There is no official confirmation as to the cause of Seeta’s death. Her husband said it was a heart attack, but her family bore witness to bruising around her neck and upper chest, and intended to bring her body home. Before they could, Seeta was cremated by her husband in the dead of night. While in shock and grieving, Seeta’s family reported her death as suspicious to the Indian police, but they saw it as a family matter and tried to reconcile the families, even offering the return of Seeta’s deaths.
children—British citizens—in exchange for dropping the murder allegation. When that did not work, the case was simply closed.

The Bill extends extraterritorial jurisdiction to domestic violence. I hope it will re-emphasise our responsibility to investigate murder aggravated by domestic violence. At present, victims do not have the same level of protection, and there is not the same commitment to investigate, prosecute or provide desperately needed support to victims and families. Crucially, the Bill would end the near impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of domestic violence who often, with the complicity of foreign states, seek to escape justice by taking women abroad so they can continue committing their crimes. In this country, we make no distinction based on faith, heritage or background. There can be no exceptions to equality of treatment before the law or to the pursuit of justice. The words we use and the actions we take must reflect the values that we hold dear.

12.39 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I am afraid that, for reasons that I will set out, I oppose this Bill as it is currently framed. For the benefit of the morons on Twitter, and for some in this House, I should make it clear from the start that obviously, along with everybody else, I oppose women suffering from honour-based violence, but it seems that I am the only one in this House at the moment who equally opposes honour-based violence against men too.

I certainly commend my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) for her wish to tackle the politically correct culture that sometimes surrounds certain cultures in this country and which can be very damaging to those caught up in them. I attended a meeting organised by Baroness Cox where three very brave Muslim women explained how they had been very badly treated by sharia courts. Unfortunately, despite all the people here who claim to be concerned about women, I was the only Member of the House of Commons at that meeting, so concerned were people about the violence that those women had faced through judgments from sharia courts.

This Bill deals, quite rightly, with dangerous political correctness, as it does not get any more serious than murder. I completely agree with my hon. Friend about murdering someone. I would encourage her to keep making this point, as even without legislation she could make some progress. I am afraid, however, that while tackling one element of political correctness, she might cause her to cover the victims of these crimes. As far as I am concerned, all these things are just as bad as each other.

I am no expert, but I am told that karo-kari, which is the Pakistani term for so-called honour killing, literally means “adulterer” and “adulteress”. These terms have wider definitions than their literal ones to cover all immoral behaviour, and it is quite clear that they cover both sexes and are therefore not gender specific.

In 2007-08, the Home Affairs Committee said that men are also victims of honour-based violence. In January 2015, the Henry Jackson Society published a report on so-called honour killings, where it said that “men are also victims of ‘honour’ killings. In the cases of male victims reported in the media over the past five years, the perpetrators usually included the families of a current or ex-partner”.

It went on to confirm that in the UK there were 22 female victims, but seven male victims too. A report by the Government’s Forced Marriage Unit says:

“In 2015, 980 cases...involved female victims and 240...involved male victims. This highlights that men can also be forced into marriage.”

The Crown Prosecution Service report, “Violence Against Women and Girls”, says that “where gender was recorded, female victims accounted for” about 76% “and male victims were” about 24%.

This means that nearly a quarter of all the victims of these crimes are men. That is not an insignificant number, and it is not something that we should ignore. I understand that this is particularly an issue for gay men, but they would certainly not be included under the provisions of the Bill.

As we are talking about crimes taking place outside this country, we ought to look at the victims of crime over there. The Pakistani Human Rights Commission, which monitors reports of such crimes, came to the conclusion that about a quarter of victims in Pakistan were men. People might want to bear it in mind that The Guardian has reported cases of male killings. The newspaper cited the case of Ahmed Bashir, who died after he was attacked with a sword and a machete in the garden of his west London home. It is very sad that the Opposition do not care about Ahmed Bashir, who was
killed with a machete in his own home; it seems that that does not count because he happens to be a man. What kind of Parliament have we become? The Telegraph ran a piece that highlighted the case of another male victim of an honour-based killing. Phyllis Chesler, emerita professor of psychology at Richmond College of the City University of New York, has also written about how male victims are included in honour-based crimes.

There are other issues with this Bill, which I do not have time to go into now, but I believe that its discriminatory premise is wrong. Not all victims are female, and not all offenders are male. We should introduce gender-neutral legislation that is designed to help all victims of crime, whether they be men or women, and to punish all offenders responsible for such crimes, whether those offenders be men or women. [ Interruption. ] People are saying that that is what my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden said, but I am looking at the annunciator screen, which reads: “Crime (Aggravated Murder of and Violence against Women)”. There is no mention of men. It is no good saying that this Bill includes men; it does not. That is there on the screen for hon. Members to see, if they cannot hear what is happening. They clearly have not read the Bill. Some people will ask, “Why not support something that might help somebody, if not everybody?” I say, “Why not help everybody from the start?” What possible reason is there for not including men and women in the terms of the Bill?

I end where I started. Of course, we all oppose women suffering from honour-based violence, but I, for one, equally oppose honour-based violence against men. To have a strategy for dealing with one but not the other is, in my opinion, not acceptable and not justifiable.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Nusrat Ghani, Mr David Burrowes, Michael Gove, Yvette Cooper, Tim Loughton, Robert Jenrick, John Mann, Naz Shah, Craig Whittaker, James Berry, Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil and Stuart C. McDonald present the Bill.

Nusrat Ghani accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill to be read the First time: to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 129).

Philip Davies: I will be here.

Mr Speaker: The sedentary observation of the hon. Member for Shipley that he will be here was, if I may say so, superfluous. None of us doubted it for a moment.

European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill


Second Reading

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of Mr Angus Robertson.

No fewer than 99 Back Benchers are seeking to catch my eye today, without regard to how many might seek to contribute tomorrow. There will have to be a tough time limit on Back Benchers, the severity of which will depend on the level of consideration shown by Front Benchers, so there is of course no pressure.

12.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): I beg to move, that the Bill be now read a Second time.

Given your admonishment, Mr Speaker, and indeed the state of my voice, I give the House warning that I will not take very many interventions. I will take some, but not my normal two dozen.

The Bill responds directly to the Supreme Court judgment of 24 January, and seeks to honour the commitment the Government gave to respect the outcome of the referendum held on 23 June 2016. It is not a Bill about whether the UK should leave the European Union or, indeed, about how it should do so; it is simply about Parliament empowering the Government to implement a decision already made—a point of no return already passed. We asked the people of the UK whether they wanted to leave the European Union, and they decided they did. At the core of this Bill lies a very simple question: do we trust the people or not? The democratic mandate is clear: the electorate voted for a Government to give them a referendum. Parliament voted to hold the referendum, the people voted in that referendum, and we are now honouring the result of that referendum, as we said we would.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr Davis: Not at the moment.

This is the most straightforward possible Bill necessary to enact that referendum result and respect the Supreme Court’s judgment. Indeed, the House of Commons has already overwhelmingly passed a motion to support the triggering of article 50 by 31 March. We will respect the will of the people and implement their decision by 31 March.

Clause 1(1) simply confers on the Prime Minister the power to notify, under article 50 of the treaty on European Union, the United Kingdom’s intention to withdraw from the European Union. Clause 1(2) is included to make it clear that the power to trigger article 50 may be conferred on the Prime Minister regardless of any restrictions in other legislation, including the European Communities Act 1972. Together, these clear and succinct powers will allow the Prime Minister to begin the process of withdrawal from the European Union, respecting
the decision of the Supreme Court. This is just the beginning—the beginning of a process to ensure that the decision made by the people last June is honoured.

**Philip Davies:** Given that triggering article 50 is an inevitable consequence of the result of the referendum, does the Secretary of State agree that although it may be honourable for MPs who voted against having a referendum in the first place to vote against triggering article 50—that would be entirely consistent—it would be entirely unacceptable for those who voted to put this matter to a referendum to try to renege on the result of that referendum?

**Mr Davis:** My hon. Friend makes his point in his own inimitable way. As he knows, I always take the view that people’s votes in this House are a matter for their own honour and their own beliefs.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to make a little bit of progress, and I will then give way to him.

I draw hon. Members’ attention to the explanatory notes to the Bill, which set out the application of the Bill to Euratom. The Bill also gives the Prime Minister the power to start the process to leave Euratom. The Bill makes it clear that in invoking article 50, we will be leaving Euratom, the agency established by treaty to ensure co-operation on nuclear matters, as well as leaving the European Union. This is because, although Euratom was established in a treaty separate from the EU agreements and treaties, it uses the same institutions as the European Union, including the European Court of Justice. The European Union (Amendment) Act 2008 makes it clear that in UK law membership of the European Union includes Euratom. That is why article 50 applies to both the European Union and to Euratom.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): I received an email yesterday from Professor John Wheater, the head of physics at Oxford University, who had the very dubious pleasure of being my tutor for four years in the mid-1990s. He is concerned about the implications for his research programme of our leaving Euratom. Is there any way in which we could postpone leaving Euratom by a year or two, and if that is not possible, what assurance will the Secretary of State give Professor Wheater and his colleagues?

**Mr Davis:** The first thing I would say to my hon. Friend is that there is a two-year timetable, so we are still two years out from this. The Prime Minister has also said very clearly in her industrial strategy and in her speech on Brexit that we intend to support the scientific community and to build as much support for it as we can. When we engage in negotiations after March, we will negotiate with the European Union with the aim of creating a mechanism that will allow the research to go on.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I do not want to have to keep saying this, because I know it is very tedious. I know that the Secretary of State is a most attentive Minister, but may I appeal to him not to keep turning around and looking at people behind him? It is incredibly frustrating for the House. I know that is the natural temptation.

**Alex Salmond** rose—

**Mr Davis:** I give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

**Alex Salmond:** The question from the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) is an illustration of the fact that the consequences of the Bill go much further than the Secretary of State is telling us. Is not the reason why the Government find themselves in a position of such abase to President Trump that they have decided to abandon the high ground of the single marketplace, without so much as a negotiating word being spoken? That is why they are desperate to do a deal with anybody on any terms at any time. Why did the Secretary of State lead this country into a position of such weakness?

**Mr Davis:** That is almost exactly the opposite of the case. Since the right hon. Gentleman picks up on Euratom, let me make the point in rather more elaborate detail. Euratom passes to its constituent countries the regulations, rules and supervision that it inherits, as it were, from the International Atomic Energy Agency, of which we are still a member. When we come to negotiate with the European Union on this matter, if it is not possible to come to a conclusion involving some sort of relationship with Euratom, we will no doubt be able to reach one with the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is possibly the most respectable international body in the world. I am afraid he is wrong on that.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** No.

Our aims are clear: we will maintain the closest possible nuclear co-operation with the European Union. That relationship could take a number of different forms, and it will of course be subject to negotiations that will start after we have notified.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Brexit affords huge opportunities for international trade for global Britain, and part of that global trade is with the single European market. Although there may be access to full market—hybrid access—will the Secretary of State confirm that anything that introduces new taxes, tariffs or duties on British goods is not in our national economic interests?

**Mr Davis:** The answer to that intervention is yes.

**John Woodcock:** May I urge the Secretary of State and the Government to keep an open mind on Euratom? There is a danger that years of uncertainty will put at risk the 21,000 new jobs slated to come in as part of the Moorside development, as well as many others across the UK?
Mr Davis: The hon. Gentleman made his point very well, and I take it absolutely. He is right that a lot of jobs are involved, as are our standing in the scientific community and our international reputation, as well as individual projects, such as the Joint European Torus project and ITER—the international thermonuclear experimental reactor—all of which we will seek to preserve. We will have the most open mind possible. The difficulty we face is of course that decisions are made by the European Council, and decisions are made by the heads of state. We will have to work with the devolved Administrations to make sure that the voices of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland continue to be heard throughout the negotiation process. I will come back to this point in more detail, so, if I may, I will take interventions on it a little later.

I made a statement to this House on 17 January about the negotiations ahead of us and I do not propose to repeat it, save to say that our aim is to take this opportunity for the United Kingdom to emerge from this period of change stronger, fairer, more united and more outward-looking than ever before. I also set out our 12 objectives for those negotiations. They are: to deliver certainty and clarity where we can; to take interventions on it a little later.

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is exactly right. I said last week that I view the terms hard Brexit and soft Brexit as propaganda.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the people need to be better informed about the impact of Brexit? At what point are the Government going to publish their analysis of the impact on jobs of our leaving the single market?

Mr Davis: The assertions that people like the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). As I have already said, the Bill simply seeks to deliver the outcome of the referendum, a decision the people of the UK have already made. They will view dimly any attempt to halt its progress. The Supreme Court’s judgment last week made it clear that foreign affairs are reserved to the UK Government. The devolved legislatures do not have a veto on the UK’s decision to withdraw from the European Union. However, that does not mean we have not paid a great deal of attention to them. We have consistently engaged with the devolved Administrations through the Joint Ministerial Committee on European Negotiations and the Joint Ministerial Committee plenary. The latter met yesterday in Cardiff, and the meeting was attended by the First Ministers of all the devolved Administrations. In addition, and independent of those meetings, I have had bilateral meetings with the devolved Administrations, and there have been 79 official-level meetings to discuss the interests of each of the devolved Administrations.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Does he not accept that the people of Scotland voted to remain within the European Union, and that respect has to be shown to the Scottish people, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, which empowers the Government to act in our interests? Why will he not negotiate to allow Scotland to remain with access to the single market as we demand?

Mr Davis: I remind the hon. Gentleman that there was another referendum a little while ago, which was about the people of Scotland deciding to stay within the United Kingdom. That is what they are doing and that is what we expect them to continue to do.
The Prime Minister has committed to bring forward a White Paper setting out the Government’s plan and I confirm that it will be published in the near future. Guaranteeing UK citizens’ rights in the EU, and EU citizens’ rights in the UK, is one of the objectives set out by the Prime Minister. We have been, and remain, ready to reach such a deal now—now—if other countries agree.

Finally, there has been continual parliamentary scrutiny of the Government on this process: I have made five oral statements in the House of Commons; there have been more than 10 debates, including four in Government time; and over 30 Select Committee inquiries. We will of course continue to support Parliament in its scrutiny role as we reach the negotiating stage.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): Does the Secretary of State accept that Northern Ireland voted to stay in the European Union? In fact, my constituency voted 70%, on a 70% turnout, to remain. Does he accept that we do not have a devolved Administration at the moment? Does he have any plans to recognise the situation in Northern Ireland and the damage that has already been done to the Northern Ireland economy, in particular our agricultural economy?

Mr Davis: The position of Northern Ireland, the peace process and all related issues were obviously at the forefront of the Prime Minister’s mind when she went there as one of her first visits as Prime Minister. It will be at the forefront of my mind, which is why we have, without any qualification whatever, guaranteed the retention of the common travel area. On continuing representation, although there is no Executive individual Ministers stay in place, as is the norm with Governments during election times. I wrote to the Executive a week or so ago asking them to send a representative to each of the Joint Ministerial Committee meetings. They have done so, and they have made a serious and significant contribution to the meetings. We are taking very seriously the analysis they have provided of industries in Northern Ireland, including special issues such as the single Irish energy market. They are the sorts of issues that we have put front and centre in the list of negotiating points to deal with. The hon. Gentleman may absolutely take it as read that we take protecting Northern Ireland very seriously.

We have been clear that there must be no attempts to remain inside the EU, no attempts to re-join it through the back door, and no second referendum. The country voted to leave the European Union and it is the duty of the Government to make sure we do just that.

Finally, we remain committed to the timetable set out by the Prime Minister to trigger article 50 no later than 31 March. We will provide plenty of time for debate and scrutiny of the Bill, but it is equally vital that right hon. and hon. Members move swiftly to adopt this proposed legislation, in keeping with the Prime Minister’s timetable for triggering article 50 by the end of March. The House voted in favour of that timetable in December, and it is providing certainty both at home and in the European Union.

I conclude by saying this: the eyes of the nation are on this Chamber as we consider the Bill. For many years, there has been a creeping sense in the country—and not just in this country—that politicians say one thing and then do another. We voted to give the people the chance to determine our future in a referendum. Now we must honour our side of the agreement: to vote to deliver on the result. So, we are considering that very simple question: do we trust the people or not? For generations, my party has done so. Now that question is before every Member of this House. The Bill provides the power for the Prime Minister to begin that process and honour the decision made by the people of the United Kingdom on 23 June last year. I commend it to the House. Trust the people.

1.9 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): We have before us a short and relatively simple Bill, but, for the Labour party, this is a very difficult Bill. [Laughter.] I ask that hon. Members be courteous as I try to set out the position of the Labour party in what are very difficult circumstances. I will try to set that out clearly, and I expect people to be courteous.

We are a fiercely internationalist party. We are a pro-European party. We believe that through our alliances we achieve more together than we do alone. We believe in international co-operation and collaboration. We believe in the international rule of law. These beliefs will never change. That is why we campaigned to stay in the EU. We recognise that the EU is our major trading partner and that the single market and customs union have benefited UK businesses and our economy for many years. We recognise more widely the benefits of collaborative working across the EU in fields of research, medicine, technology, education, arts and farming. We also recognise the role that the EU plays in tackling common threats, such as climate change and serious organised crime. We share values and identity with the EU.

But we failed to persuade. We lost the referendum. Yes, the result was close. Yes, there were lies and half-truths—none worse than the false promise of an extra £350 million a week for the NHS. Yes, technically the referendum is not legally binding. But the result was not technical; it was deeply political, and politically the notion that the referendum was merely a consultation exercise to inform Parliament holds no water. When I was imploring people up and down the country to vote in the referendum and to vote to remain, I told them that their vote really mattered and that a decision was going to be made. I was not inviting them to express a view.

Although we are fiercely internationalist and fiercely pro-European, we in the Labour party are, above all, democrats. Had the outcome been to remain, we would have expected the result to be honoured, and that cuts both ways. A decision was made on 23 June last year to leave the EU. Two thirds of Labour MPs represent constituencies that voted to leave; one third represent constituencies that voted to remain. This is obviously a difficult decision. I wish the result had gone the other way—I campaigned passionately for that—but as democrats we in the Labour party have to accept the result. It follows that the Prime Minister should not be blocked from starting the article 50 negotiations.

That does not mean, however, that the Prime Minister can do as she likes without restraint from the House—quite the opposite: she is accountable to the House, and that...
accountability will be vital on the uncertain journey that lies ahead. She fought to prevent the House from having a vote on the Bill until she was forced to do so by the Supreme Court last week. She resisted Labour’s calls for a plan and then a wider White Paper until it became clear that she would lose any battle to force her to do so. Just before Christmas, she was resisting giving the House a vote on the final deal—a position that she has had to adjust.

That is why the amendments tabled by the Labour party are so important. They are intended to establish a number of key principles that the Government must seek to negotiate during the process, including securing full tariff and impediment-free access to the single market. They are intended to ensure that there is robust and regular parliamentary scrutiny by requiring the Secretary of State to report to the House at least every two months on progress being made in the negotiations and to provide documents that are being given to the European Parliament. The amendments would also require the Government to consult regularly the Governments of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland throughout the Brexit negotiations. I have recognised on numerous occasions the specific issues and concerns of those living in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, and I support the proposition that they should absolutely be consulted throughout the process and that their interests should be borne in mind.

Several hon. Members rose—

Keir Starmer: I will press on for a minute and then take interventions.

The amendments would also ensure that this House has the first say, not the last say, on the deal proposed at the end of the article 50 negotiations.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I will give way in a minute, but I want to make some progress, if I may.

We also support amendments in relation to workplace rights and environmental rights, and we will be making the case that the legal status of EU nationals should be resolved before negotiations take place. I recognise the Government's position on EU nationals and the work done to try to ensure that there is a reciprocal arrangement, but that has not worked, and now the Prime Minister should act unilaterally to give assurance to EU nationals living in this country. I am sure that all hon. Members will have had, in their surgeries, EU nationals in tears over the uncertainty of their situation. I have seen it at every public meeting I have attended on the topic and at every surgery. I understand the constraints, but we must now act unilaterally to secure their position.

Taken together, the amendments would put real grip and accountability into the process, and the Government should welcome them, not reject them out of hand.

Several hon. Members rose—

Keir Starmer: I will make some progress and then give way. I am mindful of the fact that 99 Back Benchers want to speak, and it is important, on such an issue, that I set out our position.

It is important to remember what the Bill does and does not do. It empowers the Prime Minister to trigger article 50—no more, no less. It is the start of the negotiating process, not the end. It does not give the Prime Minister a blank cheque—and here I want to make a wider point that has not been made clearly enough so far in any of our debates: no Prime Minister, under article 50 or any other provision, can change domestic law through international negotiations. That can only be done in this Parliament. If she seeks to change our immigration laws, she will have to do so in this Parliament in primary legislation. If she seeks to change our tax laws, she will have to do so in this Parliament in primary legislation. If she seeks to change our employment laws, our consumer protection laws or our environmental laws, she will have to do so in this Parliament in primary legislation. If she seeks to change our current arrangements in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, she will have to do so in Parliament in primary legislation.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman not realise that the very point of our leaving the EU is to ensure that this place can make decisions on those very points?

Keir Starmer: Yes.

When the Secretary of State last week said there would be many votes on many pieces of legislation in the next few years, he was not wrong. In each of those votes, at every twist and turn, Labour will argue that jobs, the economy and living standards must come first. We will argue that all the workers’ rights, consumer rights and environmental protections derived from EU law should be fully protected—no qualifications, limitations or sunset clauses.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): My hon. and learned Friend rightly points to the very necessary consultation that must take place with the devolved Administrations, but on 17 January I asked the Secretary of State what discussions he had had with the north-east about the impact of leaving the single market, given that 58% of our exports go to the EU. Does my hon. and learned Friend share my concern that we still do not have an answer to that question—whether the Secretary of State has even had those discussions—as well as many other questions?

Keir Starmer: I agree, and I urge the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to ensure that there is the greatest consultation in relation to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. They each have specific areas of concern, which are well known to this House.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman share my concern that if no deal has been struck at the end of this process, all options must remain open and it will be for this place, not the Government, to decide what happens next?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. It is to ensure that this place has a meaningful role that Labour has tabled these amendment, in relation to the final vote, to ensure that the issue comes here first, rather than later.
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): In that spirit, does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is astonishing that the Government have not told us when they will publish the White Paper? Does he agree that it should be published ahead of the Bill’s Committee stage, which is scheduled for next week?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. My view is clear: the White Paper ought to be published as soon as possible, and before the Committee stage is concluded, and I hope that it will be.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Keir Starmer: I am going to make some progress, given the number of hon. Members who want to come in on this debate.

More broadly, Labour will be arguing for a strong, collaborative future relationship with the EU. In her Lancaster House speech, the Prime Minister said that she does not “seek to hold on to bits of membership as we leave”.

That is short-sighted, as we are now finding in relation to Euratom. Why would we want to be outside the European Aviation Safety Agency, which certifies aircraft before they are allowed to fly? Why would we want to be outside the European Medicines Agency, which ensures that all medicines in the EU market are safe and effective? Why would we want to be outside Europol and Eurojust, which, as the Prime Minister and I know, are agencies that work closely together in the prevention and detection of serious crime and terrorism? The same goes for the European Environment Agency and Euratom. We challenge the Prime Minister on these fronts and ask that consideration be given to finding ways to ensure that where we can we stay within those agencies, for the obvious benefits that they bring, and we will absolutely challenge any suggestion that the Prime Minister has made very positive contributions to the development of the EU.

...
were the leading contender and made a big difference. The first was when the Thatcher Government led the way in the creation of the single market. The customs union and common market had served a purpose, but regulatory barriers matter more than tariffs in the modern world. But for the Thatcher Government, the others would not have been induced to remove those barriers, and I think that the British benefited more from the single market than any other member state. It has contributed to our comparative economic success today.

We were always the leading Government after the fall of the Soviet Union in the process of enlargement to eastern Europe, taking in the former Soviet states. That was an extremely important political contribution. After the surprising collapse of the Soviet Union, eastern and central Europe could have collapsed into its traditional anarchy, nationalist rivalry and military regimes that preceded the second world war. We pressed the urgency of bringing in these new independent nations, giving them the goal of the European Union, which meant liberal democracy, free market trade and so forth. We made Europe a much more stable place.

That has been our role in the European Union, and I believe that it is a very bad move, particularly for our children and grandchildren, that we are all sitting here now saying that we are embarking on a new unknown future. I shall touch on that in a moment, because I think the position is simply baffling to every friend of the British and of the United Kingdom throughout the world. That is why I shall vote against the Bill.

Let me deal with the arguments that I should not vote in that way, that I am being undemocratic, that I am quite wrong, and that, as an elected Member of Parliament, I am under a duty to vote contrary to the views I have just given. I am told that this is because we held a referendum. First, I am in the happy situation that my opposition to referendums as an instrument of government is quite well known and has been frequently repeated throughout my political career. I have made no commitment to accept a referendum, and particularly this referendum, when such an enormous question, with hundreds of complex issues wrapped up within it, was to be decided by a simple yes/no answer on one day. That was particularly unsuitable for a plebiscite of that kind, and that point was reinforced by the nature of the debate.

Constitutionally, when the Government tried to stop the House having a vote, they did not go to the Supreme Court arguing that a referendum bound the House and that that was why we should not have a vote. The referendum had always been described as advisory in everything that the Government put out. There is no constitutional standing for referendums in this country. No sensible country has referendums—the United States and Germany do not have them in their political systems. The Government went to the Supreme Court arguing for the archaic constitutional principle of the royal prerogative—that the Executive somehow had absolute power when it came to dealing with treaties. Not surprisingly, they lost.

What about the position of Members of Parliament? There is no doubt that by an adequate but narrow majority, leave won the referendum campaign. I will not comment on the nature of the campaign. Those arguments that got publicity in the national media on both sides were, on the whole, fairly pathetic. I have agreed in conversation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union that he and I can both tell ourselves that neither of us used the daintier arguments that were put forward by the people we were allied with. It was not a very serious debate on the subject. I do not recall the view that £350 million a week would be available for the health service coming from the Brexit Secretary, and I did not say that we going to have a Budget to put up income tax and all that kind of thing. It was all quite pathetic.

Let me provide an analogy—a loose one but, I think, not totally loose—explaining the position of Members of Parliament after this referendum. I have fought Lord knows how many elections over the past 50 years, and I have always advocated voting Conservative. The British public, in their wisdom, have occasionally failed to take my advice and have by a majority voted Labour. I have thus found myself here facing a Labour Government, but I do not recall an occasion when I was told that it was my democratic duty to support Labour policies and the Labour Government on the other side of the House. That proposition, if put to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) in opposition or myself, would have been treated with ridicule and scorn. Apparently, I am now being told that despite voting as I did in the referendum, I am somehow an enemy of the people for ignoring my instructions and for sticking to the opinions that I expressed rather strongly, at least in my meetings, when I urged people to vote the other way.

I have no intention of changing my opinion on the ground. Indeed, I am personally convinced that the hard-core Eurosceptics in my party, with whom I have enjoyed debating this issue for decades, would not have felt bound in the slightest by the outcome of the referendum to abandon their arguments—[Interruption.] I do not say that as criticism; I am actually on good terms with the hard-line Eurosceptics because I respect their sincerity and the passionate nature of their beliefs. If I ever live to see my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) turn up here and vote in favour of Britain remaining in the European Union, I will retract what I say, but hot tongs would not make him vote for membership of the EU.

I must move on, but I am told that I should vote for my party as we are on a three-line Whip. I am a Conservative; I have been a decently loyal Conservative over the years. The last time I kicked over the traces was on the Lisbon treaty, when for some peculiar reason my party got itself on the wrong side of the argument, but we will pass over that. I would point out to those who say that I am somehow being disloyal to my party by not voting in favour of this Bill that I am merely propounding the official policy of the Conservative party for 50 years until 23 June 2016. I admire my colleagues who can suddenly become enthusiastic Brexiteers, having seen a light on the road to Damascus on the day that the vote was cast, but I am afraid that that light has been denied me.

I feel the spirit of my former colleague, Enoch Powell—I rather respected him, aside from one or two of his extreme views—who was probably the best speaker for the Eurosceptic cause I ever heard in this House of Commons. If he were here, he would probably find it amazing that his party had become Eurosceptic and rather mildly anti-immigrant, in a very strange way, in 2016. Well, I am afraid that, on that issue, I have not followed it, and I do not intend to do so.
There are very serious issues that were not addressed in the referendum: the single market and the customs union. They must be properly debated. It is absurd to say that every elector knew the difference between the customs union and the single market, and that they took a careful and studied view of the basis for our future trading relations with Europe.

The fact is that I admire the Prime Minister and her colleagues for their constant propounding of the principles of free trade. My party has not changed on that. We are believers in free trade and see it as a win-win situation. We were the leading advocate of liberal economic policies among the European powers for many years, so we are free traders. It seems to me unarguable that if we put between us and the biggest free market in the world new tariffs, new regulatory barriers, new customs procedures, certificates of origin and so on, we are bound to be weakening the economic position from what it would otherwise have been, other things being equal, in future.

That is why it is important that this issue is addressed in particular.

I am told that that view is pessimistic, and that we are combining withdrawal from the single market and the customs union with a great new globalised future that offers tremendous opportunities for us. Apparently, when we follow the rabbit down the hole, we will emerge in a wonderland where, suddenly, countries throughout the world are queuing up to give us trading advantages and access to their markets that we were never able to achieve as part of the European Union. Nice men like President Trump and President Erdogan are impatient to abandon their normal protectionism and give us access. Let me not be too cynical; I hope that that is right. I do want the best outcome for the United Kingdom from this process. No doubt somewhere a hatter is holding a tea party with a dormouse in the teapot.

We need success in these trade negotiations to recoup at least some of the losses that we will incur as a result of leaving the single market. If all is lost on the main principle, that is the big principle that the House must get control of and address seriously, in proper debates and votes, from now on.

I hope that I have adequately explained that my views on this issue have not been shaken very much over the decades—they have actually strengthened somewhat. Most Members, I trust, are familiar with Burke’s address to the electors of Bristol. I have always firmly believed that every MP should vote on an issue of this importance according to their view of the best national interest. I would be voting with my conscience content, and when we see not serving you; I am betraying you.” I personally shall be voting with my conscience content, and when we see what unfolds hereafter as we leave the European Union, I hope that the consciences of other Members of Parliament will remain equally content.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Angus Robertson. [Interruption.] No; the amendment has been tabled in his name, but I think it is Mr Gethins who is going to orate to the House, and we look forward to that with eager anticipation.

1.42 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

this House declines to give a Second Reading to the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill as the Government has set out no provision for effective consultation with the devolved administrations on implementing Article 50, has yet to publish a White Paper detailing the Government’s policy proposals, has refused to give a guarantee on the position of EU nationals in the UK, has left unanswered a range of detailed questions covering many policy areas about the full implications of withdrawal from the single market and has provided no assurance that a future parliamentary vote will be anything other than irrelevant, as withdrawal from the European Union follows two years after the invoking of Article 50 if agreement is not reached in the forthcoming negotiations, unless they are prolonged by unanimity.

The amendment stands in my name and, indeed, that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), as well as those of other colleagues, including representatives of the various constituent parts of the United Kingdom. I thank Members in all parts of the House for backing it today.

It is a privilege to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who spoke a huge amount of sense—a great deal more sense than we have heard in recent times. He made some exceptional points, for which I thank him. It is also a privilege for us that he will be voting with us tomorrow evening. In particular, he made some good points about the benefits of the European Union, and it is important for us to reflect, even briefly, on those.

The European Union has had an impact on all of us, from the progress that we have made as member states in protecting workers’ and parents’ rights and the environment to our progress in helping to bring about peace, security and prosperity over the past 70 years—something that was never guaranteed. There are endless reasons for voting for our amendment, and I know that a number of my colleagues will touch on them today and tomorrow. One of the main reasons, however, must be connected with scrutiny. What is the purpose of having a Parliament—what is the purpose of us all being here—if it is not to scrutinise the work of the Government? Their unwillingness to subject this decision to any proper scrutiny reflects a lack of confidence in their own position and in the process that will follow once this has been done.

It is good that, despite the Government’s best efforts, we are to have a say on the triggering of article 50, but we did have to drag them here kicking and screaming, and at great expense. I also think it imperative for all Members to reflect on the debt of gratitude that we owe to Gina Miller, who made today’s debate possible. Today, however, I want to reflect on our amendment.

Primarily, what we want is scrutiny. It is interesting that the Government have not published a White Paper in time for the debate, and that they want to publish it after the Bill has been passed. That must surely be unprecedented. Secondly, there is a lack of respect for the devolution settlement. Thirdly, there are the consequences of leaving the EU without certainty, and fourthly, there is the vision of the United Kingdom that is being created.

One enormous step that the Government could have taken—this was touched on by both the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe and the hon. and learned
Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—was to deal with the position of the EU nationals who contribute so much to our country. Given that the Government are surely in need of friends with influence, they should give those people the certainty that they and we need.

Let us reflect for a moment on why there is so much uncertainty. The leave supporters campaigned on a blank piece of paper, an act of gross irresponsibility and negligence which has been perpetuated by the Government over the past nine months and which lies at the heart of why we need a White Paper. I must add, as the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union returns to the Chamber, that Ministers, both present and previous, who supported the leave campaign bear a particular culpability when it comes to the uncertainty in which we now find ourselves.

Will we have the White Paper before the Bill's Committee stage? Will we go through the normal process, whereby we see a White Paper before a Bill is passed? That has certainly been the practice in the past when the House has been given a say. The right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—was true to his word, we would not be in the situation on to "a statutory footing." If that was the case and he has also said that the Bill will put the Sewel convention on to "a statutory footing." If that was the case and he was true to his word, we would not be in the situation we are in just now.

The Secretary of State for Scotland has also said that the Bill will put the Sewel convention on to "a statutory footing." If that was the case and he was true to his word, we would not be in the situation we are in just now.

Only two plans have come forward. One was from the Scottish Government about Scotland's place in Europe, and I also pay credit to Plaid Cymru and to Labour colleagues who managed to pull together a plan from the Welsh Government as well. Fair play to them for putting aside their political differences and producing more detail.

Stephen Gethins: The Scottish Government plans have won praise from stakeholders and European partners across the spectrum. They would maintain our place in the single market, give new powers to the Scottish Parliament—as suggested by the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove)—and ensure that EU nationals can continue to stay.

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is in a state of great animation and excitement, and I do not want to spoil that for him, but I have always had the courage of my convictions, and, therefore, his breach of parliamentary protocol is, in this case, mildly offensive. May I just remind him that debate here takes place through the Chair? The word "you" is not only not required, but should be deleted from any part of his text.

Stephen Gethins: I apologise, Mr Speaker. You, of course, have the courage of your convictions every time, although those on the Government Benches may be a different matter altogether—but that is well said, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I am sure you will also agree with me that scrutiny is a good thing; it strengthens governance and has a major role to play.

Let me talk about the devolution settlement and what has been happening. The Secretary of State talked earlier about listening. He says a great deal about listening, but I have not seen anything that has changed so far from all this listening that has been going on; I have not been seeing any changes. They were listening in Cardiff all day yesterday, and we have seen nothing. The Court ruling made the point that this is a political decision; the decision to involve the devolved Administrations should be a political one.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con) rose—

Stephen Gethins: This White Paper contains 670 pages of details of what the country looked like, and it was published a year before the Scottish referendum. There was no scrabbling around for the odd detail nearly a year after a referendum. It is a disgrace, and the Government should be ashamed.

Mrs Murray rose—

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what that White Paper told the people of Scotland? Did it tell them what currency they would be using if they voted for Scottish independence?

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman has made a good point. Does he know what the White Paper talked about? It talked about currency. Moreover, a Fiscal Commission Working Group was set up. So much more work was put into that.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg rose—

Stephen Gethins: On the issue of modernity and progress for this country, I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I seem to remember that the Scottish people blew a large raspberry at that White Paper.
Mrs Murray: It has taken a long time for the hon. Gentleman to take my intervention, but I am somewhat confused as to how he expects to get a 600-page White Paper on a two-clause Bill. Can he explain that to me please?

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Lady says she is confused. I will make this point: if the Government come forward with a White Paper that is not quite 670 pages, I think they will be okay with that on these Benches. Indeed, if the Secretary of State comes forward with a White Paper, it would be some progress. But the hon. Lady is a little confused: may I remind her and others on the Conservative Benches on a point of democracy that they got their worst general election result in Scotland since 1865, so they could do with a little bit of listening? They are being pulled by their nose by the UK Independence party who have never even saved their parliamentary deposit in Scotland. Let me say on democracy that the Conservatives govern on 15% of the votes, claim a victory on one in five voters, and want to bring powers back to this place and hand them to the House of Lords.

Several hon. Members rose—

Stephen Gethins: I will not give way any more.

The consequences of leaving the EU will be significant for universities, for the opportunities that I had and for our environment for universities, for the opportunities that I had and want to vote, claim a victory on one in five voters, and want to bring powers back to this place and hand them to the House of Lords.

Several hon. Members rose—

Stephen Gethins: I am not going to take any more interventions.

This is a debate—

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) has made it clear that he is not giving way, and may I gently say that an enormous amount of heckling is taking place, sometimes from the hon. Gentleman’s own Benches? They are heckling more loudly than I shout when watching Britain in the Davis cup, and I do not do that while play is in progress.

Stephen Gethins: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Let me gently remind colleagues about this. As well as learning a lesson on democracy and on the Conservatives’ abject failure in terms of winning any kind of vote in Scotland, this House is at a crossroads today. Are we going to have a future of continuing progress and prosperity whereby we maintain a close relationship with our partners in Europe, as set out by the Scottish Government in our plans—which were a compromise, when we failed to see any kind of compromise from the other side?

Political opponents in Wales have been able to compromise. The Scottish Government, in spite of two thirds of people in Scotland voting to remain in the EU, have been able to set out a compromise. The alternative to that is a path of isolationism and exceptionalism that leaves us desperately scrabbling around for friends, and the Prime Minister, who has left the Chamber, will note the reaction to her visit to Washington on streets the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

Going back in history, Scotland has done well as an EU member state. I want to see us continue with research, trade and political alliances going back centuries, and where sharing sovereignty is a good thing. As another lesson to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, I say that that is sharing sovereignty, but what is not sharing sovereignty is being forced to have a Trident missile submarine that the Scottish people are against and 98.5% of Scottish MPs have moved against. What is not sovereign is being taken out of the EU against our will, and what is not sovereign is having a Tory Government that have one MP in charge of our affairs.

Europe is where our future lies. It is one where we tackle inequality and climate change and where refugees get help—areas that do not get much of a hearing in Whitehall these days. Pooling our sovereignty and working together is a good thing. If the House passes this Bill and turns its back on our amendment, it will be turning its back on the progress made and disrespecting the devolution settlement.

I urge Members to vote for our amendment; otherwise, this is a backward and damaging step, and an act of constitutional and economic sabotage.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I referenced earlier the very large number of colleagues wishing to contribute, which I am afraid necessitates the imposition on Back Benches, with immediate effect, of a six-minute time limit.

1.56 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): This has been for me, and for many of us, a very long journey. It is 30 years since I tabled an amendment to the Single European Act to retain the sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament. I have to say, Mr Speaker, that it was denied me; the amendment was not selected. However, I looked with interest at clause 1 of this Bill, which says:

“This section has effect despite any provision made by or under the European Communities Act 1972 or any other enactment.”

I believe that that satisfies the requirements of sovereignty in respect of this Bill.

I want to pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). I respect him and the way in which we have battled over these matters over all these years. We have done so over a similar period of time—he from a little earlier than me, I must admit—but we have been on different roads, and now we have arrived at different destinations.

For me, the referendum was a massive peaceful revolution by consent, of historic proportions. This Bill at last endorses that revolution. From the 17th century right through our history—that is the corn laws, the parliamentary reform Act that gave the vote to the working class, the suffragettes who got the vote in 1928, and then again in the period of appeasement—there have been great benchmarks of British history and they have all ultimately been determined by the decisions taken in this House, and, if I may be permitted to say so, by Back Benches. That is where the decisions have
so often been taken. The fact is that the fundamental question on which we have fought not only this referendum but all the battles back to the 1980s has been that of who governs this country. This Bill answers that question.

With respect to the Bill itself, I simply say—I do not want to spend time on this, but just to make the point; and the shadow Minister for Brexit, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), made the same point—that if one looks at the Supreme Court decision, it is clear from the manner in which its ruling was given that this is not about timing, method, our relationship with the European Union or the terms of withdrawal. That is all set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the judgment itself. It goes on to say at paragraph 1.22 that the freedom to make these decisions lies exclusively with Parliament, and that is where we are now embarking on yet another journey.

With respect to the referendum, I came to the conclusion back in 1990, looking at the Labour and Conservative Front Benches in the House of Commons, that nothing was going to break the collusion between those two Front Benches on the European issue or on the question of sovereignty. A strategic decision had to be taken, so I set up the Maastricht referendum campaign. After many, many years, we have reached this point, largely on account of the efforts made by all my hon. Friends on this side of the House and by those I will describe as my constituents. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), who has been our leader on this issue for many decades, put it, this House owe a great debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins)—

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Bob Cryer.

Sir William Cash: Yes, Bob Cryer, and others. This has been a huge battle, and I do not disrespect the Governments of either party for the decisions that they have taken during this period, because they have been forming judgments, although they fell short of what we needed in this country. In this democratic cockpit, we have to fight our battles and to stand up for our own needs in this country. In this democratic cockpit, we have to be carried out, and that is what we will do. I shall repeat the words of William Pitt in the Guildhall speech of 1805:

“England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe”— and the United Kingdom—by her example.”

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), I must appeal to Members not to keep coming up to the Chair and asking where they are on the list, either explicitly or by the back door by asking, “Is it all right if I go to the loo?”, “May I have a cup of tea?” or “Am I permitted to eat a biscuit?” I shall do my best to accommodate everyone in the substantial amount of time available, but I appeal to colleagues to show a little patience and some regard for the Chair needing to concentrate on the debate. I will get you in if I possibly can, and so will all other occupants of the Chair.

2.5 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Our relationship with Europe has run like a contentious thread through our politics for more than 60 years, and the referendum revealed a nation that remains divided. Though it pains me to say it, for the reasons so ably set out by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)—the Foreign Secretary, who is no longer in his place, was shaking his head throughout that speech, probably because he did not wish to be reminded of the arguments he had included in that other article, which he chose not to publish back in June—we are leaving the European Union, and our task now is to try to bring people together. This means that, whether we voted to leave or remain, we have a responsibility to hold in our minds the views, concerns and hopes of everyone in our country, whether they voted leave or remain.
The Supreme Court decided, rightly in my view, that a decision of this magnitude should be made by Parliament and not by the Executive, but with that power comes a responsibility to respect the outcome of the referendum, however much some of us might disagree with it. This is about democracy. This is about faith in our politics, not just in the United Kingdom but across the western world, where—if we are honest—it is not in very good shape. If this Parliament were to say to the people, “You did not know what you were doing, only 37% voted leave, the referendum was only advisory and there were lots of lies”—whether or not we agree with some of those assertions—we really would have a crisis of confidence in our politics, for the reasons so eloquently set out by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). That is why the democratic thing to do is to vote for this Bill, and I shall do so tomorrow.

But the referendum decided only one thing: the fact that we are leaving the institutions of the European Union. It did not determine the terms on which we leave or our new relationship with the other 27 member states. That is why we have, as a nation, to get our objectives and the process right as we start this great negotiation. The Government’s handling of this matter so far has not shown sufficient respect for Parliament—notwithstanding the number of times the Secretary of State has come to the Dispatch Box. For several months, Ministers appeared to believe that saying that there would be “no running commentary” and telling those asking for greater clarity that they were not, in the words of the No. 10 spokesperson, “backing the UK team” was the right approach. It was not. Commitments have eventually been made to set out objectives, to seek transitional arrangements, to publish a White Paper and to confirm that Parliament will have a vote—all things that the Exiting the European Union Committee, which I have the honour to chair, called for—but at every stage, far from being freely made, they were reluctantly conceded, usually a day or two after the Secretary of State had resisted them from the Dispatch Box.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): My right hon. Friend refers to the fact that the Government now say that there will be a vote on the eventual deal. I presume that what they mean is that, under the provisions of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, there will be a single vote on an unamendable motion in relation to a treaty. I do not think that that is good enough. If the European Parliament—and, for that matter, the Irish Dáil and the French Assemblée Nationale—will have the right to consider such a treaty line by line, this House should have that right as well.

Hilary Benn: I agree with my hon. Friend, but the House must have a proper plan and, in the words of my Front-Bench colleague, a “meaningful” opportunity to scrutinise the agreement in draft, rather than being presented with a fait accompli at the end of the process. This is one example of how the Government have had to be pushed, cajoled and prodded at every stage into giving Parliament its proper role.

I say to the Secretary of State—this may not be his fault—that it is extraordinary that we meet here today, and are being asked to vote on this Bill tomorrow, when not a single Government document setting out the consequences has been published. Seven months after the British people reached their decision, there has been no economic assessment, no analysis of the options, and no White Paper. That is not the way to do things and that attitude must change. The Government need to recognise that Parliament should be not a bystander but a participant in what is probably the most complex and significant negotiation that this country has ever faced. We have to unwind and recast 43 years of relationships with our neighbours. It affects every area of our national life, every part of the country, every person, community and business, and the jobs and incomes on which they depend. It is therefore essential that we have unity of purpose in trying to get the best deal for Britain, despite the inevitable uncertainty of the outcome.

We will come to the issues of substance in Committee and subsequently. What does special access to the single market mean now that the Prime Minister has decided that we are leaving it? How exactly will seeking to remain and leave the customs union at the same time work? If ensuring a continuation of tariff and barrier-free trade is a priority for Ministers, but Europe comes back and says, “You can’t have your cake and eat it. You have to choose,” I trust that the Government will choose to remain in the customs union. The world is more uncertain now than at any time over the past 60 years, so how will we continue to co-operate with our neighbours on foreign policy, defence, security and the fight against terrorism?

Finally, the referendum result revealed something else: two great political forces in the western world are now reflected in our politics. On the one hand, people desire greater devolution and control in a world in which many believe that we barely have any control at all owing to the pace of change in our lives. On the other hand, every single Member of the House, whether we voted leave or remain, understands that in the modern world we have to co-operate with our neighbours to deal with the great challenges that we will face in the years and centuries ahead. Leaving the European Union may change the balance between the two, but it will not change the necessity to embrace both as we look to the future.

2.12 pm

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I rise to follow the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn)—not that I will agree with much of what he said, but I fully respect his ability and strength of purpose, in line with what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said, to stand by his convictions. It is therefore a privilege to follow him.

It is also a privilege for me, as it is for many of my colleagues, to speak on this Bill. It is without doubt that I support the Government and therefore the passage of this Bill. I commend the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the Opposition spokesman, who made a particularly measured speech on what the Bill is and is not about. He was clear in his words, for which I commend him because I actually agreed with them when he said that this is about giving the Government the right to invoke article 50, and nothing more. He said in his interesting speech that no
place but here can have the right to change domestic laws, and I agree. That is why I and my hon. Friends have urged that we repeal the European Communities Act 1972 at the time that the European Union Act was made necessary under article 50, but it is the right thing to do domestically and provides an answer to those who say, “But what will we do about all these issues?” Every element of our membership of the European Union is within that Act, and I am certain that the House will debate that for many hours and reach a decision.

I have a huge amount of respect for my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe. We served together in the same Government and have debated this issue for a long time. There is nobody whom I respect more in this House than him. He is as constant as the compass. There is absolutely no way in which anyone could have any doubt about where he was going to be not only on this matter, but on many others. I look across the Chamber to my erstwhile right hon. Friend, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), who will agree that during the coalition Government we absolutely knew where my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe was going to be on many issues in Cabinet—invariably not where the Government were.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Not only is our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) to be respected for his views on Europe, about which he has been entirely consistent and courteous, but he was surely one of the most remarkable Chancellors of the Exchequer that our country has seen.

Mr Duncan Smith: I do not doubt that at all. In fact, so successful was he that he managed to tie the following Government in all sorts of knots as they sought to pursue his policies without any of the same drive or intelligence in how they were going to do it.

My purpose today is simply to explain that I opposed the Maastricht treaty. In case anybody asks, I did not actually want to leave the European Union. I originally voted to join the European Union, or the Common Market as it was then, but when it came to Maastricht I decided that there was something fundamentally wrong with the direction of travel. I am going to raise the name of an individual whom not many people in this House ever raise in debate: Altiero Spinelli. He was essentially the architect of both the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty. His purpose was quite clear. He believed that the whole purpose of the European project was the eradication of the nature of the nation state. He said:

“If a post war order is established in which each State retains its complete national sovereignty, the basis for a Third World War would still exist”.

I do not agree with him, and I never did. The reason we fell into the terrible cataclysm of the second world war following the great depression was the absence of democracy and, most importantly, robust democratic institutions in many European states. War will never happen where we have democracy and strong democratic institutions with open trade. Such democracies simply will not do that. My sense was that the European Union’s direction of travel from Maastricht was bound on a course that was going to lead to the UK ultimately deciding that it can no longer stay within it.

I agree with much of what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe said. I have come to a different conclusion, but I fully respect anyone who decides to vote against the triggering of article 50. They were sent here to use their judgment. Yes, the British people have made a decision, but the job of an MP is to use judgment on such matters. If somebody chooses to oppose the Bill, I will respect that. I will disagree with them, but they deserve a hearing and we should in no way attempt to shout them down.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and for his thoughts on democracy. Does he accept that Members in this House have less information about this crucial decision than the average local ward councillor has about their annual budget?

Mr Duncan Smith: I am grateful for that intervention, but I do not agree. Given the past 40 years, if anybody in this House does not have enough information to make a decision, I wonder where they have been for all those years—or the years that they have spent here. Of course we have enough information. The hon. Lady is referring to the publication of the White Paper, which the Government have said they will publish. I stand by that and think it is a good idea. I must say, however, that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a pretty good of fist of it in her recent speech, in which she set out the 12 points that will guide her negotiation. I hope that the Government reprint them with a couple of diagrams, the odd explanation and a nice picture, which will make an excellent White Paper.

I absolutely do not agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe that my party is somehow anti-immigrant. When I was in government with him, both in coalition and subsequently, we did more than any other country to help those who were displaced as a result of the wars in Syria, Libya and Afghanistan. As a Government and as a country, we should be proud of our support for immigration. Whatever other countries choose to do, we put ourselves on the side of those who flee terror.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way and for that clarification. We are not anti-immigrant, and I do not think that anyone who voted to leave the European Union is anti-immigrant. There is a difference between being anti-immigrant and being anti-uncontrolled immigration. It was the latter that the British public were against. They wanted control, and many people of different backgrounds voted to leave the European Union.

Mr Duncan Smith: That is the point: they wanted to take back control. They are not anti-immigration but simply want to make sure that it is controlled migration at a level that the country can absorb without any difficulties. That is where we should be on this, that is where my party should be and that is where we stand. I intend to pursue that because I am pro-migration.

Chris Bryant: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Duncan Smith: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman because I have literally a matter of seconds and he will have plenty of time to speak.
[Mr Duncan Smith]

The only thing on which I disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe is that we are not the hatter’s tea party. The hatter’s tea party is sitting in opposition. I do not know who the dormouse is or who the hatter is, but I am sure they will tell us later.

Having listened throughout to all these debates, I will be voting tonight to trigger article 50. [HON. MEMBERS: “Tomorrow.”] Tomorrow, I will be voting to trigger article 50 simply because of all the mistakes of the past. We were told that somehow we can place our trust in a larger body that will do a lot of our protections for us, but we cannot. As a nation state, we can be in Europe but not run by the European Union. That is why I am voting to trigger article 50 tomorrow.

2.20 pm

Mr Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): As this is the formal beginning of a process that will most likely lead to the end of Britain’s leading role in the heart of Europe and the European Union—a cause I have espoused and defended all my political life both in opposition and in government—I have to confess that of course I feel sad that we have come to this point, much as I was surprised and saddened, as many people were, by the outcome of the referendum last summer.

That sadness is increasingly mixed with a growing sense of anger at what I consider to be the Government’s deliberate distortion of the mandate they received from the British people in a way that I think is divisive, damaging and self-serving.

Let us be clear: the British people gave the Government a mandate to pull the United Kingdom out of the European Union. The British people did not give this Government a mandate to threaten to turn our country into some tawdry, low-regulation, low-tax, cowboy economy. The British people did not vote to make themselves poorer by pulling out of the greatest free-trading single market the world has ever seen—incidentally, that is one of the many reasons why the Liberal Democrats believe that the British people should be given a say at the end of the process, much as they were given a say at the beginning. And the British people most certainly did not give a mandate to the Government to indulge in the ludicrous, sycophantic farce that we have seen in recent days in which this Government, having burned every bridge left with our friends in Europe, rushed across the Atlantic to sidle up to a US President without seeming to be aware that his nativism, isolationism and protectionism are diametrically opposed to the long-term strategic interests of the United Kingdom.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why my constituents, the majority of whom voted to leave, reject his party’s call to hold a second referendum? I really believe it is an insult to the integrity of my constituents to promote that.

Mr Clegg: The insult was that the Brexit campaigners deliberately withheld from the British people what they meant by Brexit. It was a deliberate, effective but highly cynical tactic. We never received a manifesto with the views of Nigel Farage, the Foreign Secretary or the former Education Secretary, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), explaining what Brexit means. Therefore, when we finally know what Brexit really means in substance, rather than in utopian promise, of course the British people should have their say.

Mr Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Clegg: No, I wish to make some progress. That is why I believe that this House has not a choice but a duty to withhold from the Government the right to proceed with Brexit in the way they have planned. That would not stop Brexit but would simply urge the Government to go back to the drawing board and to come back to this House with a more sensible and moderate approach to Brexit.

Mr Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Clegg: I really wish to make some progress. I have only four minutes.

Mr Clegg: Some people say that there is no alternative, that we must leave the single market and that there is no remote chance that we could find an accommodation with our European partners. Nonsense. For instance, I confirm to the House that I have recently heard it on very good authority that senior German decision makers, shortly after the Prime Minister, no doubt to her surprise, found herself as Prime Minister without a shot—or indeed a vote—being fired, were keen to explore ways to deliver her an emergency brake. In return, they hoped for an undistruptive economic Brexit.

But what did this Government choose to do? They decided to spurn all friendship links with Europe. They decided to disregard the needs of Scotland, Northern Ireland and, indeed, our great capital London. They decided to placate parts of the Conservative party rather than serve the long-term strategic interests of this country. They decided to pander to the eye-popping vitriol and bile that we see every day from people like Mr Dacre, the editor of the Daily Mail, and other members of the moneyed elite who run the Brexit right-wing press in this country—and this Government have become too slavishly preoccupied with their opinions. But, above all, this Government have decided to disregard the hopes, the dreams and the aspirations of 16.1 million of our fellow citizens, which is more than have ever voted for a winning party in a general election—242 Westminster constituencies voted to remain.

Mr Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Clegg: No, I have only two minutes.

Mr Duncan Smith: You will get an extra minute.

Mr Clegg: All right.

Mr Clegg: I have a very simple question to ask the right hon. Gentleman will get the rest of his minute. Does he recall that, during the referendum
campaign, the then Prime Minister and many others on the remain side said that if the British people voted to leave the European Union, it would absolutely mean that we leave the single market? Did he agree with that at the time?

**Mr Clegg:** It is a novel concept that the winning side in a competition invokes the arguments of the losing side to make a case that it did not make itself. That is ludicrous. The Brexit campaign deliberately did not spell out to the British people what Brexit means, which is why it is right that, when we finally do know what Brexit means, the British people have another say.

My final point is that the British Government have taken the mandate of 23 June 2016 and not only disregarded the 16.1 million people and the 242 constituencies that voted to remain but have very deliberately decided to ignore the plans of the people who who actually count most. It is our children and our grandchildren, the youth of Britain, who will have to live with the fateful consequences more than anybody in this House or anybody on the Government Front Bench, and—guess what?—conventional wisdom says that the youth of today are politically indifferent and do not participate but 64% of 18 to 24-year-old voters voted. They mobilised in huge, unprecedented numbers, and 73% of them voted for a different future.

I know that the vote of a 19-year-old does not weigh any differently in the ballot box from the vote of a 90-year-old but, when we search our consciences, as we have just been asked to do, we should search our consciences most especially about what country we think we are handing on to the next generation. Call me old-fashioned, but when a country decides to go on a radical, uncompromising departure to a new and as yet entirely unpredictable future, and does so against the explicit, stated wishes of those who have to inhabit that future, it is a country embarking on a perilous path, and I hope that our consciences will not pay for it.

I have a great sense of foreboding. Notwithstanding my personal admiration for the Secretary of State for Brexit, who will try to conduct his negotiations in good humour, the negotiations are getting nasty and acrimonious. Just think what will happen in the British tabloid press when the Government first start arguing in a competition invokes the arguments of the losing side to make a case that it did not make itself. That is a false one. If soft Brexit means staying in the single market was the “worst of both worlds”.

My final plea is that Members look to the long-term interests of our country and their constituents when voting, not to the short-term interests of this Government. It is a novel concept that the winning side in a competition invokes the arguments of the losing side to make a case that it did not make itself. That is ludicious. The Brexit campaign deliberately did not spell out to the British people what Brexit means, which is why it is right that, when we finally do know what Brexit means, the British people have another say.

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**Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con):** In following the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) with pride on this side of the House, where, I remind him, we are standing by our mandate of “Brexit means Brexit.” I also remind him that once a politician stood on a mandate of “No tuition fees.”

This Bill may be simple, small and perfectly formed, but its significance is way above its size. This Bill is about delivering on democracy and on commitments made by politicians to the electorate. If the country spoke decisively in a democratic vote, in a referendum that had been initiated by a very large majority—more than 10 to one MPs—in this House, and we should all remember that. More people voted to leave the EU than have ever voted for a single political party. That vote cannot be ignored, so I will therefore be voting for this Bill on Second Reading and then supporting the Government in their negotiations to ensure that a good deal is obtained, which works primarily in the interests of the UK, but without damaging the 27 other member states of the EU. We do expect a professional attitude towards those negotiations from the European Union, without the vindictiveness that has come through in some of the statements made by European politicians.

In my commercial life before entering the House, I worked in many countries in Europe. I am fortunate to have represented the UK in European institutions, and I also have strong personal ties with Europe, as many of my family live in Denmark and are Danish, so I am certainly not anti-European. When people say that we are anti-European, I tell them that we are not leaving Europe—we are leaving the European Union. Europe is a fantastic place to call home—it is diverse in culture and language, and its unique historical enigma us all—but the EU’s goal of standardisation and a one-size-fits-all Europe has been a source of baulkment to many of us.

While many countries, including our own, are devolving power away from central Government, the EU is moving in the opposite direction, centralising power in Brussels and imposing bureaucracy from above. The EU has constantly eroded national sovereignty and undermined the nation state. Its key decision makers in the European Commission are unelected and unaccountable, and nobody can say that the single currency has been a success for many of those countries facing such dire economic situations at the moment. It has been clear for some time that the EU needed fundamental reform, but it has become equally clear that it lacks the political will to do this.

So, like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), I have been consistent in my views about Europe. When I was first elected to Parliament, the Maastricht treaty was going through this House. I was a member of the Fresh Start group, with many of my colleagues here today, and I have not changed my position in 25 years of serving this country and my constituents. I made no secret of the fact that I supported the campaign to leave the EU, but I knew it was up to individuals to make up their own minds. Now the country has made that choice clear, the Prime Minister has made her intentions clear and we need to get on with it. The choice that some seem to be offering between what they call “hard Brexit” and “soft Brexit” is a false one. If soft Brexit means staying in the single market with no controls on our borders and, crucially, the UK being subject to the European Court of Justice, it is not really Brexit at all. Indeed, I believe I recall the remain campaigners arguing during the referendum campaign that sacrificing EU membership but staying in the single market was the “worst of both worlds”. 
We are leaving the EU, and that means freeing ourselves of its institutions. But we remain a firm friend and ally of all the European countries with which we have been working over decades to try to maintain peace, prosperity and stability on European soil. Not only do we want to have and will seek an open trading relationship with those countries, but, no matter what the outcome, we will continue to work with them on tackling areas of common interest: terrorism, crime, climate change and environmental protection. This major change in our governance means that Britain can freely reach out to the rest of the world, forging new friendships, building new alliances and expanding into new markets. But, like the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), I recognise the disappointment of people who were satisfied with our membership of the EU and wish we were in a different place. I think we have a bright future were in a different place. I think we have a bright future if we were to leave the EU to end the free movement of people, we might, in consequence, find that we have to address, and it helps nobody to cheapen it in that process, there are serious and profound questions about whether or not we commence the process of implementing their decision, a process that will not be simple, easy or fast. It does no one any favours to pretend otherwise.

Although I accept that decision and I will vote for the Bill, I fear that its consequences, both for our economy and our society, are potentially catastrophic. I therefore hope that the practice of dismissing any calls, queries and concerns, however serious and well founded, as merely demonstrating opposition to the will of the British people will now cease, along with the notion that they would merely obstruct the process. Once we commence this process, there are serious and profound questions to address, and it helps nobody to cheapen it in that way.

A second practice I deplore is that of pretending that the question the public actually answered—whether to leave the European Union or to remain—is instead the question some leave campaigners would prefer them to have answered. I hear many claiming that the people voted to leave the single market—that they voted to leave the customs union. First, those were not the words on the ballot paper. Secondly, although we all have our own recollections of the debate, mine is that whenever we who campaigned to remain raised the concerns that if we were to leave the EU to end the free movement of people, we might, in consequence, find that we have to leave the single market, with massive implications for jobs and our economy, some leave campaigner would immediately pop up to assure the people that no such complications or problems were likely to arise and that we could have—

Margarreit Beckett: I am looking at one of them now. They would suggest that we could have our cake and eat it—that we could leave the EU not only without jeopardy to our economy, but even with advantage, because we could negotiate other trading relationships without any such uncomfortable ties.

John Redwood: Does the right hon. Lady not remember that the official leave campaign said that one of our main aims is to have many more free trade agreements with the rest of the world and that in order to do that of course we have to leave the single market customs union, because we are not allowed to undertake free trade?

Margarreit Beckett: No, honestly I do not particularly recall that. I recall those in the leave campaign saying that we could have trading arrangements with a whole lot of other countries, and I am going to turn to that now. India was cited as one example, but I have the distinct impression that when the Prime Minister discussed these issues with the President of India she may have been advised that far from closing the immigration door, he would like to see it opened wider. Nor do I think a trade deal with China will be without any quid pro quo.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Further to that, does my right hon. Friend recall the International Development Secretary making the case to my constituents of Indian descent, of Bangladeshi descent and of Pakistani descent that leaving the EU would not only lead to future trade deals, but would improve immigration to this country from the Commonwealth? Does my right hon. Friend expect that promise to be delivered?

Margarreit Beckett: I am extraordinarily grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because not only do I recall it, but I originally had it in my speech, only to take it out on the grounds of time.

As for the United States, I am sure that the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, who, like me has had a degree of experience in complex international negotiations, is as conscious as I am that one of the first prerequisites is to listen to the words. It was not the President of the United States who said that Britain would be at the front of the queue, it was British politicians. What the President said was, “You’re doing great.” I do not take much comfort from that, especially coming as it does from a President whose motto is “America first.” I wholly share the fears that have been expressed, and that probably will be again in this debate, about the possibility of America’s companies wishing to exploit the healthcare market here or weaken our regulations on, for example, food safety.

The negotiations we will trigger with this Bill will be extraordinarily difficult and very time-consuming. I do not think for a second that they can be concluded within two years, and I do not think anybody who has ever negotiated anything would. It will therefore be vital to make allowance and preparations for possible transitional arrangements.

I am conscious of the time, so I shall make my final point. It is not clear whether the Prime Minister frightened the European Commission with her threat to devastate our tax base and, in consequence, all our public services,
but she successfully frightened me. I do not believe—not for one second—that that is what the British people thought they were voting for. When this process is concluded, the European Parliament will have the right to vote on the outcome. If taking back control means anything, it must mean that this House enjoys the same right.

2.41 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It is with a heavy heart, and against my long-held belief that the interests of this country are better served by our being a member of the European Union, that I shall support the Bill. In 2015, I promised the good people of Broxtowe that, if I was elected to represent them for another term, and in accordance with my party’s manifesto, I would vote for an in/out referendum on our EU membership, agreeing, in the words of David Cameron, that the people would “settle the matter”. I promised to respect and honour the vote. On 9 June 2015, along with 544 Members of this place, I agreed to that referendum, and in so doing I agreed to be bound by the result.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) was not in favour of that referendum and did not vote for it, so he is, of course, free and able to vote against the Bill. I am sure it is no coincidence that he happens to enjoy a considerably large number of people in his constituency who voted remain, and that he has—quite wrongly, in my view—announced that he will not be standing again in 2020. I say to Opposition Members, though, that you cannot go back on your word because you do not agree with the result.

I believe that history will not be kind to this Parliament, nor, indeed, to the Government I was so proud to serve in. How on earth did we ever come to put to the people an alternative that we then said would make them worse off and less safe and would weaken our nation? I echo the wise words of some of the speech by my new friend, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), when I say that I greatly fear that generations that either did not vote or are yet to come will not thank us for our great folly. Neither will they forgive those who since 23 June have chosen not to be true to their long-held view—that those who have remained mute as our country has turned its back on the benefits of the free movement of people, a single market and the customs union, without a debate, far less any vote in this place. Why is that? It needs to be said and recorded that our Government have decided that the so-called control of immigration, which actually means the reduction in immigration—that is what so many people in our constituencies believe—is worth more than the considerable benefits of the single market and the customs union.

What has been even more upsetting is the fact that Members on the Labour Front Bench have connived with the Government. The Government were never going to give us the opportunity to debate these important matters, for reasons that I genuinely understand and, indeed, respect, but for the Labour party to go against everything it has ever believed in is really quite shameful. It is a combination of incompetence on its Front Bench and a deep division among so many, with a few honourable exceptions—among whom I of course include the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). They have turned their backs on their long-standing belief in the free movement of people and failed to make the positive case for immigration.

The referendum vote exposed a deeply divided Britain, and that has been exposed in no place better than in the Labour party. Labour Members have been petrified—literally frozen to the spot—looking over one shoulder and seeing that their constituency Labour parties have been taken over by the extreme left, and beyond that, in many instances, that up to 70% of their own voters voted leave.

What has happened to our country? Businesses have fallen silent, scared to speak up and to speak out. I think they believe it is all going to be fine—that we are not really going to leave the EU, we will not really leave the single market and we will not really leave the customs union. They are going to get a sharp shock.

Alberto Costa: Does my right hon. Friend agree that when she, I and other Members of this House voted, rightly, to give the British people the ultimate say in this matter, we did not vote to take away the rights of EU citizens like my parents who live in this country? It is disgraceful that, as it stands today, we are not honouring their rights.

Anna Soubry: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. A Conservative who I include among those many brave souls on the Government Benches who, in the face of abuse and even death threats, have stood up and been true to what they believe in.

Why has there been this outbreak of silence? I quote the wise words of Edmund Burke: “Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their inartistic chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shade of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field.”

That is what has happened, but now it must stop. We must now make sure that everybody is free and able to stand up and say what they believe, and that people no longer cower in fear of four newspapers and this never-ending chorus, which I do not believe represents my constituents.

Chris Bryant: We are very grateful on the Labour Benches for all the advice the right hon. Lady is giving us. [Interruption.] I am sure her own Back Benchers are grateful as well, sometimes.

Was the right hon. Lady a member of the Government who tried to cut net migration to tens of thousands? Did she stand as a Conservative Member in the most recent general election and the one before on a manifesto that pledged to cut net migration to tens of thousands? I just ask.

Anna Soubry: I do not think anybody would say that I have not been forthright in putting forward my views about the positive benefits of immigration to our country. The best way that the Government can reduce those figures is, of course, to take out overseas students. If only they would do that; it would be the right thing to do.

Notwithstanding the considerable abilities and efforts of our Prime Minister and Government, as we embark on these negotiations looking over one shoulder, I remain far from convinced that we will get any good deal. Like the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), I do not believe that in two years we will secure a good bespoke deal on
trade, the customs union and our nation’s security. I hope very much to be proved wrong, and I will, of course, support the Prime Minister and our Government as they embark on the most important and difficult set of negotiations in decades, with consequences for generations to come.

What happens if no deal is secured? It is difficult to see how any Government could put to this place a deal that they believe to be inadequate in some way. I want, please, assurances from the Government that, in the event of no good deal being reached, all options will be placed before this House, and that we, on behalf of all our constituents and our businesses, will decide what happens next. We may need more time. We certainly do not want to jump off the cliff into World Trade Organisation tariffs when we are out of the single market and the customs union as that would be dangerous for our businesses in all sectors and of all sizes.

Let us now begin to heal the wounds and the divides, so that we can come together to get the best deal for our country as we leave the European Union.

2.50 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I will, not surprisingly, be wholeheartedly voting to trigger article 50 tomorrow evening. I have also used my judgment. I accept that Lambeth voted overwhelmingly for remain but, as I have made very, very clear, this was a United Kingdom referendum, not a constituency or borough-based referendum. I welcome the many letters that I have received from my constituents—a lot were very pleasant—regretting that I will vote to trigger article 50. I have also had many nasty, venomous letters, not necessarily from my constituents, but from across the country. I resent and deplore the language that has been thrown around over the past few months. It comes not just from one side. There is a tendency to think that it is only the remainers who have had some pretty awful things said about them. Pretty dreadful things have been said by some who voted to remain against people such as me who stood out against our own party. None of it is acceptable. Members all need to do their bit to ensure that we seek to improve the level of political discourse, especially over the years when we are involved in our negotiations.

Like the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I remember the Maastricht treaty debate, when I was a relatively new Member of Parliament. Time after time, the Labour party made us come along to vote against all the amendments but then, when it came to the final vote, we were ordered to abstain.

I welcome the speech made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). I welcome his tone, the gravity of the way in which he put his argument, and his honesty about the difficulty that Labour faces on this issue. I am very pleased that my party has decided not to block the referendum decision; it would be a travesty if we did.

I wish to raise a couple of annoying things that people keep saying. One is that people did not know what they were voting for. It is said that those who voted to leave did not understand what that meant. That really is patronising, and it shows part of the reason why so many people voted to leave—they were fed up being treated as if they knew nothing and as if those in power knew more than them.

Mr Duncan Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, which means that I have secured her a bit more time. Does she recall that during the course of the referendum—this was certainly my experience, and I hope that it was hers—there was much more engagement, much more questioning, much more interest and a bigger turnout than at any general election in which I have ever been involved? People were really trying to find out what this was all about.

Kate Hoey: The right hon. Gentleman is quite right. At the many meetings I spoke at all over the country, there was a fervent interest in the issue. People wanted to know more. I remember hearing the former Prime Minister and the former Chancellor of the Exchequer very clearly warning—not just warning, but threatening—people that if they dared to vote to leave, the consequences would be our leaving the single market. Let us not call it the single market; it is an internal market. If we are leaving the EU, of course we have to leave the internal market. I am sure that, like any other country outside the EU, we will be able to get a deal that allows us to have access to that market.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Hoey: No, I will not. The right hon. and learned Gentleman had 22 minutes in which to speak.

Mr Speaker: It was 17 in fact.

Kate Hoey: Mr Speaker, my maths are not as good as yours.

The other matter I want to raise is this idea that if someone voted to leave, they are, if not an outright racist, an indirect racist. It is ridiculous and appalling that someone voted to leave are being treated in that way. We know that those people were against not immigrants, but the idea that people from 27 other countries—26 excluding the Republic of Ireland—could come into our country for no other reason than that they could do so. That did not apply to people outside the European Union. We betrayed the people from the Commonwealth so badly back in 1973, yet they had no right to come here. It is all about getting back control. I know that that sounds like a cliché, but it is what we are doing—taking back control of our own country.

Once we have left the European Union, we will probably have sharp disagreements in the House and not so many cross-party views on a lot of the issues. We want to build—I certainly want to build—a post-Brexit UK that looks at spending priorities that might be very different from those proposed by Members on the other side of the House. I want to look at how we can use new freedoms on state aid in our country, and in order to do that, we must trigger article 50 and get into the negotiations.

Our businesses and the country generally want us to get on with it. We have left ourselves in a situation in which we are spending two days of debate on a very simple Bill. The amendments will be considered next week, one or two of which I hope the Government will accept, but...
the reality is that this is a process that needs to be triggered. We need to do it soon, and the public expect us to do that. I have hope that we can look forward to negotiations that will take this country not to the forbidding place that the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) mentioned—I have no foreboding about our future outside the European Union—but to a bright future. That will happen tomorrow night when we vote to trigger article 50.

2.56 pm

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): People in the UK voted to take back control. They voted to take back control of their laws, their borders and their money. They showed great bravery, a huge passion for democracy and enormous engagement with the many complex issues that were put before them by the two campaigns. They voted by a majority to leave, despite being told that that course would be fraught with danger. They were told that the EU would bully us on the way out, and their answer was, “We will stand up to the bullies.”

They were told that the economy would immediately be badly damaged and plunged into a recession this winter; they said that they did not believe the experts. Fortunately, they were right and the experts were wrong.

Now is the time for all of us here to do the difficult task of speaking up for those many constituents who did agree with us and those many constituents who did not. Both sides come together around two central propositions. The first is that we are all democrats. Everyone who is fair-minded knows, in the words of the Government leaflet that was sent to every household, that the people made the decision. That was our offer. That was what our Parliament voted to provide, and that is what the people expect. They also expect us to be greatly respectful of each other’s views. In a democracy, people do not automatically change their view when they have lost the argument and the vote. It is incumbent on those of us on the majority side to listen carefully and to do all that we can to ensure that the genuine worries as well as the inaccurate worries of the remain side can be handled. We all want economic success. Many of us believe that we can deliver that economic success by leaving. Many remain voters will be relieved

**Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that our interlocutors on the other side are listening to and watching this debate very carefully, and that sending mixed messages would be against the national interest of this country if we want to get a good deal for both the 52% and the 48%?

**John Redwood**: Indeed. I believe in free speech, but it is in the national interest that we share our worst doubts privately and make a strong presentation to our former partners in the European Union. I believe that business now wants us to do that. The message from business now is, “Get on with it!” It accepts the verdict.

**Margaret Beckett**: A few moments ago, the right hon. Gentleman said that all the fears expressed about the impact of the decision have proved to be ill-founded. He must have seen the analogy that has been floating around: we are in the position of somebody who has just thrown themselves off a 100-storey building. What storey does he think we are at now?

**John Redwood**: That is not a sensible analogy. We know that the main claims were wrong because we were told that there would be a recession this winter—that the economy would plunge immediately off a cliff. Instead, we were the fastest-growing economy in the G7 throughout last year, and stronger at the end than we had been in the middle.

This is the once and future sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom. The thing that most motivated all those voters for leave was that they wanted the sovereignty of this Parliament to be restored. That is what the Bill allows us to do by our exiting the European Union, and then making our own decisions about our laws, our money and our borders. As one who has had to live for many years with an answer from the British people on the European Union that I did not like, I was increasingly faced with an invidious choice. Did I support the position of Government and Opposition Front Benches, which agreed that every European law and decision had to go through because it was our duty to put them through? Alternatively, should I be a serial rebel, complaining about the EU weather which we had no power to change?

I had reached the point where if the country had voted remain, I would have respected that judgment and not sought re-election at the next general election. I would have seen no point in this puppet Parliament—this Parliament that is full of views, airs and graces, but cannot change laws or taxes, or spend money in the way the British people want. That is the liberty that we regained. This Parliament is going to be made great by the people. It is going to be made great despite itself.

**Alberto Costa** rose—

**John Redwood**: It is going to be made great because the people understand better than so many of their politicians that sovereignty must rest from the people in this Parliament.

**Alberto Costa** rose—

**John Redwood**: And the great news is that we can decide to keep for ourselves all those many good things that, we are told, Europe has given us. All those good laws we will keep; all those employment protections we will agree to continue.

**Alberto Costa** rose—

**John Redwood**: The day we leave the European Union will be a great day because everything will change and nothing will change. Everything will change through because it was our duty to put them through? What is it about freedom that some Members do not like? What is it about having power back in our Parliament that they cannot stand? Vote to make the once and future sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom sovereign again. That is what the people challenge you to do!

**Several hon. Members rose**—

**Mr Speaker**: Order. Mr Costa, I say to you gently that you should remember the merits of keeping a safe distance.
Dame Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): I am rather nervous about following that extraordinary double-act.

The debate has shown once again how important it is for Parliament to scrutinise properly the Government’s approach and actions in respect of leaving the European Union. It has made the Government’s attempts to thwart that scrutiny through the Supreme Court look even more ludicrous.

I want to make four points. First, I shall support the Bill. I did not want us to leave the European Union, but the majority of those who voted in the referendum thought differently, including nearly 70% of people in Doncaster Central. It is important that we respect that decision, as was stated so eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and the shadow Secretary of State.

Secondly, we must do all that we can to get the best deal for Britain from the negotiations. That deal must benefit all parts of the UK. The Government have focused on strategies for Scotland, Wales, London and Northern Ireland, but we need to make sure that all our regions have input and a proper analysis of the effects of leaving the European Union.

People in Yorkshire and Humber want to know what the effect will be on our businesses—small and large—universities, science and technology sectors, local authorities, trade unions, representatives of the third sector and others in our region. During proceedings on a recent statement, the Secretary of State said that the other nations would of course be involved in those discussions, adding that he would also be inviting representatives from the regions to a meeting in York. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us more detail about exactly how that will work. Who will represent the Yorkshire region? Will any analysis be done of the effect of Brexit on Yorkshire, what we will need to see from any deal, and how an ongoing dialogue will be maintained? Each nation and region will have an interest not only in trade deals, but in the Government’s so-called great repeal Bill.

My third point is about employees’ rights and conditions. The Government have said that they will guarantee that current employment rights will be incorporated into UK law once we have left the EU, but they need to go further by strengthening UK employment law if they are to deal with the issues of undercutting and exploitation. British manufacturing, the agricultural industry and our public services, especially the NHS, will need workers—skilled and unskilled—from European Union countries.

Concern about immigration was a key factor in many people’s minds during the referendum. A lot of that concern revolved around a feeling that workers’ wages and conditions were being undercut by migrants, especially those from eastern Europe. I know from my constituency that many of those workers are on zero-hours contracts, often being offered only about 10 hours’ work a week even though they want to work for longer, and at the minimum wage—sometimes even below it. The employers are not just about breaking even; they are big companies that often use agencies to supply their workers and effectively use the state—through housing benefit, for example—to subsidise cheap labour while seeing big profit margins.

I will also follow—some may think, rather counterintuitively—the other remarks of the hon. and learned Gentleman who led for the Labour party. I sincerely believe that this process is not a triumph of nationalism, or of us being apart from them. It is quite the opposite: part of a new internationalism and recognition of our common citizenship of the whole world. We stand ready to break free of the protectionist barriers erected by the EU that have so damaged much of the third world, and rejoin the world at large. As a former Prime Minister of Australia said, “Britain is back.”

Some call some of that a form of modern slavery. We need to use the opportunity before us to look again at how the labour market operates. If the Government are to address the concerns that I have set out, they will have to improve the whole way in which our labour market works. I believe that countries across Europe have concerns about this issue and we will be discussing it at the Labour party conference on Brexit in a few weeks’ time. It would help if we could talk to our European neighbours about the issue in respect of gaining as much access as we can to the single market.

My final point is that, as we saw yesterday, huge concern has been expressed in this country and throughout the world about the actions of President Trump. That has shown how essential it is that the UK does not withdraw from the world stage because of Brexit. I am a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Last week, I saw at the Assembly how valuable it was to show that the UK has not withdrawn into itself, and that we understand the importance of working with our European neighbours and advancing our common cause on human rights. I know that Government Members feel strongly about that issue as well.

I hope that the Minister will reassure the House, once and for all, that the Government will not be withdrawing from the European convention on human rights and the Council of Europe. We need to lead the debate on how we leave the European Union, and the Bill should be an opportunity to do that.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The speech made by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) was one of the best speeches I have ever heard from the Labour Front Bench in its tone, its honest acceptance of the difficult choices being made by all of us in this House and its fundamental acceptance that we, by a majority of six to one, passed a decision to the people that we have to respect. This debate is simply about facilitating that, which is why so many of us will ensure that there is a large majority tomorrow evening to vote in favour of triggering the process for which our people asked.

I will also follow—some may think, rather counterintuitively—the other remarks of the hon. and learned Gentleman who led for the Labour party. I sincerely believe that this process is not a triumph of nationalism, or of us being apart from them. It is quite the opposite: part of a new internationalism and recognition of our common citizenship of the whole world. We stand ready to break free of the protectionist barriers erected by the EU that have so damaged much of the third world, and rejoin the world at large. As a former Prime Minister of Australia said, “Britain is back.”

Of course, we crave the familiar—self, family, friends, village, county, country or even continent—but we know that the human race is one and that human dignity is indivisible. That dignity has not been respected in our continent in the past. By the spring of 1945, Europe had descended into such a spiral of hate, war and destruction that people understandably despair. Noble spirits such as Schuman, Adenauer and De Gasperi understood that the familiar divisions of home, tribe and nation were so dangerous when exaggerated that they needed to be not abolished, but overcome, in a
In all sincerity and with sympathy for their views, we and scrambles, nor board games of Risk and Diplomacy. Yes, we want our European friends to succeed. to take the mantle of solidarity with the rest of the world. Yes, we want our European friends to succeed. escaping the EU barriers and looking beyond the ocean seem to want to grasp the immense globalism of Brexit—of arguments, but we are disappointed that they do not the sincerity with which our remain friends put their to set the project in motion.

Alberto Costa: My hon. Friend and I are executive officers of the all-party parliamentary group for Italy, and we both went to Rome but a few months ago. Does he agree that, although we will respect the will of the British people, that does not include changing the rights of Italians and other EU nationals who have been lawfully resident in the United Kingdom for years? Will he confirm that that is his view?

Sir Edward Leigh: Of course I will confirm that that is my view. It is also the view of everyone to whom we spoke in the Italian Parliament and in the British Parliament. Our Government have made that absolutely clear.

The point that I am trying to make is that, at the time I was describing, the British Parliament, under the leadership of Attlee and Churchill, understood that this was a supranational movement, which is why they did not join. All the discussions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which we can read about, talked about an ever-closer union. It was not the Council of Europe, in which the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton) serves and in which I had the privilege of serving. The EU is not a body of sovereign nations. It is bound by a single court of justice. That is why our predecessors took the decision not to join in 1957, and they were right to do so.

Our predecessors were desperate to try to conclude a free trade agreement with our European friends and if they had been offered that free trade agreement in Messina, they would have signed up to it. That is precisely what we are trying to achieve. We are trying to be internationalist and to further free trade. This country is not, and never must be, protectionist or small-minded. Indeed, de Gaulle had an understanding of our point of view, when he talked about a “Europe of nations”. He asked how Great Britain, a maritime power with large and prosperous daughters all over the world, could fit into the Europe that was being created. An amusing cartoon from 1962 by the Dutch cartoonist Opland shows European Economic Community leaders faced with the prospective arrival of big mother Britannia with her diverse progeny of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The caption reads, “If I join, can my offspring too?” Of course, the answer was no. We were already part of a worldwide community of nations, which we called, and still call, the Commonwealth.

What we are now trying to achieve is similar but even more ambitious. We want to lead this worldwide drive towards free trade. In 200 years’ time, people will view Brexit not as the last gasp of an outdated nationalism, but as the advent of a new internationalism. We understand the sincerity with which our remain friends put their arguments, but we are disappointed that they do not seem to want to grasp the immense globalism of Brexit—of escaping the EU barriers and looking beyond the ocean to take the mantle of solidarity with the rest of the world. Yes, we want our European friends to succeed. We are definitely not engaged in 19th-century rivalries and scrambles, nor board games of Risk and Diplomacy. In all sincerity and with sympathy for their views, we believe that this is an opportunity for us and them.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Edward Leigh: Of course I will give way to my friend, the Chair of the International Trade Committee.

Mr MacNeil: My friend talks about opportunities for globalisation through Brexit, but for globalisation to occur, somebody needs to reciprocate. Who will be the major reciprocators of the change of attitude that has emerged in the UK in the past six to eight months?

Sir Edward Leigh: I accept that there will be trials along the way, but what is the harm in trying to lead by example? What is the harm of believing in true internationalism and international free trade, and leading the world in it? That is all we are asking.

A free trade deal can be concluded so quickly. We have harmonised our laws for 40 years. It is only politics that prevents our European friends from concluding a free trade deal with us. I say to the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central, in all sincerity, that we do not want to create a bargain basement economy in which we lessen workers’ rights. On the contrary, such is the strength of our economy, innovation and industries that surely we can enshrine a gold standard protecting our workers as well as our fields, forest, rivers and seas. There is nothing, apart from politics, to stop our European friends rapidly sorting out a free trade deal in goods and services. There has never been so easy a free trade deal.

I appeal to my French cousins—not figurative ones, but literal ones—living in Provence and Paris. We want to strengthen our links, not dissolve them, in an amity of nations. On the way, we have to ensure that we enshrine security, control of borders and all those things but, for the positive and international reasons I have given, many Members of Parliament will be proud to vote for this tomorrow evening.

3.18 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Tomorrow evening, my colleagues and I will vote to ensure that the process of leaving the European Union is commenced by the triggering of article 50. I have always believed that we were much better off in an arrangement where the people of the United Kingdom elected representatives to express their views and make decisions about them exclusively in the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

In the history of our involvement in the EU, time and again detrimental laws were passed by people who were not part of our country and were not elected in our country. In my role as a councillor and in the Northern Ireland Assembly, we were told, time and again, “These measures might not be suitable for Northern Ireland and may have consequences that were perhaps not even intended by the people who wrote them. Nevertheless, you don’t even have a say in whether these laws should be taken into consideration. You simply have to sign them off.”

I campaigned in the referendum to leave the EU, and I am pleased that my constituents, by 55% to 45%, took my advice—that is more than vote for me in a general election, so I even persuaded some of my detractors that it was the correct thing to do.
Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene when he was about to get into full flow. He and his colleagues in the Democratic Unionist party know perfectly well that a clear majority of the Northern Ireland electorate voted for the UK to remain within the EU. A majority of my constituents in North Down voted to remain. How do he and his party colleagues propose to respect that fact in their voting tomorrow evening, and indeed in their negotiations with the Brexit Secretary?

Sammy Wilson: The hon. Lady leads me neatly on to my next point.

When I campaigned in the referendum, I campaigned as a Member of the UK Parliament, which passed a law for a referendum that had national implications and would be judged on a national basis, not on a narrow regional basis of Northern Ireland having a different say from the rest of the people of the United Kingdom. I would have thought that as a Unionist the hon. Lady would respect the fact that this was a UK referendum and therefore the outcome had to be judged on a UK basis. It would be detrimental to the Union if Northern Ireland—or Scotland or Wales—had the right to say to the people of the whole of the United Kingdom, “We don’t care how you voted. The 1.8 million people in Northern Ireland have a right to veto how the rest of the people in the United Kingdom expressed their view.” I therefore would not accept that that could be the case.

Ian Blackford: We are not seeking to impose a veto on the people of the United Kingdom. The people of the United Kingdom have voted to leave, and we respect that. We have asked that Westminster respect our situation of having voted to remain, as one of the family of nations. Why will the UK Government not support our right to remain within the single market?

Sammy Wilson: Of course, it depends on how you dress up that request.

The Government have made it clear that they want to hear about the concerns and issues that affect not just Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, but other regions of England, and particular industries as well. Indeed, they have set up mechanisms to do so. There are numerous conversations and discussions between officials within Departments. There is the Joint Ministerial Committee where politicians from the different countries that make up the United Kingdom can express their views. There are ministerial meetings. Not only that, but in the case of Northern Ireland the Government have made a commitment—

Mr MacNeil rose—

Sammy Wilson: No, I will not give way again.

The Government have had very good contacts with the Irish Republic because there are issues between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

For those reasons, we will be voting in support of the outcome of the referendum. I accept that some people in this House probably do have the right to be exempt from looking at what the people of the United Kingdom said and voting against it, because they were opposed to a referendum. However, many in this House who will be voting against the Bill tomorrow evening will be saying, “We voted for a referendum that gave people in the United Kingdom a right to express a view that will be binding, and now we simply disregard that.” They do not have a right to do that. That is where the line should be drawn.

The former leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), said that people did not know what they were voting for. Well, there is no excuse for people in this House not knowing what they are voting for now, because the Prime Minister has made that very clear in 6,000 words. During the referendum campaign, the people of the United Kingdom knew what they were voting for. Those who were voting to remain tried to scare the devil out of them. They told them that all kinds of horrors were going to beset them—that within a couple of days they would be eating dry bread and having to drink water, and losing their jobs—and still they voted to leave. Voting to leave meant that if we were going to have the freedom to make our own laws, we could not be part of the single market, because being part of the single market meant that somebody else made the laws. When people voted to leave, they knew they were voting to leave the customs union, because our future rests with those parts of the globe where there are expanding economies, not the part where, because of restrictive policies, the economy is contracting. People knew what they were voting for.

It has been argued that we should be thinking of the future of young people. I think that many young people listening to the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam would not believe what he was saying. This is a man who promised, “You will have fee-free education”, and then imposed fees on them. This is a man who voted, and whose party voted, for greater Government debt that will be paid for by young people out of their taxes in future. We would have found that had we remained in the EU as well.

Anna Soubry: Would the hon. Gentleman accept my word, and no doubt that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), that when we stood in Loughborough market on the day of the referendum, almost overwhelmingly everybody said to us that they were voting leave to get the immigrants out? That is the reality of the leave campaign.

Sammy Wilson: I can tell the right hon. Lady what my constituents voted for. They voted to make sure that the EU’s interference in our affairs was ended and that we made a decision about immigration policy, we made a decision about economic policy, we made a decision about environmental policy—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have been very generous to the hon. Gentleman, even though he seems blissfully unaware of the fact.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): As Attorney General, I had plenty of opportunities to witness some of the problems attendant on EU membership, including the difficulties of achieving harmony when there are 28 member states, of the ways in which rules could be applied, and, at times, of the irksome sclerosis that pervaded it as an organisation. I have to say, however,
that at no time did I have any doubt that being a member of the European Union was in our national interest. In the months that have elapsed since the referendum I have never taken the view that my opinion has any reason to change on this matter whatsoever. On the contrary, it seems to me that as the months go by it becomes clearer that the challenges we face in leaving the European Union are going to be very considerable.

We reassure ourselves that we wish to globalise and to look outwards. I never thought there was any problem in looking outwards from within the European Union in the first place. But as we go and spend time trying to get trade deals with third countries outside the European Union, it becomes manifestly obvious that each one of those will carry its own cost, and that that cost will often go beyond just economic issues and into values as well. That is what has always worried me most of all about the decision to leave. Although we are insistent, and rightly so, that we wish to continue close co-operation with our European partners, the reality is that we are embarking on producing a series of obstacles to understanding, and that means that we will be perceived as turning our back on countries who are not only our closest neighbours but in reality, as becomes manifestly more obvious with every passing year, share our values in a very developed fashion. That is not to say that that is exceptional—there are other countries that do so outside the EU—but these are key relationships for the wellbeing of our citizens and our national security. The only thing that has given me comfort during this period is that the speech by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a week or so ago seemed to me to set out very clearly an understanding of the challenges that we face and an intention to pursue a policy that, if it can be carried out—I have to say that I think it is going to be of considerable difficulty—would place the United Kingdom at the least disadvantage from its decision to leave.

So far as triggering article 50 is concerned, I take the view that I will support the Government in doing so, despite my deep concerns. That comes from two things. One, as has already been cited by others, is that I supported the referendum and, by implication, indicated that I would honour the decision that the electorate made. Even if I had not, one of the reasons why we are sent to this place is to pursue the national interest by looking at the widest considerations. I cannot see, at present, how continuing with political uncertainty would be in the national interest, if we tried to obstruct the decision that the electorate so clearly made.

That brings me to what we should try to do in this Bill. Many amendments have been tabled, many of which seem to me to involve micromanagement of the negotiating process, which is something that this Parliament cannot readily do. But I do worry about process. It may sound legalistic, but process, in my experience, matters enormously because it enables one to focus in a sensible way on the issues that arise. It worried me deeply that the Government—leave aside the legalities of the matter and the Supreme Court decision—seemed at the start of the process to want to deprive the House of a say in triggering article 50. In the same way, I worry very much that there should have a proper process to help to engage the House and the country in what we are going to do. We still do not have a White Paper, and I say to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that that White Paper has got to be there before we come to the Committee stage. Without it, we cannot have the informed debate that we will need to have at that stage.

Looking forward much further, there will come a time when the Government return to the House and ask for its approval of what they have succeeded in negotiating. Of course, they do not have to do so, because of the way in which conventions operate in foreign affairs. But I have to say to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that that has to happen before the matter goes to the European Parliament for ratification, if that is the deal that has been agreed. Those seem to me to be the two benchmarks that we will need if we are to maintain the support that the House needs to give to the Government if the negotiations are to lead to a satisfactory outcome.

I started my political career by campaigning for the “Keep Britain in Europe” campaign in 1974, so I cannot say that I am unemotional about this issue. I think we have made a grave error, and I think it is one that will become more and more apparent with the passage of time. In the meantime, the national interest is that we should all try to work together to achieve the best possible outcome for our country.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who, as ever, made some cogent points about the importance of process. I completely agree with him that the Government must lay out a process by which this House can begin to have a say in the proceedings and on the final deal.

I stand up today to talk with passion about the biggest constitutional change to this country in my lifetime and in several generations. I regret that I do not believe that we will reverse this decision, but I will not be supporting it. That is not because I do not recognise the result of the referendum. I cannot walk blindly through a Lobby to trigger a process without a shred of detail from the Government. There has been much talk of the Prime Minister’s speech—made not in this House, but elsewhere—but no White Paper and no detail. After seven months, it is really shocking that the Government can come to the House today and say so little.

There is still no real guarantee of parliamentary oversight. Although there was a vote to leave, there is a lot more detail below that decision that the House has a constitutional role to play in delivering. There is no certainty for business, as we stand here, and businesses in my constituency are very concerned about their future. There has been no word of succour for EU citizens resident in the UK, an issue I have raised with the Prime Minister. There has been no answer about the many regulations that will need to be transposed into our law will be dealt with. I suspect that we will see an explosion, at speed, of quangos. This is the same Government who wanted a bonfire of the quangos.

In the short time that I have, I want to focus my comments on EU citizens resident in the UK. At the last census in 2011, around 10% of my constituents were born in other EU countries. That was the case for about 27,000 residents across the Borough of Hackney, and the percentage is similar across London as a whole, where 841,000 people were born in other EU countries. If we look at student numbers, we see that 31,000 students...
from the EU were accepted in 2016, up 22% from 2010. That is a significant bunch of people who are contributing to our economy.

We cannot get figures for everywhere in our public services, but 5% of NHS staff UK-wide are from other EU countries. In 2015-16, nearly 11% of staff who joined the NHS were from European Union member states other than the UK. That has gone up from nearly 7% in 2012-13. That demonstrates that there is a big gap between our skills in this country and the skills and talents that we need to fill those jobs.

Let us look at the tech sector. I am proud to represent Old Street and Shoreditch, which is home to a burgeoning tech sector. Approximately 184,200 EU nationals work in tech. There are already issues with visas in this sector, because it is such a modern and emerging global industry. Often, jobs do not have titles—they do not exactly exist, in official terms—and there are real issues about where we get that talent from. Cutting off overnight the stream of EU citizens, who may be asked to leave this country, is a real issue.

Overall, 3 million EU citizens live and work in the UK. Those people pay more in tax than they withdraw in benefits, and they contribute at least £2 billion annually to our economy. A recent poll by BMG showed that a majority of UK residents believed that EU citizens’ rights should be guaranteed, with 58% agreeing with that position, 28% disagreeing and 14% saying “don’t know”. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) talked about the human misery that this is causing. I have had people ringing my office in tears because they are worried about their future. When I am on doorsteps talking to constituents, they cannot hold back their emotions, because they are fearful about what it will mean. What about the woman who wrote to me recently—a Dutch woman with a British partner and British children, who has spent 20 years in this country but does not know her future? What about another woman who is worried that she is a freelancer, she will not be able to stay in the UK?

Changing this issue would not require an amendment to the Bill; the Government could agree to it straight away. We should be very wary of turning on foreigners to the Bill; the Government could agree to it straight away. What about another woman who is worried that, because she is a freelancer, she will not be able to stay in the UK?

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Mr Nigel Evans: The hon. Lady is making a very powerful point. I actually think it is tantamount to torture not to tell people from the EU living and working in this country that they can stay, as it is for British people living and working in the European Union. Does she not believe that both sides ought to get together as quickly as possible and put people out of their misery by telling them that they are allowed to stay, to live and to work in the countries where they currently are?

Meg Hillier: I agree with that position, but I believe the Government could go further and make a unilateral declaration. These people live in our midst, they are our friends and our neighbours, they work in our public services, they are contributing to our economy, and I believe that people who are exercising their treaty rights today should be allowed to stay. They have made their lives in this country with every expectation that that would be the permanent position, and I think it would be magnanimous of the Government to give way now.
that it is liberal democratic structures that deliver economic peace that deliver us liberal democracies. I will not trade different view. I do not think it is economic success and everyone in this House will vote to trigger article 50.

An economic liberal democratic structure would give us success and peace. Therefore, a new modern 21st-century one area where a unilateral decision on our part would have been here for less than five years whom we really EU citizens living here, approximately 1.8 million have been. It is extremely important for us on the Labour need to protect. It is extremely important to enshrine environmental rights and ensure our communities are protected. It is extremely important for us on the Labour heartlands that never recovered from the 1980s.

It is also extremely important to protect the rights of EU citizens. Let us remember that, of the 2.8 million EU citizens living here, approximately 1.8 million have already established their right to be here. It is those who have been here for less than five years whom we really need to protect.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I might support unilateralism, but does the right hon. Lady concede, given the Government’s policy, that the only obstacle to guaranteeing reciprocal rights is that our European partners have dogmatically insisted on no negotiating before notification?

Ms Stuart: There is a rational case for what the hon. Gentleman says, but as we enter negotiations that is the one area where a unilateral decision on our part would set a tone for those negotiations that would serve EU citizens and UK citizens living in the EU.

I want to finish with one basic observation. I take a different view. I do not think it is economic success and peace that deliver us liberal democracies. I will not trade liberal democratic structures for anything else. I believe that it is liberal democratic structures that deliver economic success and peace. Therefore, a new modern 21st-century economic liberal democratic structure would give us that democracy and that peace. That is why I hope everyone in this House will vote to trigger article 50.
Mr Duncan Smith: Does my right hon. Friend speak French and German?

Mr Paterson: I chaired the meetings in French, and we translated for the Germans when they could not keep up.

I saw at the time the extraordinary growth of young economies elsewhere in the world, and I saw that we were being held back. It is tragic now to see how Europe is falling behind. Everyone bangs on about our sales to Europe and the single market. Our sales were 61% of our trade in 1999, they have now fallen to 43% and they will fall to 35%.

There are wonderful opportunities out there in the three main areas for which I have had ministerial responsibility. First, on Northern Ireland, I bitterly resent the comments about this damaging the peace process. We have, and will continue to have, the very best relations with the Republic of Ireland, and we will respect the common travel area and all that is good, but we need to revive the economy of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, it is hard to think of two areas of government activity more damaged by European government than the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. We will now return responsibility for those areas to a person at that Dispatch Box whom we can hold responsible. As Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I would come here and lamely say, “I’m a democratically elected Minister, but I cannot change this because we were outvoted.” For now on, responsibility will lie with elected persons accountable to this Parliament.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has heard the fishing industry complaining about the disadvantage it has faced under the CFP over the last 40 years?

Mr Paterson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. She invited me to Cornwall last summer. In a hotly fought contest, the CFP is the most dreadful, the most shatteringly bad act of misgovernment. It is a biological, environmental, economic and social disaster, and it cannot be reformed. Once we get power back to a Minister at that Dispatch Box, we can start holding them to account, and we can learn the lessons of the CFP, as I did in an Opposition green paper in 2005, after having travelled across the north Atlantic, to Norway, the Faroes, Iceland and Newfoundland, and then down to the Falklands. We can bring in modern technology and get away from the disgusting relic that is the quota system, which ensures that a quarter of fish are thrown back dead—no one really knows, but it can be 1 million tonnes and worth £1.6 billion annually.

Finally, there are also advantages for the environment. We are proud signatories to the Bern convention and the Ramsar convention, but those should be interpreted not at a European level, but specifically for our own environment. So we will gain in agriculture, in fisheries and on the environment, and I will be voting tomorrow for the Bill.

3.53 pm

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): It took the Supreme Court to remind us that we live in a parliamentary democracy. It is true that Parliament decided that we should have a referendum, and I find it difficult not to respect the outcome of the vote, but Parliament did not cut itself out of the issue altogether. It did not divest itself of involvement in determining what should happen when the UK withdraws from the EU, which is what the Bill enables. We are discussing the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union, not the Maastricht treaty—which, by the way, had 23 days of debate in Committee—or the Lisbon treaty, the Amsterdam treaty or the Single European Act. This Bill is more important than all those Bills wrapped together and multiplied by a large factor.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Leslie: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

That is why we should look carefully at what this Bill says. This Bill says, grudgingly, that Ministers will come and get permission from Parliament for the notification, but then they try to yank it right back to the Prime Minister, so that it is entirely, 100% back in the hands of Ministers alone to determine our fate outside the European Union. That is why I just cannot bring myself to vote in favour of this Bill: there are so many issues, so many ramifications and so many questions surrounding our withdrawal from the European Union that it is our duty—it is what the Supreme Court insisted we should do—to ensure due diligence and look at all the issues surrounding this question.

That is why I have decided to table a few, very judicious amendments to the Bill, to try to cover off a few corners of the questions that I think it needs to address. What will happen, for example, in our relationship with the single market? What are we doing for potentially tariff-free access or frictionless trade across the rest of Europe? Will we be able to have such advantages again? These are the questions that were not on the ballot paper, which simply asked whether we should remain in or leave the European Union. The ballot paper did not go into all those details, which are for Parliament to determine. It is for us as Members of Parliament to do our duty by performing scrutiny and ensuring that we give a steer to Ministers—that we give them their instructions on how we should be negotiating our withdrawal from the European Union.

I personally do not have faith in the Prime Minister’s vision for a hard Brexit—because it is a hard Brexit. We may currently be falling very gently through the air, like the skydiver who has jumped out of the aeroplane—“What seems to be the problem? We’re floating around”—but I worry about hitting the ground and the effect not just on our democracy, but on our constituents and their jobs and on the growth that we ought to be enjoying in the economy to keep pace with our competitors worldwide.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): My hon. Friend is giving an excellent speech. Will he confirm the view, which is held quite widely on the Opposition Benches, that absolutely critical to a successful Brexit will be membership of the single market?

Chris Leslie: Absolutely, and it beggars belief that we will not even be given the opportunity to debate that in this legislative process—a process, by the way, that the Government are so afraid to go into that they have
given it a meagre three days in Committee, an eighth of the time given to scrutinise the provisions of the Maastricht treaty. If they were not so frightened of debate, they would allow the House to go through all these questions.

What happens to EU nationals? Will they have rights to stay? It should be for Parliament to determine these things. Are we going to have a transitional arrangement, so that we do not fall off that cliff edge when we get to 1 April 2019? What about visa-free travel? What happens to the financial services trade? It may not face tariffs; it may face a ban on trading altogether in various different areas.

For the Prime Minister to have already accepted the red lines of the other European Union 27 countries—for her to have thrown in the towel on single market membership without even trying to adapt free movement and find a consensus, which I think would be available—is a failure of her approach at the outset. For her to accept the red line that we are not allowed to have parallel negotiations—that we can only do the divorce proceedings in these two years and then maybe talk about the new relationship—is a failure of the negotiations.

Anna Soubry: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the Prime Minister showed great reality in her speech a few weeks ago when she made it clear that if we do not accept free movement—as indeed she has made clear—then we cannot be a member of the single market? That is just the reality.

Chris Leslie: I very much respect the right hon. Lady’s contribution—she is an independent thinker on these issues—but I would not give up on the single market that easily. I think we should have at least asked and tried; that is what a negotiation is. We should not just accept the red lines set down by those on the other side of the table. We should go in and try to adapt it. No one should try to convince me that Germany, Italy and Greece, for example, are not facing issues that might lead them to want a more managed migration system. I think it could have been possible, if only we had had a little bit more ambition.

I believe that we should have had a bit more fight in this particular process in an attempt to salvage some of the advantages we need for future generations, let alone for today’s economy. I would like to see more fight from all Members of Parliament, and I would like to see more fight from our own leadership in the Labour party on this question. This is one of the most important pieces of legislation for a generation, and our children and future generations will look back on this moment and say, “What did you do to try to nudge the Prime Minister off her hard Brexit course; what did you do to try to steer the course of the Government negotiations away from the rocks and stop them falling over the cliff edge?”

I cannot bring myself to back this Bill, but I will not be dissuaded from doing my duty of trying to amend the Bill and to improve the process so that we get the right deal for Britain. That is our duty, and I urge all parliamentarians to use the Bill wisely in that respect. It might look like an innocuous sentence and a simple clause, but it has phenomenal ramifications, and if we do not try our best to come together across the parties to save some elements of the single market and salvage some of the benefits of tariff-free trade for all our businesses and our constituents, we will have failed massively in our duty as parliamentarians.

4.1 pm

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): After more than three hours of debate, a great deal of what needed to be said on either side has been said, and I do not intend to bore the House by repeating it. Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), I voted to remain; unlike him, I voted to promote the referendum and indeed played some part in bringing the Conservative party to the point of committing to a referendum. I shall therefore obviously vote tonight in favour of triggering article 50 in line with the outcome of that referendum. I shall also vote in the succeeding week against each and every attempt through amendments of whatever kind to bind the Government in any way—administratively or legally—because the Government must have the ability to negotiate flexibly and in the national interest.

In the brief minutes allowed, I would like to add one point that I do not think has so far come out of the debate: what we are doing if, as I suspect, we vote tomorrow night to trigger article 50. There has been some suggestion in some speeches that, somehow or other, this vote is not irrevocable or final, and that there will come a time when Parliament can decide whether it likes the deal that the Government have negotiated or whether it prefers instead to go back to the position of remaining in the EU. That is clearly contrary to what the Prime Minister set out in her speech, when she made it perfectly clear that, in her view, what Parliament will then be deciding is whether to accept the deal or not to accept it, in which case we will have to fall back on the WTO and other such arrangements because we will in any case leave.

I want to make it clear why I think the Prime Minister was right about that from three points of view. The first is the question of legal fact. None of us in this House is qualified to make a judgment about the law in that respect, but we have a piece of luck, which is that the Supreme Court has made a judgment on that. In the judgment of the High Court—a rather unusual High Court as it was composed—it was not totally clear, but in the Supreme Court judgment it was totally clear that the presumption of the minority as well as the majority was that this was an irrevocable act. The whole foundation of the legal case was that.

Mr Bone: My right hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech, but was it not agreed in the High Court that both sides accepted that it was irrevocable, so that the Supreme Court did not look at that question?

Sir Oliver Letwin: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, but it seems to me that the difference between the two judgments is that the Supreme Court made it clear that in an irrevocable act, what was happening in its view was a fundamental change in our constitution, which is a different character of argument from what was made in the High Court judgment—and it seems to me conclusive. It means that the Supreme Court has ruled that, in its view, this is an irrevocable act.

In a sense, that is irrelevant to us, because we are a Parliament and not a group of lawyers. So we come next to the question of the democratic mandate. Is there
a democratic mandate requiring that, when article 50 is triggered, the result—whatever it may be; an acceptable deal or a non-acceptable deal—should be that this country leaves?

In that regard, I thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) and one of two others who spoke in similar terms were right. In fact, I know they were right, because I am one of the guilty men. During the referendum campaign, I made it perfectly clear to the many audiences whom I addressed that, in my view—and this is part of the reason why I voted to remain—an inevitable consequence of leaving the EU would be leaving the single market, we would have to reassert our control of the borders which would be incompatible with the single market, we would seek to negotiate with the rest of the world, and therefore we would have to leave the customs union. I made it perfectly clear that we might find ourselves unable to negotiate a free trade agreement—because that takes two sides, and it is impossible for one side to guarantee what the other side will do—and that therefore we might have to fall back on the WTO, which I think would be greatly to the disadvantage of this country.

I made all that clear, so it seems to me, when it comes to the question of the democratic mandate, that the people who voted to leave were voting with their eyes wide open, knowing that the consequence might be our falling back on the WTO. I should add, to be fair, that the leave campaign—or, at least, the more responsible and sensible people in the leave campaign—made that perfectly clear as well. It seems to me that, both as a matter of legal fact and in the context of a democratic mandate, there is an extraordinarily strong argument for believing that when we vote tomorrow night we shall be taking an irrevocable step, which should not lead Parliament to be under any illusion that at a later date it can go back to remaining if it chooses, and if it does not like the deal.

The third, and, I think, overwhelming point is this: in the end, what matters most is the fate of our country. All these arguments are just arguments, but the fate of our country is a real thing that affects the men and women living in it. The truth is that the negotiating hand that our Government have will largely determine whether, in the event, we secure a comprehensive free trade deal of the kind that the Prime Minister rightly seeks. I know of no fact more certain than that if the House were to suggest to our counterparties in the EU 27 that we might decide at a later date that, if the deal offered to us was bad enough, we would prefer to remain, they would offer us the worst deal they could think of. It would be an inevitable consequence of their wanting to keep us in—and, although I do not know exactly why, many of our EU 27 counterparts do want to keep us in—that they would best achieve that by offering the worst deal possible if they knew that Parliament might then vote to remain.

I therefore think that we in the House have a very solemn duty to make it abundantly clear—not just to the people in this country, but to the EU 27—that tomorrow night’s vote will be an irrevocable act. We must make it clear that we are taking a step from which we cannot go back; that if those countries want a proper deal that is in the mutual interest, they should offer it; and that if we do not get that deal we will leave, because we have triggered article 50 and we will be out, and we will have to cope with the consequences thereafter. That makes tomorrow night’s vote one of the most important that we shall ever take in the House, and I take it with some doubt and hesitation, but I take it because I believe that, ultimately, the will of the people has been expressed.

4.8 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I find myself in the invidious position of agreeing with virtually everything that was said by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), and with virtually everything that has been said by my hon. Friends who intend to vote against the Bill’s Second Reading tomorrow evening. I differ from them in one respect only: I do not think it is possible for me, as a democratically elected Member of Parliament who entered into the referendum process having accepted that we were going to have a referendum, then to tell the public that somehow I know better, and that I am not going to honour the outcome of that referendum.

I will vote in favour of triggering article 50 for that reason, but also because I do not want the Conservatives, every time I challenge them over the process and every time I challenge them to come back to the House to be held accountable for what they are negotiating on behalf of this country, to turn around and say that I am seeking to second-guess the outcome of the referendum. They must be accountable to the House for what they are doing.

There are some questions to be asked about whether members of the Government are acting in our best interests. We had the spat with the Italian Economic Development Minister over whether Italy would be hurt by selling less prosecco to the UK, where he turned around and said, “We may sell a little less prosecco, but that’ll be happening in one country, while you’ll be selling less to 27 countries.” We had the comments of the Foreign Secretary over freedom of movement as a founding principle of the European Union, where he used a very unfortunate word in an interview with a Czech newspaper and said it is a “total myth” and “nonsense” to say it is a “founding principle”. He may well believe that that is true, but that is not the way to go about negotiating with people who are going to have an important say over future trade agreements for this country. Then, when it came to the meeting about the outcome of the American presidential election, he spoke down to the people attending a meeting specially convened to discuss that, and said:

“I would respectfully say to my beloved European friends and colleagues”.

What sort of language is that to use—talking down to the very people we want to co-operate with us in future negotiations? He also went on to describe Donald Trump as “a liberal guy from New York”.

He may well be rethinking that one.

The Government have clearly shown that they are not to be trusted with these negotiations without having oversight from this House of Commons. We must have a say in this process. I will be voting to trigger article 50, and I have heard speeches from the Government Benches where Members have said that they also want to have a say over the process here in Parliament. I hope that we
will see them voting on amendments to ensure that that actually takes place in the three days of debates we will have next week.

I have heard all the talk about a brave new world that is going to open up for us under the World Trade Organisation, but people do not seem to be respecting the fact that there are rules, regulations and tariffs to be negotiated with the World Trade Organisation. In fact, it is highly likely that our easiest way into the World Trade Organisation is to take as a package all the agreements that we have under the EU and adopt them under the WTO; that is the easiest way possible to avoid all sorts of challenges to the UK.

Incidentally, we do not have the teams of lawyers, accountants and officials who are used to dealing with these sorts of negotiations to act on our behalf. We are opening up all these negotiations without having the expertise in place. The Government have repeatedly been asked questions about building up these Departments and the expertise: where are the experts who are used to negotiating on behalf of the UK? They are all in Europe; they have been doing it at a European level, and they are not here. We are going to have to do that at several levels—over article 50, over future trade agreements and over trade agreements through the WTO.

What is going to happen with those countries who have vested interests, like Spain, who might want to use this vulnerability of the UK to open up negotiations about Gibraltar? If we go into the World Trade Organisation, would Argentina start to challenge agreements with the UK to open up negotiations about the UK and open up negotiations about the future of the Falklands Islands?

This is the reality of international trade agreements; this is the real world that we are going to be moving into. The idea that we can just fall out of Europe and fall into the World Trade Organisation with absolutely no consequences is folly. That is why this House of Commons has got to have a say over the process and scrutinise in detail what this Government are doing on behalf of this country. We as Members of Parliament have a duty to do that, and the Government should not stand in the way of democratic accountability in this House under the guise of saying, “You’re trying to renegotiate the outcome of the referendum.” That is not true, but that does not mean they cannot avoid accountability. I hope the Government will accept an amendment on that basis so that we do bring sovereignty back here to this House of Commons.

4.14 pm

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): May I begin by saying how grateful I am, and I am sure many other Members are, to both the High Court and the Supreme Court for their rulings which ensure that this Bill comes in front of the House of Commons today? As has been pointed out by our judges, not least by Lord Justice Laws in the “metric martyrs” case, the original European Communities Act 1972 was a constitutional statute of such significance that it and its provisions can only be changed by legislation, and I am glad that the Government have brought forward this Bill. The 1972 Act is so significant because, uniquely, it allows laws made outside this House to have a direct effect on the law of this land. That means that laws that were made in the period between 1972 and now, when literally thousands of laws were imposed on the people of this country not only without scrutiny but without debate, without votes and without the possibility of amendment or rejection? I have to say that those people are pretty late coming to the democratic party now.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Michael Gove: No.

In talking about democracy, it is vital, as was pointed out in the brilliant speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), that we do not attempt to revisit the decision that the British people made last year. I thought it was instructive that the former leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), was so dismissive of the result and of the debate during the referendum campaign. A previous leader of the Liberal Democrat party said on referendum night:

“In. Out. When the British people have spoken you do what they command. Either you believe in democracy or you don’t. When democracy speaks we obey. All of us do...Any people who retreat into ‘we’re coming back for a second one’—they don’t believe in democracy.”

It is a tragedy that the party that is called Liberal Democrat is scarcely liberal and, now, anti-democratic.

It would be harmful for our democracy at a time when we are all concerned about the rise of raucous populism—[Interruption.] I note the response from Scottish National party Members, who are the prime traders in raucous populism and the politics of division. If we were now to reject the considered decision of 17.4 million of our fellow citizens, we would only feed the disaffection with the democratic process that has led to unfortunate results in other countries. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset was right when he said that we should respect the result and honour the mandate.

A number of people are now asking for White Papers, scrutiny and greater clarity, but we have already had the promise of a White Paper, and a 6,000-word speech from our Prime Minister. We have had clarity in all these issues. Those people will not take yes for an answer; they are seeking not clarity but obfuscation, delay and a dilution of the democratic mandate of the British people.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): A 6,000-word speech from my right hon. Friend would be a very short speech. I want to challenge him on the issue of the White Paper. He and many others who campaigned and voted to leave want to take back control. They want control to rest in this sovereign Parliament. Does he agree, therefore, that it is right that the terms on which the Government want to start the negotiations should be presented in a White Paper to this Parliament and not just in a speech at Lancaster House?

Michael Gove: The Prime Minister has already agreed that a White Paper will be published, and rightly so. The Secretary of State has said from the Dispatch Box...
that it will come as soon as possible. I have enormous respect for my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), and I shall return in a moment to an argument that she has made outside this place.

Many of those who have called for a White Paper or for clarification rarely outline what they think the right course of action is. It is very rare to hear a positive case being put forward. Instead, we repeatedly hear attempts to rewrite what happened in the referendum. The right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) tried to present the referendum debate as though it had somehow been inconclusive on questions such as our membership of the single market or the customs union, but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said, we could not have been clearer on behalf of the leave campaign that we were leaving the single market. It was also made perfectly clear that we could not have trade deals in the future without leaving the customs union.

Anna Soubry: Will my right hon. Friend please assure us that he will be true to his claim, as a leader of the leave campaign, that £350 million a week will now be going into our NHS? Or does he agree with others who say that that figure was always false and that that was a lie?

Michael Gove: I have no idea whether the word “lie” is unparliamentary, but as someone who is not in the Government I cannot deliver such sums. What I can do, however, is consistently argue, as I have done, that when we take back control of the money that we currently give to the European Union we can invest that money in the NHS. In fact, it was the consistent claim of the leave campaign, as my right hon. Friend well knows, that we wished to give £100 million to the NHS—some of the money that we were going to take back control of—and also spend money on supporting science and ensuring that we could get rid of VAT on fuel, something which we cannot do while we are still a member of the European Union.

Angela Smith: The right hon. Gentleman may not be in the Government and therefore able to make the decision, but will he confirm whether he will be lobbying his Prime Minister hard for £350 million for the NHS?

Michael Gove: I have repeatedly argued that we should ensure that that money is spent on our NHS and on other vital public services when we leave the European Union. That goes to the heart of the fair challenge issued by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the Opposition spokesman: how do we ensure that the views of the 52%, which were clear, unambiguous and to which this legislation gives effect, and the views of the 48% who did not vote to leave are respected? The 48% are represented at the highest levels of Government. We have a Prime Minister and a Chancellor who voted to remain in the European Union, so it is not as though those views are ignored or marginal.

My challenge and my offer is that we ensure that the Brexit we embrace is liberal, open and democratic. For my part, that means more money to the NHS, but it also means embracing the principles outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough in a recent “ConservativeHome” article. It means, as the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said, giving an absolute unilateral guarantee to EU citizens that they should stay here. It also means having a free trade policy liberated from the common external tariff, allowing us to lower trade barriers to developing nations and to help the third world to advance. It means exercising a leadership role on the world stage at a time when European Union politicians are increasingly naive or appeasing in their attitude towards Vladimir Putin. It means that we can stand tall, as the Prime Minister did, in making the case for collective western security and NATO. Those opportunities are all available to us as we leave the European Union. The challenge for the Opposition and the opportunity for us is to ensure that we make that positive case.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): Within the London Borough of Wandsworth, which contains my constituency, small businesses have been booming, and the previous Prime Minister and a member of the Government’s Treasury team—[Interruption.] Basically, last year, the Prime Minister said that businesses were booming due to access to the single market. Does the right hon. Gentleman deny that?

Michael Gove: I absolutely do. Since we have left the European Union, it has been remarkable to see—[Interruption.]—that we could get rid of VAT on fuel, something which we cannot do while we are still a member of the European Union.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds), may I appeal to Members to have some regard for the conventions of this place? I realise that the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), although incredibly bright, is very new to the House, but if one intervenes on a Member, one must do so with some regard to their moral entitlement to have time to reply, which the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) did not.

Dr Allin-Khan: Duly noted.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I certainly remember the Vote Leave campaign bus that promised £350 million a week for the NHS, which we unfortunately saw on our TV screens night in, night out, but I digress in following the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). I campaigned to remain in the EU, but I accept the result of the referendum and will vote for this Bill tomorrow. The leader of the Liberal Democrats calls that cowardly; I call it democracy. We held a national referendum. Those of us on the remain side might not like the result, but we have to accept it. It was close, but it was clear—and it was clear in my constituency. However, that does not mean that the Government get a free pass, and it does not mean that if I strive to hold them to account, I am an enemy of the people. After all, the Government are accountable to this place and have already made some major errors not just on the substance of these negotiations, but on the tone. For example, it is the height of irresponsibility for the Foreign Secretary to choose to pick needless fights with our EU counterparts
when we are about to embark on one of the most complicated and sensitive negotiations in our history. His locus, like ours, should be on securing the best deal for the UK and the rest of the EU.

For me, today’s debate is not about whether we leave the EU, but about how this House holds the Government to account at every stage of the process and makes sure that they secure the best deal for the UK. After all, a bad deal or no deal could have catastrophic results for our economy, for jobs, for investment and for the living standards of the people we represent.

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Lady mentioned the vote. To paraphrase the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the people of my country—the people of my nation—voted to remain, and I will be voting accordingly.

Emma Reynolds: The referendum in Scotland a couple of years ago was lost by the SNP. We are one country, and this was a national referendum.

I wish to make three brief points. First, we must have meaningful parliamentary scrutiny of the process. We are debating the Bill only because the Supreme Court upheld parliamentary sovereignty, which Eurosceptics have lectured us about throughout the decades but seem to think that we can give up on this issue. Giving MPs the opportunity to vote on and scrutinise the Government’s plans at the very start and the very end of the process is not good enough. We are not here simply to rubber-stamp the Government’s plans and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) so eloquently put it, we are not passive bystanders. We should be active participants in this process. After all, our Parliament represents every corner of our country and this Government do not.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, who used to be a great champion of parliamentary sovereignty back in the day, said in this House on 24 January:

“The simple truth is that there will be any number of votes—too many to count—in the next two years across a whole range of issues.”—[Official Report, 24 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 168.]

On that day I asked him whether Members of this House would get a vote either before or at the same time as the European Parliament. He claimed that he had not thought about that, which was rather odd, and kindly agreed to write to me. I am still waiting for his letter.

The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) forcefully made the point that we cannot just have a vote at the end of this process, when we could be left with a choice of no deal or leaving. In his winding-up speech tomorrow, I would like the Minister to tell us whether this House will have a vote prior to the European Parliament’s vote on that stage of the negotiation. I hope that one of the amendments on that point will be agreed to.

Secondly, the Government must deliver the best economic deal and be clear about what it means. They must level with the British people about the risks to our economy. I understand that they have ruled out membership of the European single market. The Prime Minister says that her priority is tariff-free trade, but the benefits of the single market go way beyond a traditional free trade agreement. The single market is a vast factory floor with integrated supply chains, and goods and services move seamlessly across borders. As the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said, regulatory borders matter more than tariffs in the modern world, especially in advanced economies like our own. That is why businesses and business organisations are calling for regulatory stability, and I would like to hear more from the Government about that.

One of the most alarming prospects raised by the Prime Minister in her Lancaster House speech was that she was prepared to settle for no deal. What is a worse deal than no deal? I am struggling to understand why we would want to choose to fall back on WTO rules and tariffs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eelham (Clive Efford) said so eloquently, that would be catastrophic and would involve huge risks to jobs, investment and our constituents’ prosperity.

Thirdly, and finally, I agree with hon. Members who have said that the Government should unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU nationals, as that would create good will in the negotiations and ensure that our nationals in other EU member states get the same treatment, but I also believe the Government should put forward a preferential and managed migration system within these negotiations. The Government are wrong to assume that free trade deals are just about trade. When the Prime Minister went to India, what did the Indian Government want to talk about? They wanted to talk about visas for their business people and for their students. To secure the best possible economic deal, the Government must put forward proposals that give EU workers preference, but we should also have a system that controls the numbers. That is why I, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), have proposed a two-tier system that would retain free movement for highly skilled workers, but put in place controls for low-skilled and semi-skilled workers. I hope that the Government will start to give Parliament a meaningful say on this process.

4.30 pm

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I suspect and fear that the process we are about to vote on will, in effect, close a lengthy chapter in our national history that has included our support of enlargement, and that has seen sustained growth in our economy, our country becoming more liberal and our being more active in the international field. That is a great problem to have to deal with, and historians will ask in years to come: why did we do this? We have to make sure that we understand the gravity of the situation and the seriousness of our decision. I campaigned very hard to stay in the EU, both in my own constituency, where I got 55% to say yes, and across the country. However, I did say that this was the decision and it was the decision that mattered, so I feel duty bound to recognise that I have to support article 50 this week, although I do so with a very, very heavy heart.

I want to say something about trade. There seems to be this idea that because we are in the EU we cannot trade elsewhere, but that is wrong. Germany, France, Italy, Poland and Spain all export to the rest of the world precisely because they are in the EU and because we have free trade agreements with the rest of the world. Let us be clear that all such agreements will have to be remade by us.
Mr Duncan Smith: If, as my hon. Friend supposes, the EU has been so successful at putting in place trade deals, how is that Switzerland has been able to set up many more trade deals than the EU has managed over the years?

Neil Carmichael: It is worth bearing in mind that the EU accounts for almost a quarter of the world’s GDP and is involved in a huge amount of trade. That is a signal of why it is important for us to bear in mind what the EU has done for us.

I now want to talk about the 48% of people who voted to remain, because it is crucial that they are properly represented in this process. When we elect a Government in a general election, we do not expect them to govern just for one bit of the country; we expect them to govern for the whole country, with regard to every aspect of our national life. I do the same in my constituency. I do not ask whether someone voted for me before I start dealing with them; I say, “You are one of my constituents, whoever you voted for.” That is how we have to deal with this business about Brexit. We must recognise that the 48% have a say and should be included, because that is how we are going to bring this together. We need to open things up and make sure that we reach out to them. Those of us who were in the 48% need to reach out to the others. When we are looking at the great repeal Bill—we should recall what happened to the Conservative party when we looked at the Great Reform Act—we will discover one or two important things about our national life, as we find that we are not always being told by the EU to do things that we do not want to do. I am look forward to the opportunity of exposing the facts during that debate, because Brexiteers will be disappointed to discover that quite a lot of things that we supposedly want to repeal are actually things that we might want to retain.

Mr MacNeil: On the point about being told what to do, was the hon. Gentleman astonished by the speech made by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), who is no longer in the Chamber? He said that the feeling in Northern Ireland was that the EU was telling people there what to do, and that that was a terrible thing, but that the fact that Northern Ireland is being told by the UK to leave the EU is seemingly okay. The idea of who is telling whom to do what seems to a shape-shifting one.

Neil Carmichael: I usually find that when I am telling somebody to do something they do not want to do, I get the blame, and if I suggest something that they do want to do, it was their idea in the first place. That is how we should remember this. When we look back on our history, we will see that that was absolutely right with regard to the European Union.

I wish to talk about events. Harold Macmillan was a great one for events, and we face two years of important events, some of which will be unpleasant and some quite surprising. I cannot predict what they will be, but the Government do have to react carefully to them, because they will involve changes in the economic mood and international policy situations that require a response above and beyond what we are focusing on with Brexit.

We must remember that events will provide opportunities for a more sensible view about how we direct our Brexit negotiations and sense of purpose. Parliament must have a significant say in how we proceed because such events will affect this country, our judgment, the negotiations and the overall outcome. The place to discuss and properly debate these things is Parliament, not press releases. Parliament is the national place for such decisions.

The fact that we cannot leave Europe geographically is critical. We are only a few miles away from the European continent, so we will always need to have good relationships with it and the 27 member states. I urge the Government—and everyone—to make sure that over the next two years those relationships are built on and strengthened. We do not want to find ourselves in a situation in which we do not have these friendships and alliances. Why? Because Europe itself will change, and we want to be part of that, driving it forward to even greater and better things. If we play our cards right, that will offer us the opportunity to think about, for example—I am just speculating—associate membership. We must not turn our back on the opportunities that might present themselves, which is why I am so keen that Parliament has a strong role and that, over the next two years, we think about possible events and opportunities, and retain and strengthen our relationships in Europe.

It is, of course, essential that Parliament has a final say when we get to the endgame, if we actually do it. It is not only necessary to talk about voting on whether we have a deal or no deal; it is important that we have a view about where we go if a satisfactory deal does not emerge, or if no deal emerges at all. We must have a contribution to make. It is not correct to say that the European Union is hellbent on making our life a misery. Everybody knows that we are interdependent—we know that and it knows that, and it is important for us to accept that as a Parliament and as a country.

I am going to borrow a very good phrase from one of my constituents: “You shouldn’t jump out of an aeroplane without checking that the parachute is working.” That is what we will have to consider as we head towards the final moments in two years. We must think about how we incorporate in our decision the views of not only the 52%, but the 48%. We must think about the opportunities that may arise from events, as well as threats that might emerge, and we must maintain good relationships. Above all, we must recognise that this Parliament is sovereign; it always has been, and that is what we have to salute.

4.39 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow a thoughtful contribution from the hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael). A Government who were confident in what they were doing and confident that they were pursuing the right ends would have had no difficulty in engaging with Parliament. In fact, they would have welcomed the opportunity. What we saw instead was a Government and a Prime Minister hiding from Parliament and the democratic processes on which good governance is built. They were forced into coming to the House and doing the right thing only because they were dragged before the courts, defeated, and defeated again by campaigners holding up the principle of parliamentary democracy as something to which the Government should bow. I, too, would like to take this opportunity to thank those democracy campaigners—I single out Gina Miller in particular—for their contribution, which, as I have mentioned before, will have long-lasting effects on this and other issues.
This Bill—these few paragraphs, this poor excuse for legislation—has been wrung out of the Government, and its brevity is childish and disrespectful to this place, the courts and the people whose representatives come here on their behalf. The Government should be ashamed of themselves. The suggestion is that no preparation was done by the Government in advance of the Court judgment—not even when the judgment was going back to appeal without much hope of success. That would smack of the same kind of arrogant laziness that marked the approach of David Cameron's Government to the referendum. There was no preparation; they just winged it and hoped. After hearing Members from the Government Benches, I am shocked that they do not think that the people should be entitled to know what the plan is. People like to mention the independence referendum very often: in Scotland, we debated the details for two years. In this place, the Government still do not what the details are two months before kick-off.

A clear indication of the lack of preparation is the attitude that the Government have struck towards the devolved Administrations, promising consultation and open dialogue, but delivering little—almost nothing. The Scottish Government, who have put some thought into how to proceed, offered some constructive suggestions but had nothing in return other than a promise that the paper that they presented would be read. There was no real engagement, no dialogue, no offer to discuss the negotiations as they go along, and no offer of a seat at the negotiating table for Scottish Ministers. That is what a United Kingdom Government would offer if they were serious about taking the devolved Administrations with them and if they were confident of their ground.

Scotland and Wales have particular reasons to be anxious about what the UK Government are doing in Europe, but Northern Ireland, despite the warm words of the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), has more reason than most to worry. The prospect of a return to a hard border is horrendous for communities and businesses in Northern Ireland and any threat to the common travel area extremely serious. The Government’s attitude to date seems to be an approach that says that everything will be fine, that Northern Ireland has always been treated as a special case by the EU and will be treated so again. That ignores the fact that it was treated as a special case while it was part of the EU. There are no guarantees that any EU institution or member state will feel like giving special dispensation to Northern Ireland. If there is a case to be made there, it may only be by the grace and good will of the Irish Government that it is made.

The UK is approaching Brexit in the same way that this Bill was made—with hope, arrogance, swagger, disdain and, frankly, nothing in its pockets. There is nothing on offer to our European partners because the arrogant assumption of this Government and of the Brexiteers around them is that the EU needs the UK and, pretty soon, my other single largest trading partner—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—will not be in the EU either. The Republic should be getting out along with us.

Deidre Brock: Maintaining a close trading relationship with Northern Ireland will of course be in the best interests of the UK, whether or not it is in Europe, and it is the same with Europe as well.

Let me return to my point about the Government believing that the EU’s financial institutions will come begging rather than that firms will move staff to the EU. That is how it appears and how it will continue to appear; because this legislation, perhaps the most important constitutional legislation considered by this House in 40 years, has come without a White Paper or an intelligible Government position. It has come without a manifesto commitment and without preparation. This Bill cannot be entrusted to carry the intent of this House, because this House does not know the intent of the Government in leading negotiations with the 27 other EU states. What does the trading agreement they seek look like? Does it give us full access to the market? What about the movement of people between EU countries and the UK? We hear a constant barrage of comments about taking back control of immigration, but nothing about how those controls will be exercised. We know neither the starting position nor the hoped-for end effects of the triggering of article 50. We saw a supposed 12-point plan recently, but frankly that looked more like a wish list. In the great field of evidence-based policy making, this Bill does not figure. The devolved Administrations on these islands have been operating without knowing what position the UK Government are taking, each trying to find some kind of satisfactory rescue for their people, but all hampered by the UK Government.

I should be astonished that the Government are seeking to take the UK out of the EU with this pitiful “dog ate my homework” excuse for a Bill and I should be shocked that most of the loyal Opposition are not opposing it, but I am not. We have come to expect nothing more from this clueless, rudderless Government and this apparently fratricidal official Opposition. The SNP will not support the triggering of article 50. We believe that Scotland’s place is in the EU and we are here to speak up for Scotland’s best interests. I hope that enough Members on the Government and Labour Benches have the character to join us in the Lobby, but I am not holding my breath.

4.45 pm

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): This is an historic day. I participated in the campaign and fought hard for us to leave the European Union. I was too young to vote in the first referendum in 1975—[Interruption.] My birth certificate will be available for viewing later. I was too young, so this, 43 years later, was the first referendum on Europe in which I had an opportunity to vote. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) said that when someone is jumping out of an aeroplane, they should make sure that the parachute is working; I prefer the adage “if at first you don’t succeed, skydiving isn’t for you”.

On this occasion, the British people knew exactly what they were doing. It was a hard fought campaign. We heard all the arguments for remaining, which were
characterised as “Project Fear”. I am really pleased that the vast majority of what was predicted has simply not happened.

**Mr MacNeil:** The hon. Gentleman says that the British people knew exactly what they were doing. I have great respect for him, as he knows, but the International Trade Committee, on which he and I sit, has had sitting after sitting trying to work out what it is all going to mean. I am amazed that everybody knew everything before, given all those sittings. I find those two ideas rather incongruous.

**Mr Evans:** It was said that a number of things would happen when we left the European Union. I suspect that the reality is that many were somewhat surprised that the British people had the guts: despite what they were told was going to happen, they still decided to vote to leave the European Union. I remember the then Prime Minister appearing on television and saying that if we voted to leave, we would also be leaving the single market—he actually said that on the “Marr” programme just a couple of weeks prior to the referendum on 23 June. As Prime Minister, he said that, so we needed to take heed. People knew that. He said it to frighten people into not voting to leave the European Union.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP) rose—

**Mr Evans:** I will make a bit more progress if I may. Despite all those threats, the British people decided that, in their considered opinion, they wanted to vote to leave the European Union. About 57% of my constituents voted to leave—all the Lancashire constituencies, in fact, voted to leave the European Union. In the north-west of England, on a 70% turnout—not a thin turnout—54% decided to vote to leave. That reminds me of the referendum on Welsh devolution. The turnout was 50.1%, 49.7% of whom said no and 50.3% of whom said yes. And what did we do? We did not shout for a second referendum. We did not even call for a recount. Is it too late? The fact is that we accepted the result on a thin turnout and a very close result indeed, and that is what is expected of us on this occasion.

I condemn the pamphlet that was sent to every household in the country at the cost of £9.3 million. I was one of the people who did not send it back to No. 10 Downing Street without a stamp; I kept it as a souvenir. The back of it read:

“This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide.”

Therefore, if we believe in democracy, the onus is on us to accept the verdict of the British people—52% versus 48%—and give the Prime Minister the power to trigger article 50.

I fully recognise the trauma felt by many European Union citizens who live and work in this country, thinking they could be asked to leave. The idea that we will round up EU nationals and put them on the next Ryanair or easyJet flight back to whichever country they came from is bonkers. That would be quite despicable, and we ought to clarify as quickly as possible that we will not ask that of them.

**Dr Allin-Khan:** EU citizens are a vital part of our community. They work in our communities. Many of us are married to them, and they are our friends, families and colleagues. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should give these people, who have contributed so much, legal certainty, as soon as possible?

**Mr Evans:** I totally agree with the hon. Lady. I also have cognisance of the British people who happen to live in the south of Spain, or who work and live in Madrid, Frankfurt and various other parts of the European Union. They are going through the same trauma that EU citizens are going through here.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Evans:** I will not because I do not have time.

As I understand it, the Prime Minister has already made it clear that as soon as the rest of the EU says yes—whether President Juncker or someone else makes the decision—regarding British citizens in the EU, that is exactly what will happen for EU citizens living here. It is cruel and inhumane for the Commission to say that it will not clarify its position until we trigger article 50 and the negotiations begin, as if human beings should be pawns in the negotiation. If that position is kept up, I ask the Government to ensure that this matter is the first thing negotiated in the process. As soon as the agreement comes, we should announce it straight away and we should let people know our exact intention, not wait until the two-year process is finished. That is the humane thing to do. The prospect of Germany, which has taken in 1 million refugees from the middle east, rounding up British citizens and sending them home is a remarkable thought and it would be a remarkable sight. The situation must be clarified as quickly as possible.

In conclusion, I believe in democracy and I actually love Europe. I love my European neighbours and I visit on a regular basis. I am a member of the Council of Europe. Indeed, I was at one of its part-sessions in Strasbourg last week. But the British people have voted to leave the European Union. It is a simple choice. Those who are going to deny the verdict of the British people appear to love the EU more than they love democracy, and that is a dangerous thing.

4.54 pm

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): I quite enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) until the last bit.

Today we debate not just this shortest of short Bills but our intention to set in train enormous constitutional, legal, political, social and economic changes for our country. Yet this was a debate the Government did not want us to have. They had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the highest court in the land and ordered to give this sovereign Parliament a say, taken there by a brave woman who is now receiving death threats for her trouble. The Government tried to claim that taking back control meant the revival of government by diktat using the royal prerogative—an abuse that the civil war was fought to eliminate.

Literally everything we have legislated for in the past 40 years through the EU is now up for grabs: rights at work, health and safety, environmental standards, regulation, consumer rights, food standards, and trading rules.
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): With regard to this list of all the rights that we are going to lose, allegedly, or that those who wish to remain in the EU think we are going to lose, why can we not make all these decisions in this place, for our country, for the benefit of our people? We do not need other people to make our rules.

Ms Eagle: When we joined the European Union we pooled parts of our sovereignty so that we could have a bigger bang for the buck that we spent, particularly on issues such as the environment. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has noticed, but pollution does not stop at national borders.

The most hallucinatory of the Euroscopist nostalgies in the Tory party dream of a frictionless divorce with no real consequences, economic or otherwise—a trade deal swiftly done which grants the UK all the benefits of EU membership with none of the costs. Some of them even imagine a new mercantilist British empire, forgetting that times have almost certainly moved on. They are content to gamble with 50% of our trade and 100% of our prosperity.

I argued passionately against the isolationist leave side in the referendum, and fought back against the alternative facts and magical thinking that underlay many of the arguments put forward by the other side. I especially disapproved of the downright lies on the NHS cynically perpetrated by the leading lights of the leave campaign and repudiated by them on the day after their victory. Who will ever forget that bus, now a byword for cynical manipulation? As it happens, the Wirral voted narrowly in favour of remaining—a tribute to its good judgment, along with its record of returning a full deck of Labour MPs at the last general election.

But we are where we are, and it is undoubtedly the case that the country as a whole voted 52:48 to leave. The referendum split the country down the middle. A Government interested in building a decent future for our country would have sought to bring us together, but this Government have done the opposite. They have chosen to interpret the results of the referendum as a victory for Nigel Farage’s very own version of “Little Britain”. First there were the xenophobic speeches at Tory conference announcing the creation of lists of foreign workers, then the months of confusion about the nature of the Government’s plan, then the Prime Minister’s speech, and finally a promised, but as yet unpublished, White Paper.

If she does not get her way in Europe, the Prime Minister has threatened to create a low-regulation Britain with fewer human, civil and workers’ rights guaranteed in law, unmaking decades of social progress. That is unacceptable to Labour Members and I believe it is unacceptable to the British public. The narrow majority of British voters who cast their ballots for Britain to leave the EU did not, to a person, have in their mind’s eye a libertarian fantasy state as their end goal. They were told they could expect, and they voted for, more money for crucial services, and sensible controls on immigration. In reality, they continue to get massive cuts to the NHS, policing, local services and schools, as this Government’s austerity cuts continue to decimate our public services and care for the elderly.

I fully endorse the amendments tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—they would make the best of this difficult situation—but I know that Opposition amendments, no matter how sensible, rarely get accepted by the Government, especially this Government, who seem obsessed with bringing about the most extreme Brexit possible. Labour will fight to get the best possible Brexit deal.

I surveyed members in Wallasey this past weekend, and I received responses from a substantial number of them. To the hundreds who responded I say thank you for shaping my approach to this most difficult of votes. A huge majority thought that the Bill would make them and their families worse off. Just over half thought that we should engage but beware of the Government’s motives, and that we should give the Government authorisation to proceed only once we had guarantees on workers’ rights and tariff-free access to the single market.

As democratic politicians, we have to recognise the result of the referendum, but that does not give the Government carte blanche for an extreme Brexit. It does not give the Government permission to destroy the social settlement and make our society poorer and even more precarious. Labour’s amendments guaranteeing rights at work, equality rights and the environmental standards that we take for granted now are crucial if the Bill is to be acceptable and to help to bring our divided country together.

Rather than presenting the House with the most perfunctory Bill possible, I wish the Government had wanted to engage and involve Parliament in what will be the most crucial project we have undertaken in generations. I wish we had a Government who wanted to grant meaningful votes and real influence to Parliament rather than simply trying to reduce parliamentary sovereignty to a take-it-or-leave-it rubber stamp.

We swap the known for the unknown in one of the most volatile political eras that I have experienced in my lifetime. We throw away established relationships and economic connections, including deeply integrated European supply chains and cultural affinities. We alienate our closest allies in perilous times. We have a divided and angry country. Social injustice and poverty are soaring, and many regions are being neglected. I am in politics to defend them, and defend them I will.

5.1 pm

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Last year, as Minister for Life Sciences, I voted for the EU referendum on the basis that I would be bound by the result. Despite watching over many years with a heaviness of heart the growing failure of the EU to create an entrepreneurial economy, on balance I felt that we were better off staying in to fight for a reformed, 21st-century EU. As Life Sciences Minister responsible for a £250 billion sector, I felt that I had to speak for its interests. So I campaigned, along with many colleagues, for remain, not in a bullying way but in an open way.

I actively offered my constituents a choice by inviting my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) and my friend the hon. Member for Clacton (Mr Carswell) to my constituency to put their side of the debate. We held the debate, and I lost it. Our constituents voted to leave the European Union. My constituents voted, and the country voted, in one of the biggest acts of democracy we have seen for centuries.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) said, we are not delegates. As Edmund Burke said, we are not sent here to be slaves to our constituents. I believe that the one thing that parliamentarians
should never give away is the sovereignty vested in us by the people we serve. The truth is that successive Parliaments in recent decades have done that, not least in the Maastricht and the Lisbon treaties, fuelling public anger and disillusionment and the sense of unaccountable political elites giving away powers that were never theirs in the first place. That is why I believe we were right to give the people their say and we are right—all of us—to recognise the importance of that vote and the anger that was expressed.

Mr Baker: Since my hon. Friend mentions our debate, I hope that he will not mind my saying that he fought the fight with great nobility and grace, and he was eloquent at all times. If only both sides of the campaign—I do mean both sides—had conducted themselves as he did, the referendum campaign would have been far happier.

George Freeman: I thank my hon. Friend for that gracious intervention. Having won sovereignty back for this House, we must use it. We must show that the House is worthy of that sovereignty and capable of acting in the interests of all the people we serve. Churchill once said:

“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

In the referendum campaign, we all stood up and spoke passionately for our respective sides, but now is the time for us to do the other courageous thing and listen to the will of the British people.

We have to make Brexit work for the 48% as well as the 52%, for London as well as the north, for white-collar as well as blue-collar workers and for Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. We need to deliver not a soft or a hard Brexit but a British Brexit, which allows us to respect our European neighbours, to be a good neighbour and, as the Prime Minister made clear in her recent speech, to be an active European ally and collaborator—outside the political institutions of the EU, but members of a European community of nations and neighbours.

In my view, proper democrats cannot and must not say, “Oh, the Brexit vote was illegitimate. Brexit voters were ignorant. They weren't qualified.” How condescending! Do we say that when they vote Labour, or when they vote UKIP? No. We all of us accept such results, and so we should now. Although the referendum was, in my opinion, a low point in British political discourse—let us remember that it included the appalling murder of one of our colleagues by a deranged neo-Nazi—the core underlying mandate of the British people was crystal clear. To the extent that it was not crystal clear, it is our job as elected democrats in our debates in this House to bring to the vote the crystal clarity that it needs.

All we are now doing is giving the Prime Minister and her Government the authority to start the negotiation of the terms on which we will leave the European Union. In many ways, the real debate will come not this afternoon, but when we discuss the terms of the negotiation in the House during the next two years and, ultimately, the package that she brings back to us.

Alex Salmond: Scotland is an equal partner in this “United Kingdom of nations”, to quote the former Prime Minister, so how does it come about that a massive vote in Scotland to remain and a narrow vote in England to leave results in Scotland leaving on England’s terms?

George Freeman: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that point. One of the most interesting aspects of the Supreme Court judgment—the media have not picked it up—is that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales were and are bound by the vote of this sovereign House, which SNP Members participated in, to give the British people such a decision.

Alex Salmond rose—

George Freeman: The truth is that the real challenge now falls to our new Prime Minister, who stepped in—

Alex Salmond rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I must protect the hon. Gentleman.

George Freeman: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Our Prime Minister stepped in to lead a Government committed to delivering Brexit, but who would tackle the domestic policy challenges that fuelled much of the wider disillusionment that the vote also signified. It is my privilege to work with her team on that. She now faces an extraordinary political challenge: to deliver Brexit, to negotiate the most important deal for this country in 100 years; to negotiate new trade deals with countries around the world; and to continue the great and urgent task of domestic social and economic reform, such as tackling our structural deficit, shaping our old-fashioned public services and tackling the urgent challenges of social and economic exclusion.

The truth is that the Brexit negotiations ahead of us are perhaps the greatest test of British peacetime diplomacy for a century, and the burden that falls on our Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union is heavy indeed. To succeed, we will have to put aside many of the differences that divide this House, and instead work together to make sure that we get the best deal for the country we all serve. Our interests are not served by requesting that the negotiation be carried out on Twitter.

At a time when trust in politics has never been so low, we have an opportunity to restore public trust in mainstream politics not to score easy points, but to show that we are worthy of the sovereignty vested in us and in the name of which the Brexiteers have campaigned. Our Brexit deal must be an ambitious Brexit deal for Britain. It must be a Brexit that means we can once again control our own laws, strengthen our Union, protect workers’ rights and strike ambitious new trade deals around the world. [Interruption.] Yes, for Scotland, too. To do this, however, we will have to continue to be engaged with the world, and to cherish our British values. [Interruption.] As the Prime Minister made clear in her recent electrifying speech—I encourage the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who is chuntering from a sedentary position, to read it—the work of bridging the gap between Europe and the United States will remain one of the key tasks of international relations for many decades to come.
I believe our Prime Minister has set out to do for markets and the west what the great Lady Thatcher did for the defence of the west. Last week, she showed that she was more than up for leading such a mission. It may not always be easy, but it is necessary for this country, which is not something that the right hon. Gentleman who was chuntering understands. I welcome the fact that she has made such an encouraging start with President Trump—he, too, has been elected—because although he campaigned for “America first”, the foreign policy signals are that for the Americans it is now a case of “Britain first”, and we should welcome that.

Alex Salmond: When the Prime Minister this week refused three times to condemn an obvious breach of not just this country's values but any liberal democracy’s values, what part of great British values was she standing up for?

George Freeman: I think the people of this country, in the way they have rewarded our Prime Minister with a huge lead in the opinion polls, know exactly the answer to that question.

We need a Brexit that works for the UK, the EU and the USA, because the west is facing a major test. It is in all our interests to make it work. This is not just a cultural debate; it is a hard-headed economic negotiation. The truth is that our diplomatic, military and political authority in the west is based on our economic growth and economic success. That is why I am passionately excited about the future for this country as a source of science for global sustainable growth in food, medicine and energy: Britain as a crucible of a deregulated, innovation economy leading the world in the challenges of the 21st century.

5.10 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Other speeches have been eloquent, passionate and constitutionally well informed. This speech will not be that. I want this speech to be about, and to be addressed directly to, my constituents.

The residents of Trafford voted to remain in the European Union, reflecting. I believe, our long and proud industrial history of trade, export and innovation. Trafford Park, in my constituency, was the first—I think it remains the largest—industrial estate in Europe. It is home to many domestic, European and international businesses, some of which have been based there for many decades. We welcome, too, EU and international businesses and manufacturers who have established sizeable operations elsewhere in the constituency. They make a significant contribution, nationally and locally, to the economy and employment. They are successful, they are thriving and many have been very clear with me that leaving the EU will make doing business more complex, uncertain and difficult. They highlight the importance of access to the EU market and skilled EU workers, consistent regulatory standards, and avoiding tariff barriers.

They are also adaptable. I do not say that on leaving the European Union their businesses will fail or be unable to adapt to new circumstances. However, what they look for, as far as possible, is continuity and certainty. What they say to me is that neither of those appears likely as a result of the Bill. What we know is not what we will have, but what we will not have. Single market access is out and so is full membership of the customs union. In their place come vague aspirations of new deals and arrangements with the EU and other countries that completely fail to recognise that our aspirations may not match those of our partners. On 17 January, when the Secretary of State came to this House to make a statement on the Prime Minister’s speech, I asked what he thought would happen in the gap between current trading arrangements ending and new ones being negotiated. He suggested there would be no such gap. I think that is fanciful. It is a head-in-the-sand attitude to negotiations. We have to recognise that leaving the EU will create gaps and shocks in our economy.

Shocks can of course be managed, but not by outright denial of their existence. With the Bill, we are being asked to buy a pig in a poke. We are being asked to vote to trigger the exit process with no evidence at all that there is a plan in place to protect our economy and our constituents. Important protections and standards all remain to be secured, whether in relation to our economy, our trading relationships or our security. To be asked now to endorse an exit process, when the answers to those important questions are still so vague, does not bode well for the outcome. In fact, the position with the Bill is so uncertain that I find it impossible to vote for it. I will abstain on the vote tomorrow. If the Government cannot allay my concerns during the remainder of the Bill’s passage through Parliament such that I can be sure that my constituents’ interests will be protected, at the final vote I will oppose it.

In saying that, and in concluding, I want to address the argument about respecting the referendum result. I have thought deeply about this, as I have sought to balance the wishes of voters in Trafford with the national result in a referendum for which I freely acknowledge I voted. Some of my constituents who voted to remain have told me they now feel we have no choice but to accept the result, but others do not think that. I have been sent here by my constituents to represent their interests as I see best, and I am falling back on my conscience. Everything I have done in politics and public policy has been informed by what I believe to be the most important priority: namely, what is the interest not just of my constituents but of future generations, and I do not believe that future generations will be well served by woolly aspirations to address the economic, social and security needs of their futures, by our turning our backs on maximum access to the single market, by the absence of detail on rights, protections and security or by Ministers’ complacent optimism or lazy promises.

The Government could make good these deficiencies, were they to accept many of the amendments to the Bill, but unless that happens we should not proceed to trigger article 50. In my view, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) was right to say that the judgment of future generations is what must guide us in making a decision on the Bill. We will be judged by them on the deal they inherit.

5.16 pm

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this historic debate. We have heard many passionate contributions, including from the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who has clearly thought about this issue a lot and clearly takes a
principled position. I do not share it, but I do respect it. Many of the contributions mirror the exact debate we had out in the country last June, when people put their arguments passionately on both sides of the debate. It was a privilege to go up and down the country, engaging with and talking to people on both sides—about their concerns and reasons for voting to leave the EU and about the argument for voting to remain. I recognise, therefore, that there are sincerely held points of view, not just in the House but across the country.

The word “judgment” has been used a lot this afternoon, and there have been many references to Burke in 1774, but my judgment is plain for all to see. I used my judgment in standing on the manifesto I stood on in 2015, I used my judgment in voting for the referendum and I used my judgment in advocating that my constituents and people across this great country vote to leave.

Stephen Gethins: Did you use your judgment when it came to standing on a blank piece of paper and putting that to the people in terms of the leave vote?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Would the hon. Gentleman mind asking the hon. Gentleman, rather than the Chair, about the use of judgment? I know he does not care how I use my judgment.

Stephen Gethins: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Does the hon. Gentleman consider it a lack of judgment that he campaigned on a blank piece of paper in terms of voting leave?

Tom Pursglove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but it has probably detained the House long enough already. The leave side stood on a platform that was clear for all to see, but I have no intention of raking over that ground, as time is short.

As Members of Parliament we have responsibilities, and the order of these things is well established: we have to put the national interest first. In the interests of balance, I will talk about two things said so far. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is right that all those Members who voted for the referendum have a duty to deliver on the verdict. On the remain side, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) made earlier in the debate about Mr Spinelli, as though he is getting any poorer.

Poverty will not apply to Mr Farage, who does not look like he is getting any poorer. He is right that we are in a really dangerous place internationally, and I worry about our realignment with the US, a country that is perhaps not as open to free trade right now as we would like it to be, or to different ideas or the different people who make up this incredible globe.

I want briefly to talk about the economy. We know that the statistics are not quite there yet, but household debt is up 13% in the last 12 months. We also know that our currency is dropping. The dropping of the currency is an external assessment of our economy, which is a cause for concern as well. We know that when the economy declines, it is not the well-off communities that are affected, but the poorer ones. Mr Farage famously said: “I think the social side of this matters more than pure market economics,” admitting that being poorer could be the result of leaving the European Union. Somehow, I suspect that poverty will not apply to Mr Farage, who does not look as though he is getting any poorer.

I want briefly to return to a point that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) made earlier in the debate about Mr Spinelli, who wrote about the rise of nationalism. I believe this is a cause for concern. One hundred years ago, my great-uncle died at Passchendaele. When I take my children to see his grave and try to explain why he died and what he died for, I talk about values such as liberty and trying to work with people whom we do not get on with, and I think back to the 42 years of peace and prosperity that we have had. We are in a really dangerous place internationally, and I worry about our realignment with the US, a country that is perhaps not as open to free trade right now as we would like it to be, or to different ideas or the different people who make up this incredible globe.

I want to express my fear and concern that leaving the European Union may also lead to a poorer future, not just for jobs and the economy, and not just because
sterling is going down, but because we are making this decision for young people. Many of us here voted twice on whether 16 to 18-year-olds should have had the right to participate in the referendum. Sadly, we were defeated twice, despite the advice from the other place. I think that is a terrible pity, because I feel that they think we are slamming the door on their future. I am also a strong Unionist, and I feel sad because I think this will have a detrimental effect on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are a great many questions there that have not been answered. We have not been given any information, and we have not been brought in on this wonderful secret negotiation that is happening. I do not feel ready to trust.

The best power that I can use is my vote. When tomorrow comes, I shall not vote to support Second Reading, because I think this is the only way to make the Government listen to the concerns that many of us hold, and hold very dearly. It is not just about jobs and the economy; it is about our children and our grandchildren, and about peace and prosperity.

5.25 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), who speaks with total sincerity. I obviously do not agree with her analysis of the economy, and I do not agree with voting against article 50, but I absolutely respect her sincerity in making the decision she has. One important aspect of today’s debate is that it is about individual Members making up their mind.

Anyone who goes to a Conservative selection event will find that one question likely to be asked is, “What would you put first—country, constituency or party?” The answer is country first, constituency second and party third. Happily, in most cases that aligns; it certainly aligns now, and I am delighted with what the Government have done.

I think that the Government were wrong, but I understand why they tried to go via the royal prerogative. They took the view that this House had delegated to the British people the decision on whether we should stay or leave the European Union. Once that decision was made, they thought they could trigger article 50 through the royal prerogative. In fact, I remember the previous Prime Minister saying that he would trigger article 50 the day after the vote. I argued against that privately. I said that we should have a parliamentary process, and that it should be done through a Bill in Parliament. I introduced a private Member’s Bill to do exactly that, and trigger article 50 by 31 March. The only reason it did not get a Second Reading was that the Labour deputy Chief Whip objected to it.

I am very pleased that the Labour party has now taken a very different line. I thought the shadow Secretary of State got it right: trigger article 50, because that is what the British people voted for, then let us have full parliamentary scrutiny of the Bill. No Bill going through this Parliament—the great repeal Act or anything else—will fail to benefit from the parliamentary process. It may well be that this Bill will benefit next week from the approval of some amendment or other. I do not know, but it will benefit from full parliamentary scrutiny.

I apologise for wearing the hideous tie again. It has come out of retirement for today and tomorrow and for three days next week. Obviously, however, if this House were somehow to vote not to trigger article 50, I would have to wear the tie for a lot longer. Hopefully, that might change some votes on the other side.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green mentioned that it was very difficult to get on and work with some people. As a founding member of GO—Grassroots Out—which was a cross-party group that campaigned to leave, I know exactly what she means. I had to work with people from the Labour party, the Democratic Unionist party and the UK Independence party—and, what was even more difficult, with people from my own party—to try to get us all to agree to put party politics to one side. It was an amazing feat as we toured up and down the country to find that people who could not really stand each other—[Interruption]; yes, and that is just the Tory party—could actually work together and produce something in the national interest.

I look across the Chamber and see the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). What an outstanding parliamentarian! She put the country first. It was difficult enough, all those years ago, to be in the Conservative party when it was absolutely for the European Union and we were idiots to request a referendum. It must be much more difficult to be in the Labour party and campaign for us to leave, and I congratulate members of the Labour party who put their country first.

It may seem somewhat controversial in this Chamber, but I also congratulate Nigel Farage. I think that he campaigned for something in which he believed passionately. When I worked with him, he toed the GO line. Four people decided GO policy: the hon. Member for Vauxhall, myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (TOM Pursglove), and Nigel Farage. Despite our different views, we all managed to work together in the country’s interest.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): I am actually rather enjoying my hon. Friend’s speech, but will he say whether he and the other members of the GO campaign supported the shameful and outrageous “Breaking Point” poster?

Mr Bone: I am afraid that by the time we embarked on the referendum campaign proper, the GO movement alliance had broken down. I am sorry if I misled the House. I should have said that prior to the designation of the official campaign, the GO organisation was united, but after that its members went their separate ways. If we are touching on the issue of immigration, however, let me say that it was always GO’s view that European Union citizens who were in this country before the referendum had the right to stay. I personally would have liked the Government to act on that unilaterally, although I completely understand why they have not done so: they want to protect our citizens abroad.

Whichever way we look at it, and whichever side of the argument we were on, this was an extraordinarily democratic exercise. The great thing now is that the focus of the country is back here in this sovereign Parliament, where we can make the decisions. Let me say this to Opposition Members. Some time in the future, you will be on these Benches, and you will be able to make the laws. You will be able to push it. Hopefully, that will not happen for a long time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please say “they will able to make the laws”? I will give him 10 seconds in which to say that.
Mr Bone: In fact, I am going to change my mind. They will never have a chance to make the laws.

5.32 pm

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I believe that the votes that I shall cast on the Bill will be the most important votes that I shall cast as a Member of Parliament.

I am a passionate European. I represent a European capital city constituency. I campaigned strongly for us to remain in the EU last year; I voted for us to remain, and my constituents and my city voted overwhelmingly for us to remain.

I have lived in Cardiff for nearly 30 years. The very first person whom I met when I unloaded my belongings from the transit van in 1989 was a French national who had come to Cardiff from LImoges. He lived next door, and he has become a lifelong friend, as well as a successful businessman in my city, employing many people. Now, 30 years on, I live next door to a German national, a university academic who has made his home in my constituency, has married a Welsh woman, and has a young family. He is an expert in his field, and is teaching the next generation of experts at one of my constituency’s three universities.

Every day in Cardiff Central I meet and speak and listen to neighbours and residents from across Europe and across the globe: business owners, students, doctors, healthcare workers, researchers, teachers, mothers, fathers and children. During and since the referendum campaign, however, I have had many conversations with constituents who are worried and frightened. Some have been victims of racism and hate crimes, like my friend Suzanne, who came to Cardiff from Germany and has a young daughter Lilith, who is at primary school. They have been spat at, told to “go home”, and had bricks and stones thrown at them in the street. This is the climate that they, and we, are living in, and I do not believe it is a coincidence of timing. It is a direct consequence of the referendum campaign, and the events of the past week in the United States make me more fearful of the rapidly developing climate of intolerance in our country. I implore Ministers to reassure immediately EU nationals across Britain that their legal status will be confirmed.

When I look back at the last 12 months leading up to the publication of this Bill, one thing stands out for me: the reckless action of the former Member for Witney. Where is he now? He has gone, disappeared, vanished; a man who put himself and his party before the national interest, and who gambled our country’s safety, future prosperity and long-standing European and wider international relationships to save his party and his premiership from imploding. He went to Brussels and miserably failed to negotiate a suitable reform package. He denied 16 and 17-year-olds the right to have a vote when there have been no guarantees before triggering article 50 about protecting single market access, employment, environmental and consumer rights, security and judicial safeguards, and the residency rights of many of my constituents—and no guarantees for the people of Wales, never mind a seat at the negotiating table. I will not stay silent on the basis that to speak is to be anti-democratic, while the current Prime Minister leads us towards a brutal exit with all the damage that that will cause to the people and community I represent.

Serving as shadow Secretary of State for Wales reinforced even more strongly to me what Wales will lose from exiting the EU without the guarantees that are needed. We are net beneficiaries of EU funding to the tune of £245 million every year, and in the last 10 years EU-funded projects have helped to support nearly 73,000 people into work and 234,000 people to gain qualifications. Those projects have helped to create nearly 12,000 businesses and 37,000 new jobs. Sixty-eight per cent. of our farming and food production sector rely almost exclusively on the EU market.

The single market is the lifeline to our manufacturing industry—what is left of it—in steel, automotive and aerospace, as well as to our farming and food production sector, so I cannot accept the Prime Minister’s decision that we are leaving the single market. The referendum result last year felt like a body blow, the Prime Minister’s speech felt like the life-support machine being switched off, and triggering article 50 will, for me, feel like the funeral. It is a matter of principle and conscience to me, and I must represent the majority of my constituents and share their view. I will not vote for this Bill.

5.38 pm

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), who spoke with great passion; I do not agree with her, but she is clearly wrestling with many issues.

This is a hugely significant moment for the west midlands region, part of which I represent, and for this House. It seems quite a long time ago that I was one of the 81 Conservatives who went into the Lobby to vote in favour of a referendum in 2011, and it also seems quite a long time ago that I was sitting behind the Front Bench in my role as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for Europe as the European Union Referendum Bill was steered through Parliament. During its passage I had to spend many long hours in this Chamber wearing my tin hat, as it were. So I am a passionate believer in the referendum and I recognise the importance of the result.

I had concerns about the economic consequences of our leaving the European Union, but the reality was that the west midlands region was one of the strongest regions in the country in terms of voting to leave. I think every single area of the west midlands voted for us to leave the European Union. As a democrat, and as someone who fought for the referendum, I clearly have to respect that result. We in the Black country and the west midlands are very pragmatic people. The west midlands economy has been performing extremely well over the past few years, and it is now incumbent on me
and other leaders in the region to take advantage of the opportunities that leaving the European Union will present to our economy.

I hope that we will trigger article 50 when we vote tomorrow, and I want to mention certain factors that need to be taken into consideration in the negotiations. As I have said, the west midlands economy has been performing very well. It is currently one of the export powerhouses of the UK economy, with strong exporting not only to the European Union but to the United States and China. However, there are certain countries to which we do not export so strongly. They include Japan, Malaysia and Indonesia, where the west midlands has negligible export volumes. When we are looking at making free trade deals around the world, there will be an opportunity to facilitate further export potential for west midlands manufacturers in the transport sector, for example.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise, however, that if we do not get a deal—the Prime Minister has said that that is a possibility—we could end up with a 10% tariff on cars being exported from the UK? That would be very damaging to the west midlands car industry.

James Morris: I do not believe for a minute that we will not get a deal that will be of benefit to UK-based car manufacturers. It is inconceivable that we would be unable to get such a deal.

Leaving the European Union will give us an opportunity to achieve something that has eluded Governments over the past 25 to 30 years—namely, an opportunity to rebalance our economy and lock in the benefits of regional devolution. The west midlands has benefited from European grants for infrastructure development, and as we enter into the negotiation process, it will be incumbent on us to raise the investment levels for infrastructure and skills in the west midlands. For example, the west midlands currently receives 40% less investment in transport than London and Scotland. The region is dependent on manufacturing and transportation, and that discrepancy has resulted in capacity constraints in the west midlands economy that need to be addressed.

One of the principal reasons that people in the Black country and the west midlands voted to leave the European Union was that they wanted to control immigration. As we trigger article 50 and think about negotiating our future relationship with Europe, I want to mention certain factors that need to be taken into consideration. As we enter into the negotiation process, it will be important to focus on high-quality jobs, and to see the west midlands as a critical component of our national story. The west midlands needs to have a voice in the negotiations. In May this year, we will have a directly elected mayor for the West Midlands Combined Authority, and I hope that it will be Andy Street, the excellent Conservative candidate. As the region that voted the most decisively to leave, the west midlands must be at the head of the queue for getting the benefits that I believe can accrue from our leaving the European Union.

I also want to make a broader point about Britain’s place in the world. Even though I have concerns about the European Union and voted for Britain to remain in it, I have never been a fan of its political structures. We are now on the cusp of an opportunity. For 40 years, we have spent a lot of diplomatic resource and energy on managing our relationships across the EU. We now need to change our posture in the world, to be much more outward looking and to use our diplomatic reach and resources to change how the world perceives Britain. We have enormous soft power to deploy in the world, and we should invest more in our hard power. That combination of diplomatic reach, soft power resources and the ability to deploy hard power gives a Britain outside the EU the unique opportunity to stop expending energy on it and its predilections and to focus outwards. As we embark on the renegotiation, there is a real opportunity to challenge many of the assumptions that have driven British foreign policy over the past 40 years and to forge a new role as a global, outward-looking Britain that works for all the regions of the United Kingdom.
call it. Our political settlement in 1998 keeps all our parties at the table and sustains a peace process, and hopefully a better prosperity process to follow. The EU values and rules that are written into the fabric of that agreement have helped to maintain stability. Without the EU, that stability would not have been obtained and maintained. Maintaining that stability and the settlement requires the principles of the Good Friday agreement to be underpinned in law throughout the exit process, both at the outset and in the final exit deal, and that is without even touching on the wider concerns that hon. Members have raised about the impact of Brexit on our universities, the rights of European citizens already living here and the rights of our own citizens who wish to study or work across the European Union.

Regardless of the Supreme Court’s decision on the role of the devolved Administrations, which I beg to differ from, it is in the Government’s interest to get this process right for Northern Ireland and to maintain the political stability that has been achieved. Indeed, as a co-guarantor of the 1998 Good Friday agreement, the Government are obliged to sustain that stability.

It will be much harder to get things right and to restore stability in Northern Ireland if we rush to meet an artificial timetable that has been imposed unnecessarily by the Government. That is why I call on them, even at this late stage, not to rush now and regret later. I beg them to take the time to get this right for all of us. Earlier today the Secretary of State told us to trust the wisdom of the people. Well, there is no one I trust more with the future of Northern Ireland than the people of Northern Ireland, and the people of Northern Ireland voted to remain. I remind the House that people in Belfast South voted by 70%, on a 70% turnout, to stay in Europe. I hope that I am representing them and their views here today. With no answers—or, at the very best, foggy answers—about the border, our economy and our views here today, with no answers about the border, our economy and protecting parity of esteem, my colleagues and I cannot vote to support the triggering of article 50.

5.52 pm

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): There has been a lot of debate about whether the Government have a sufficient mandate not only to invoke article 50, but to exit the single market and the customs union. Many hon. Members might know that my involvement in that question did not begin when I was elected to this House in 2015. In the five years prior to then, I had the privilege of working in Downing Street. For me, the whole question of our membership of the EU is inextricably rooted in the conflict between control—principally of immigration and our own laws—on the one hand, and our membership of the single market on the other. In the decade that followed Tony Blair’s disastrous decision to allow the new eastern European members of the EU to gain full access to the labour market without transitional controls, net migration from the EU went from being roughly in balance to being in the hundreds of thousands every year.

The application of the single market to the field of labour went from facilitating the free movement of labour around countries of roughly equal development to a mechanism for mass economic migration. That, in turn, was compounded by the fact that the UK had not only no transitional controls, but an open, English-speaking labour market that is much more conducive to migrants. Latterly, the eurozone crisis meant that while much of Europe stagnated, a mercifully free United Kingdom became a jobs-creation engine that sucked labour from stagnant continental countries.

All that led to a growing sense of a loss of control. These were huge changes about which the British people were never asked and to which they never consented. That was why Conservative manifestos repeatedly committed us to reducing migration to the tens of thousands, but our experience in government demonstrated that that could not be achieved.

Mr MacNeil: Did the Conservative manifesto commit to staying in the single market?

Oliver Dowden: The Conservative manifesto committed us to renegotiation followed by an in/out referendum, which was exactly what we delivered. The whole argument I am making is that the question of EU membership is inextricably linked to that of the single market.

The problem with trying to control migration within the EU is that the Commission rigidly stuck to the doctrine that the free movement of people was one of the immovable pillars of the single market, and that any attempt to favour UK nationals over EU nationals was discriminatory and illegal. That was despite the fact that the whole reality of its application had changed since we initially agreed to single market membership, and that there was no similar perfect purity applied to the other pillars, particularly in services, in which the UK stood to be a major beneficiary of a pure single market.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): Is it not the case that several EU countries now have deep concerns about the consequences of unfettered free movement and that the collapse of Schengen, albeit for different reasons, is further evidence of that?

Oliver Dowden: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention; what he says is undoubtedly the case. The problem is that the Commission and other EU members move at a glacial speed, so there is unlikely to be a significant change in their approach to this pillar of the single market for some time.

Of course this issue was not the only factor, but it certainly gave strong impetus to the argument that the only way we could resolve the situation was through a policy of renegotiation followed by a referendum, which was what we fought the 2015 election on. Again, the Commission dogmatically refused to compromise on its conception of free movement, which was bolstered by Chancellor Merkel’s experience of growing up as a child of East Germany and innate hostility to any imposition of borders. Going into the referendum, we therefore could not credibly say that significant control had been restored.

Pitted against that strong argument for leaving the EU was the significant economic risk and dislocation that arose from losing unfettered access to a market of half a billion people, which we had achieved through full membership of single market. The decision therefore was about a difficult balance between control and risk, which was why it was absolutely right to put such a
profound question to the British people in a referendum. We should be quite clear that the dilemma of EU membership was, in essence, the dilemma of our membership of the single market: the benefits of having free movement of goods, services and capital set against the loss of control over our laws and migration policy. These issues were the essence of the debate.

My innate conservatism favoured not taking that risk, but the British people took an alternative decision—this was whole point of asking them in the first place. So it is clear that not only should I respect that decision and vote to invoke article 50, but that I should also seek to implement it fully, which must mean leaving both the single market and the customs union. For people to claim that the Government do not have a mandate to do that is to completely ignore how we got to this situation in the first place.

Equally, however, we must be clear about the other choices that we have taken. I am glad that the economy has maintained momentum after the initial political decision to leave, and I am confident that in the medium to long term we can make a success of the huge liberation of leaving the EU. We can tailor our laws to meet the economic and trading interests of this country and those with which we choose to enter bilateral deals, rather than being bound by the lowest common denominator interests of a 27-member bloc. Indeed, we are well placed to exploit this position, as we have a denominator interests of a 27-member bloc. Indeed, we are well placed to exploit this position, as we have a

Ian Blackford: The hon. Gentleman correctly points out that the fall in sterling will lead to an increase in inflation. This Government have frozen benefits for the next four years, so does not that action and the fact that the autumn statement shows that growth is going to be lower mean that, as a consequence, a lot of people will be very much poorer?

Oliver Dowden: Two things: first, record low unemployment means that there is tremendous opportunity for those people; and, secondly, wages across the board have not grown rapidly, so it is entirely right that constraint is applied to benefits.

Of course the Commission and member states will initially resist any deal that is not unambiguously seen to be a benefit. They did not vote to lose their jobs and they did not vote based on the full truth on the table. Indeed, the campaign was terrible, bedevilled with lies about what money would be saved and what money would be spent. There was, though, a vote to make Parliament sovereign, and we should start now by making sure that Parliament is sovereign over the plan. This must be the first debate of many, and tomorrow and in the coming days we will have the first votes of many. We will ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and his colleagues to come back to the House so that we can check whether they have got the answers right and their strategy sound.

As the Secretary of State sets about the negotiations, I want to ensure that three things are uppermost in his mind. First, we have to ensure that those who lose out from Brexit are helped and supported. We all know that there are people who will be battered and bruised by the Brexit process—there is no point pretending otherwise—but let us make sure that a plan is in place to support them. They are not the rich; they are the poor. As has been argued, they are the people whose tax credits have been frozen. As a result of that and the higher inflation that is now curing fuel and food, they will be £620 a year worse off by the time of the next election. Although I wish that we were not starting from this point, the people have voted. This is a democracy and I will respect the decision that was taken.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) hit the nail absolutely on the head. The people of this country did not vote for a plan or a blueprint. They did not vote to lose their jobs and they did not vote based on the full truth on the table. Indeed, the campaign was terrible, bedevilled with lies about what money would be saved and what money would be spent. There was, though, a vote to make Parliament sovereign, and we should start now by making sure that Parliament is sovereign over the plan. This must be the first debate of many, and tomorrow and in the coming days we will have the first votes of many. We will ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and his colleagues to come back to the House so that we can check whether they have got the answers right and their strategy sound.

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John Redwood: Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why we have been the fastest-growing G7 economy for the whole of the past year, with an acceleration in the second half, and why wages are up—real wages are up—and things are looking good?

Liam Byrne: I know that experts are no longer in fashion among Conservative Members, but the Office for Budget Responsibility is clear that, because of higher inflation, people on tax credits will be poorer, not richer, over the next couple of years. I genuinely believe that the Brexit Secretary does want to protect hard-working families, but let us see him put his money where his
[Liam Byrne]

mouth is by arguing with the Chancellor in favour of unfreezing tax credits over the next couple of years. That should be our priority.

Secondly, we need a real plan to protect manufacturing in this country. We must recognise that manufacturing output has not yet recovered to its level before the crash. The car industry in regions such as mine in the west midlands employs 49,000 people today, but it will be destroyed if we have to rely on WTO tariffs of 10%, and if we add another 10% to costs by building a border to check the 60% of parts that we import to build the cars that are created in this country. Whatever deal is put in place, it must put manufacturing first.

Thirdly, we must ensure that there is no race to the bottom on rights—on workers’ rights, social rights and the rights of minorities. We have already seen the briefing that has come out from a No. 10 source that the Conservatives’ 2020 manifesto will propose exiting the European convention on human rights—that great European Magna Carta that we in this country helped to draw up after the war to stop any return to the holocaust that we marked last week. How can we possibly contemplate leaving that convention and joining the company of Putin’s Russia? I hope that, over the course of these debates, we will hear a cast-iron guarantee that there will be no exit from the convention on human rights.

Finally, although tests are looming on how we protect those battered and bruised by Brexit, how we defend manufacturing, and how we ensure that there is no race to the bottom on rights, the spirit of these negotiations is important. I have to accept that we will leave a federal Europe, but I believe that now could be the start of a confederal project in which we begin to step up our collaboration with our neighbours on security, jobs, international development, science—the things that we can do together in the world. In this debate, it is so important now that we do not listen to the devils and demons of division. Now is the time for the Government to listen to the better angels of our nature.

6.6 pm

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): It was the country’s first woman Prime Minister—this may of course arouse the ire of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies)—who said:

“In politics, if you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman.”

I am extremely pleased that our current Prime Minister is in place, because she is taking on an unbelievably difficult task and delivering it with intellect, grace and clarity. She has made very clear to this House, regardless of how we campaigned or voted, what the process and the timetable will be, and for that I am truly grateful.

The quote in this case is a little incorrect, because it has been men and women, over many years, who have debated endlessly in this place and elsewhere the European question—something that was a monumental talking point when I first came to this place. Rather confusingly, the debate did not seem to include talking about the issues that face this country and that will continue to face this country after our departure from the European Union, our puzzling and troubling productivity gap in British industry, our lack of skills, our lack of investment in education, our problems with the low savings rate that mean that families have so little to fall back on and that the country has very little to draw on for investments going forward. Suddenly on 23 June, we all went from talking to doing. I totally agree with hon. Members that this is not the place to re-run either the referendum or the arguments—people will know that I was a remain supporter.

Like so many who have spoken today, I was appalled by the quality of the debate and of the conversations that took place. We were asking the country to make a very profound decision on the basis of slogans. Extremely complicated questions and trade-offs were boiled down into a single yes or no question. The whole issue was spiced up with anti-immigration rhetoric. I am sorry for hon. Members who believe that that was not what the leave campaign represented. I thought that the breaking point poster of people wanting to come into this country was a particularly low point in the debate. The conversation was also sullied by misrepresentation over funding. We have debated today the £350 million and the £100 million or whatever it was. On foreign policy, what has happened to those conversations about Turkey, which, if we listened to many Members who were campaigning for a certain side, was lined up to join the EU?

Equally, I accept that it was the remain side that gave us project fear. We were not given positive measures on which to campaign. What about staying connected or staying relevant in the world, rather than frightening people with theoretical models, which, thanks to quantitative easing and an interest rate cut, have yet to come true?

Since the referendum result, the Government, ably led by our Prime Minister, have taken the pragmatic approach that we are where we are and that what we need is strength and leadership. As the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said earlier, the major problem facing us and representatives of other western democracies is a crisis of trust in our institutions and politicians. Therefore I will, like so many others, vote with the Government tomorrow night to support the triggering of article 50.

We will never be able to prove the counterfactual: what would have happened if we had not voted to leave, without the depreciation in currency and the changes already happening in the European Union. I, for one, feel ill-informed about this debate. I went back to the debates held in this House at the time when we joined the EU, which started with the publication of a White Paper in 1967 and ended with the referendum in 1975. I have read the speeches given by Charles Morrison, my predecessor but one, who contributed to those debates; he was an arch-European, I am pleased to say. He was given the opportunity to take part in extensive debates over six White Papers in the formation of a manifesto for the 1970 election and in multiple conversations with Parliament.

Indeed, the White Paper presented by the Heath Government in 1971 reported back on the progress of negotiations that had been made until that point between the British Government and members of the then small European Economic Community, and set out what areas still needed to be discussed. Compared with my predecessor, I do not feel well informed about the process and the trade-offs for the British economy. I reject wholeheartedly the idea that people voted one way or another in the referendum based on some perfect
knowledge of all the facts. I sat through many a hustings in which my opponents said, “It’s not for us to define what leave looks like. You’re the Government—it’s your job. We just know that we want to be out.” Everybody’s view of Brexit is slightly different.

As we near the end of the two-year process, how do we assure ourselves and our constituents that we are making the right decision? First, I urge the Government to be as open and transparent as possible and to bring forward the White Paper before the Bill goes into Committee. When we get to the end of the process and there is a binary offer—we will be either in some form of relationship with the European Union or not—I ask the Government to say what the economic consequences of those deals look like. We cannot possibly sit down and make an assessment of what a free trade world—or, indeed, a relationship with the EU, plus or minus any economic contribution we would be asked to make—might look like without understanding the implications for our country. Perhaps we have made a good decision for all the wrong reasons, but I do not yet feel that we have the right information to justify that to the country.

6.12 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): In this country, we have settled, through a process of trial and error, on a system of parliamentary democracy as the most effective form of governance. The importance of Parliament’s role was once again asserted by the Supreme Court last week. The responsibility of parliamentarians is clear: to take decisions in the best interests of the country with particular regard for the needs of their constituents. I believe that leaving the European Union will be hugely damaging for this country; the British people, through the referendum, narrowly expressed a different view. It is now up to Parliament to take account of the result of the referendum and decide what is in the best interests of the country.

There is no evidence, and none has been presented, that the best interests of the country will be served by the immediate triggering of article 50 and the pursuit of the hardest Brexit possible. It seems to me an abdication of responsibility to say that the only factor that can be considered in deciding whether to trigger article 50 is the result of the referendum. “The will of the people” cannot be tied down to one single point and be presumed never to change or waver. It should not be assumed that the decision of a narrow majority of people, willing and entitled to express a view on 23 June, should be the only thing to determine the fate of the whole population for now and many decades into the future. This is not the end of the debate; it is only the beginning.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): The Conservative manifesto on which we won the election stated that we would hold a referendum and uphold its result. That is a promise made and a promise kept. Does the hon. Lady accept that?

Sarah Olney: There has been a lot of talk about the European Union Referendum Act 2015. I was not here. I did not vote for it. I am not bound by it. The Conservative party’s 2015 manifesto also committed us to staying in the single market.

If, in three or eight years’ time, the people are not happy with the outcome of Brexit, who should they hold accountable? If they want the country to take a different course, how should they vote then? Will all their MPs step back and tell them that they merely implemented the will of the people and that the outcome of Brexit is not their responsibility? Denying the people the right to hold their representatives accountable would be truly undemocratic.

I asked the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union a question last week about what impact assessments had been done to estimate the loss of jobs and skills to the UK as a consequence of leaving the European Union. I was told that such information could not be released because it would weaken our negotiating hand. That is extremely worrying for two reasons. First, if the information exists—the Minister who responded did not confirm that such assessments have been carried out—it is not available to the public to read and consider. Secondly, our country’s future prosperity, including our jobs and skilled workers, now depends so heavily on the outcome of a negotiation.

Far from taking back control, we are apparently dependent on what other countries will, or will not, allow. There is so much that we do not know about the consequences of leaving the European Union, either because the Government refuse to reveal it or because it depends on the outcome of negotiations. We have not been given sight of the Government’s White Paper before being asked to consider the Bill. We are effectively being asked to jump out of an airplane without knowing whether we are securely attached to a parachute, and that is not a responsible approach to take to the security and prosperity of our citizens.

If we do make the decision to trigger article 50, our most immediate and pressing goal will be to advance negotiations with our European partners as quickly as possible to provide security and clarity for our citizens, but it is important that we do not just settle for whatever result we can get. We should make a further, active and informed decision that the new deal is a better alternative than remaining in the European Union. The choice should be between those two outcomes. Having held an initial referendum to ask the public to guide our decision making on the issue, we cannot exclude them from the final decision. There needs to be a referendum on the terms so that the people can decide for themselves.

The decisions that we make in this place over the coming days will shape our country for future generations, and we owe it to them to proceed with caution, thoughtfulness and care. My grandparents’ generation gifted us a country free from tyranny, and my parents’ generation gifted us a country of rising prosperity. When I think of the country that I would like my generation to give to our children, I think of a country that lives without fear, poverty and inequality, but we cannot build that world by turning our back on our neighbours, closing the door to our friends, turning a blind eye to tyranny or walking hand in hand with intolerance.

I will vote against the Bill tomorrow not just because I represent a pro-remain party in a pro-remain constituency, nor because I made this commitment to voters during my recent by-election campaign. Most of all, I will vote against the Bill because triggering article 50 is the wrong step for this country to take at this time.

6.18 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): What a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), who has reassured us
once again that the Liberal Democrats do not believe in democracy. It is slightly incongruous that they should be in that position.

Today, in fact, we celebrate one of the days that will go down in the annals of British history. There are many years in British history that we can call to mind, such as 1066 or 1215—[Interruption.]

How many do you want? Great and famous years include 1346, 1485, 1509, 1588 and 1649, but it is very rare that specific days are commemorated as I think 23 June 2016 will be. It is on a par with St Crispin’s day 1415 and with 18 June 1815, which were great days in our nation’s history. We are here debating the matter because our constitution has been put back on a proper footing by the wisdom of the British people, and also, as it happens, by the Supreme Court. I am particularly pleased by page 29 of the judgment, which says:

“For these reasons, we disagree with Lloyd LJ’s conclusion in Rees-Mogg in so far as he held that ministers could exercise prerogative powers to withdraw from the EU Treaties.”

The judges, though it has taken a year or two, finally agreed that in 1993 my father was right. So there is a virtue in this judicial process, slow and long-winded though it may be.

This is important constitutionally because Dicey’s constitution has been restored. The Queen in Parliament is the sovereign body of our nation. That is so important because, as Dicey argued, it is Parliament that is the defender of the liberties of the people, of our ancient constitution, and of our freedoms.

Ian Blackford: As a constitutional expert, the hon. Gentleman will be familiar with the judgment in the case of MacCormick vs. The Crown by Lord Cooper in Scotland that parliamentary sovereignty is a purely English concept that has no parallel in Scottish constitutional history. Does he agree, therefore, that the Scottish people can determine their own destiny if we are dragged out of Europe against our will?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman will know that following the Act of Union the Westminster Parliament was the inheritor Parliament of both Parliaments, and therefore the two traditions, to some extent, merged in 1707. He is very well aware of that point. The sovereignty of Parliament now applies to the United Kingdom as a whole.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is, as ever, making a fantastic speech. Following on from the intervention by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), is it not also the case that in the Supreme Court judgment the justices make it clear that we do not need a legislative consent motion, or indeed any consent from any devolved institution, because Dicey’s principle that power devolved is power retained means that this Parliament is always sovereign?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The judgment is completely clear that the Sewel convention is a political convention that it is not within the field of the judiciary to rule on. The judges say that they “are neither the parents nor the guardians of” the Sewel convention, but they also make it clear that by legislation this Parliament can do anything within the United Kingdom on behalf of the British people.

We need to go back to the beginning. Where does this parliamentary sovereignty come from? We are back to the debates of the 17th century. Parliamentary sovereignty in this country was thought to come either via the King from God or to Parliament via the people. That is where referendums so rightly come in, because the sovereignty we exercise is not sovereignty in a vacuum. It is not sovereignty that has descended on us from on high; it builds up from underneath. The people of the United Kingdom have an absolute right to determine how they are governed, and on 23 June—

Patrick Grady rose—

Dr Alasdair McDonnell rose—

Mr Rees-Mogg: I cannot give way again because I do not get any more bonus points.

On 23 June, the people voted that parliamentary sovereignty would be restored to this House. The judges in the Supreme Court decision reinforced that, because they reversed the clawing of power from this House that has gone to the Executive since the European Communities Act 1972. This is where the shocking, outrageous and monstrous hypocrisy of the pro-Europeans clicks into place—none of them are Members of this place, of course, for no Members of this place are ever in any sense hypocritical, as we all know. The pro-Europeans cried parliamentary sovereignty to obstruct the will of the British people, as law after law cascaded down from the European Union to a Chamber that was empty and to Committee rooms where debates were over in 30 minutes. There was no interest in parliamentary sovereignty when the ratchet was clawing it away from the United Kingdom, but a great cry when the British people asked to have it back for themselves.

The Supreme Court has recognised that this House is where power must lie in the creating and repealing of laws. This will restore our proper constitutional balance, so that no more will we have talk of superior legislation. The courts had developed a theory from the 1972 Act that it was superior law, and that laws passed after it were bound by it. That is alien to the British constitution. This House has no ability to bind its successors, and that principle is being restored by leaving the European Union and repealing, ultimately, the 1972 Act. Once that is done, the thread on which the idea of superior law has been hung will be cut, and we will be back to a situation in which a Parliament of five years can pass any laws for this country but cannot bind its successors, and its laws can in no way be overruled by anybody outside the Queen in Parliament.

The great virtue of the constitution—this is where I agree with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart)—is that it has provided prosperity, peace and security for our nation. The economy is not created out of nowhere; it depends on the existing constitutional structures that protect the rule of law, allow corruption to be exposed by freedom of speech, enable the democratic will to act as the protector of what is decided and ensure that property rights are respected.

We are returning to the happy constitutional system that was known in this country until 1972. In the glories of our constitution, and with the great wisdom of our
parliamentary draftsmen, we are doing it in one of the shortest Bills ever to pass through this House. All that this Bill does—and this is why the amendments are all so plain sailing and jetstream designed to obstruct the will of the British people—is to implement the noble, brave and glorious decision that the people made on that day of legend and song, the twenty-third of June in the year of our Lord 2016.

6.27 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I am pleased to be following the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who set out an erudite constitutional perspective for our edification. Of course, there are wholly honourable reasons for wanting to leave the European Union. The problem, however, is that we will pay a heavy economic price for leaving. Too many jobs will be forced out of the UK, and for that reason I shall oppose the Bill at the vote on Second Reading tomorrow.

Michael Gove: The right hon. Gentleman’s prediction that jobs will be lost follows the prediction made by so many that staying outside the single currency would lead to economic decline, and indeed that the vote on 23 June would trigger an instant recession. Those predictions were wrong then; with respect to his integrity, why should we believe these predictions now?

Stephen Timms: It is absolutely clear that there will be a heavy economic price. Within a couple of years, that will be absolutely clear. My view is that if we in this House believe that a measure is contrary to the national interest, we should vote against it. We have heard a couple of speeches from Conservative Members who have said in terms that they think that the Bill is contrary to the national interest. If that is the view of Members of this House, we should vote against the Bill.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for his opening words. I believe that the Bill will make our constituents poorer, and that is why I will join him tomorrow in the Lobby. Is it not a pity that part of the debate was basically to ignore what experts were saying about the destination of our country should we leave the European Union?

Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I think we should pay attention to those who know what they are talking about. The reality is that our currency has fallen significantly in value following the referendum, and that means that we are poorer than we were before. But the real damage will be done when jobs start to be forced out of Britain, as they will be over the next few years.

I know that some people argue that the loss of jobs in Britain will be a price worth paying in the short term for a better long-term future. I do not agree with that view. The fact is that we will always be dependent on close partnerships with other countries. I cannot share the view that we would be better off replacing annoying interference from Brussels with annoying interference from Washington, but that appears to be what some people believe we should head towards.

John Redwood: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Timms: I am afraid that I cannot give way again.

In any case, we must not dismiss short-term job losses during the next few years as unimportant. The Prime Minister rightly aims for barrier-free access to the single market. The problem is that without signing up to at least some version of free movement she stands no chance whatever of getting barrier-free access to the single market.

In this House, we need to be frank with people about our prospects during the next few years. For example, many of my constituencies and those of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) work in the financial sector in the City of London, and one study suggests that 70,000 jobs will be lost in that one sector alone. There will be such a scale of damage in other parts of the economy as well. In my view, that is much too high a price to pay.

I agree with those who say that the various forms of so-called soft Brexit would not solve the problem. We would then end up having to apply all the rules that are devised in the EU without having any influence at all over what the rules are. That is not a viable position for the UK in the future.

The one glimmer of a Brexit without the economic damage I am concerned about would be if we signed up not to the current version of the free movement of people, but to a form of free movement of labour in which EU citizens could come to the UK if they had a firm job offer in the UK. As I understand it, that is how things worked in the Common Market in the past. If we agreed to something along those lines, I believe that it would buy us a good proportion of the barrier-free access to the single market that the Prime Minister says she wants. However, she seems to have set her face against such a concession on the immigration policy that is needed, and we will therefore pay the price.

I must say that it is very strange that our future economic wellbeing is being relegated to the importance of focusing on reducing net migration to the tens of thousands. The Prime Minister was Home Secretary for six years. In that time, non-EU net migration, which was completely under our control, was nowhere near the tens of thousands—last year, it was 150,000—and of course all EU net migration comes on top of that. The only way the target of bringing down net migration to the tens of thousands could be delivered would be at an extraordinary economic cost to the UK. I do not believe that any Government would be willing to sign up to that.

How have we got ourselves into such a mess? I think the problem was hard-wired in one David Cameron removed his MEPs from the main centre-right bloc in the European Parliament. From that moment on, British influence in the EU diminished. It was increasingly clear that, unlike under Conservative and Labour Governments in the past, the Conservative coalition Government in the UK were unable to get their way in debates in the EU because their influence was so diminished.

An example that I am particularly aggrieved about was the failure of our Government to protect the viability of cane sugar refining in the EU, as practised at the Tate & Lyle sugar refinery in my constituency. Previous Governments—Labour and Conservative—were able to secure the future of cane sugar refining. This Government, typically, have failed. The future of the British Government to achieve their objectives in negotiations in the EU is a reflection of the loss of UK influence. The most spectacular
[Stephen Timms]

failure of all was, of course, David Cameron’s failure to secure a meaningful renegotiation in his last efforts as Prime Minister.

My conclusion is that what we actually need is a much more engaged British Government who are able to win arguments in Brussels, as previous British Governments were able to do. The failure of David Cameron’s attempted renegotiation highlights spectacularly just how big a problem has developed, but we should not now be pulling out all together and I will be opposing the Second Reading of the Bill tomorrow night.

6.35 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): I only want to make a short contribution on what in my opinion is quite rightly a very short Bill.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) is about to leave the Chamber, but I remind her that her leader, on 11 May 2016, said that this was a once-in-a-lifetime decision. I would have happily given way to her to allow her to tell us whether she agrees with her leader, but clearly that opportunity has been lost.

I voted with a large majority of this House for the Prime Minister to sign article 50 by the end of March. I would be very disappointed if the House did not now pass the proposed legislation to facilitate that. I get the impression that some in this place are trying to frustrate the clear will of the House and, more importantly, the people, by adding matters that surely should be left for the White Paper and the wider negotiation with the EU.

Lady Hermon: I am not—I emphasise I am not—trying to frustrate the will of the people of the United Kingdom. I am a Unionist. I am trying to keep the United Kingdom together. This House needs to be aware and sensitive to the fact that Sinn Féin, the republican party with four absentee Members of this House, is using the Brexit decision to campaign for an increased vote in the Assembly election. That is my reason for voting against the Bill. It has nothing to do with breaking up the Union; I want to maintain the Union.

Mrs Murray: I am absolutely delighted that the hon. Lady has clarified her position. I am sure her words have been taken on board by everybody.

Let us not tie our Prime Minister’s hands. I ask the House to respect the will of the people in my constituency and the wider country who voted to leave. Let us pass the Bill, trigger article 50 and get on with leaving the European Union as our masters, the public, instructed and the wider country who voted to leave. Let us pass the Bill to respect the will of the people in my constituency.

6.38 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I am minded to support the Bill on Second Reading because, like my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), I respect the overall referendum outcome even though I campaigned for a different result. I believe that the Government are entitled to commence the leave negotiations by 31 March, but that we are entitled to some assurances about their intentions and the way they plan to proceed. I do not think the limited time allowed for the Bill is right. It would be possible to allow more time and still meet the Government’s deadline.

The impression that the Prime Minister and her Ministers have given since she assumed power is that they want to silence MPs, sideline Parliament and rely solely on their interpretation of the referendum result. It looks increasingly as if that means ignoring the views of the 48% who voted remain and even of the larger number who voted leave when it comes to issues such as the single market. The hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) said in an intervention that it was only a two-clause Bill and she did not understand the need for a White Paper, but is it sensible to embark on an epic journey without some idea of where we will end up or how we will get there? It is one thing to give approval to start the negotiations but something else to wash our hands of our constituents’ concerns and give the Government a free hand to do just as they please.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: Does the hon. Gentleman not acknowledge that the Prime Minister has already promised to issue that White Paper at the earliest opportunity?

Steve McCabe: I acknowledge that after a lifetime of denials the Prime Minister said she would issue a White Paper and that we might now get it after the vote on the Bill. That does not seem like much use to me.

The referendum, as has been pointed out, settled the question about our wish to leave the EU, but it did not shape the answer. When the Prime Minister eventually broke her silence in the Lancaster House speech to reveal her intention to disengage entirely from the single market, I do not accept she was reflecting the views of a majority of people in this country. We need to try to ensure continued access to that market on the best terms we can secure and in a way that does not exclude us from regulatory decisions. Without that we risk jobs and businesses and we risk setting in train a period of uncertainty that might do untold damage to our economy.

I accept that the Prime Minister’s position is influenced by her desire to end freedom of movement, but where is the evidence that all those who voted leave actually wanted to prioritise their concerns about freedom of movement over access to the market for our goods and services? Why is it unreasonable to try to reach agreement on controls on freedom of movement? As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) said, why is it so wrong to seek fair movement arrangements allowing for those we need to come here and work, while placing restrictions on lower skilled labour and those not in demand? It might help if the Government were to indicate, as a positive gesture, that they will not use the rights of EU citizens already living and working here as a bargaining chip. That would not be a massive concession, given that the Home Office has already calculated that 80% of EU migrants living here after 2019 will be entitled to permanent residency.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about protecting the rights of EU citizens contributing to and living in the country, but does he not accept that it is the other countries in the EU that are potentially using this issue as a bargaining chip, rather than this Government, and that it is difficult to enter into negotiations unless we have a similar agreement from them to protect the rights of British citizens living elsewhere in Europe?
Steve McCabe: I am proposing that one way to start the negotiations is to offer up a gesture of good will.

We are talking about people mostly engaged in crucial jobs that help to support and secure the jobs of many other British citizens. They were told that the referendum was a decisive result, but it could not have been much closer, and there are many parts of the UK, and indeed England, that did not vote to leave. My constituency voted by a majority of just over 2,000 to remain, but—to break that down further—two of four wards voted to remain and two voted to leave. I have no intention of speaking up only for the views of one group and ignoring the feelings and opinions of the others.

Rather helpfully, I carried out quite an extensive survey of my constituents in Selly Oak following the referendum, because of the closeness of the result and my wish better to understand what people were telling me. Sixty-four per cent said that they want the UK to continue to trade our goods and services within the single market, 76% think that we should commit to giving EU citizens already living and working here the right to remain, and people made clear their concerns about the cost of living, research funds and training programmes, employment and job security. We cannot simply leave those things to chance. We need to know the Government’s approach, hence the importance of the White Paper.

How are we to proceed? Will we have three strands: administrative, legal and trade? Will we try to deal with them all at once or sequentially? Will there be parallel WTO negotiations and talks with other countries. Who are our negotiators? Exactly how many do we have? Do we have the capacity for so many complex negotiations in so short a time? Do we have enough experts—I was going to say that I knew that would upset someone, but he has left the Chamber—at our disposal? We need to know what progress is being made on the bright new world that enthusiastic Brexiteers are promising.

I want to be optimistic about our future, and I was slightly encouraged in that by some elements of Government thinking in the recent Green Paper “Building our Industrial Strategy”, but I do not feel sufficiently optimistic to want to trust our future to those who lied their way through the referendum, making promises of extra money for our health service that they have no intention of honouring. It is for those reasons that this House needs the Labour amendments, with regular feedback on the shape and progress of the negotiations, a right to intervene on the final offer and a right to reject that offer if it is plainly against the interests of the vast majority of our constituents.

6.47 pm

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): I was a remainder and I think it was a mistake to leave. I still think it is a mistake to leave, but that decision has been taken and tomorrow night the House will respect the decision. The question now is not whether we are leaving but where we shall arrive. We must focus on the best way of securing that, not only in our interest but in the interests of the whole continent. We need to grasp the opportunities of Brexit, which do exist, and their significance. The Prime Minister was right to say that she is going to seek a bold and ambitious trade agreement with the EU. Anything that disrupts trade is likely to diminish it and, therefore, output. A deal that safeguards both the UK and our counterparties from that disruption is therefore much needed, and in practice there may be only a little over a year to negotiate it.

So, a transitional arrangement—probably a formal agreement—is going to be absolutely essential. Without it, firms in the financial sector, for example, will act pre-emptively to protect their shareholders from the consequences of a cliff edge. A large number of them have given evidence to the Treasury Committee on exactly that point, and they are not all making it up. The action they will take has already begun in a small way, and it is much more than just brass plating. We need to be clear that the absence of a transitional agreement will cost jobs and economic activity, at least in the short to medium term, and we should not just let that business slip away.

A clear and early commitment from the Government to a transitional period—what I and a number of others have been calling a standstill—at the end of the article 50 process should be priority No. 1 for agreement at the start of the negotiations.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Treasury Committee for giving way. Does he agree that such transitional arrangements are not only in our national interest, but in the interests of every other EU member state, which is why they should agree to the Government’s suggestion sooner rather than later?

Mr Tyrie: I agree. Other states have an opportunity to agree a deal, because it would be obtainable under qualified majority voting, and does not require unanimity, as a careful look at article 50 shows, although that point was not initially understood.

If the UK leaves the customs union, a huge amount of work will be required to develop and enforce rules of origin. Despite the extra bureaucracy, I still think there is merit in leaving. If the greatest opportunities turn out to be in Asia in the medium to long term, as many forecast, we should put the country in a position to benefit. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who is no longer in his place, that a liberal economic internationalism should underpin everything we try to develop in our trade relations.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I agree with much of what my hon. Friend has to say. Does he agree that TheCityUK’s analysis has, it would appear, changed dramatically? Like him, it can see the advantages that might come from Brexit, having once been of the opinion that Brexit would be the worst possible thing for this country’s financial sector.

Mr Tyrie: TheCityUK did say that it was the worst possible thing for the financial sector, and it has clearly decided that the best thing to do is to look for the opportunities rather than spend time moaning about where we are. On the basis of what I read on my iPad on my way to the debate, it has focused on the point about the customs union.

The Treasury Committee has heard convincing evidence that both parties in the negotiations—both the EU and ourselves—have a lot to gain from maintaining a high degree of access to the single market, and a lot to lose from the absence of such access. We should bear it in
mind that the EU, like the UK, benefits from our integration with European supply chains in the automotive and aerospace sectors, for example, and we all benefit from access to London’s deep and liquid financial markets, which lowers the cost of capital to European firms, and of course to British firms. Restructuring manufacturing supply chains would cost both sides a lot; so, too, would the fragmentation of the financial markets.

Sir Gerald Howarth: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Tyrie: I will not, if my hon. Friend will forgive me, for the same reason previously mentioned—I will not get any extra injury time.

Unlike the customs union, access to the single market is certainly not a binary choice: a wide variety of options is possible. We do not need to look into the crystal ball; we can read the book. Switzerland has better access than Saudi Arabia; Canada has better access than Columbia. Reverting to WTO rules would be a huge risk for the UK—one that we should do a great deal to avoid.

There is a majority in the country for leaving, and if that means anything it must mean an end to the direct applicability of EU law and the restoration of control over EU migration. We should also bear it in mind that there is certainly a majority in the country for a high degree of continued engagement with our closest neighbours, which many on the continent also want. Huge advantages can flow from maintaining a high degree of political and economic engagement from outside the EU. It can be as economically beneficial as it will be politically expedient to try to construct it. It can help heal the Brexit wounds to which the Prime Minister referred in her outstanding speech, and it can address the deep unease that seems to be developing about Brexit among the young. Many of them are rejecting much of the irrationality of current political discourse coming out of Washington, and many are certainly rejecting the populist economic nationalism that President Trump represents, which some also attribute to Brexit.

In demonstrating that we understand and are responding to those voices of concern, we can win support at home, and we can construct alliances among our counterparts abroad by making it clear that we want to engage deeply with the EU from outside. That is why, if we can avoid the politics of unreason and avoid, too, the divisions at home and abroad that a disorderly and confrontational Brexit could bring, we can still reap considerable opportunities from the Brexit decision.

6.54 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I, too, supported the argument for remaining in the European Union, and I would do so again. Nevertheless, I respect the decision that was made in the referendum; hence my support, without qualifications, for the Second Reading of this Bill.

I am not generally in favour of referendums. As I am a strong upholder of representative democracy, it would be a contradiction for me to advocate referendums on various topics. The fact remains, however, that, in February 2016, four months before the referendum, the Cabinet Office said:

“The result of the referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union will be final.”

It would be unfortunate if the view were taken that the votes of some people, for example in the Black country in the west midlands, where there were strong majorities for leaving—in my borough in Walsall, and in the other three boroughs—were considered to be less important than others.

I fully respect the strongly held views of those who do not and cannot support the Bill’s Second Reading. Nevertheless, they are not my views, which is why I think it important that the decision made in the referendum—a majority decision—should be accepted. It is said that the majority was narrow. Of course it was narrow, but so have been the results of many general elections. It is said that lies were told. Certainly many lies were told by the leave people—I do not think there is any doubt about that—but it must be said that lies have been told in general elections as well.

One of the ironies is the fact that the leave campaigners laid a great deal of emphasis on the sovereignty of Parliament. Parliament, it was said, should be supreme. It should not be subject to the European Union. But what happened in this case? When it came to triggering article 50, instead of arranging the kind of debate that we are having now, the Government went to the courts and tried to use the royal prerogative. What kind of respect for the sovereignty of the House did the Government show by going to the courts? I am very pleased that the courts did what they did. Far from being the enemies of the people, the judges were the defenders of parliamentary democracy. We should be very grateful indeed for the decision of the High Court, reaffirmed by the Supreme Court.

Immigration, or the free movement of labour—whichever label or category we wish to specify—was undoubtedly an issue during the referendum campaign. There were strong feelings. One does not have to be a racist, or prejudiced, to want to leave the European Union. There were, of course, people who were deeply prejudiced, and perhaps racist, who did want to leave; I would not question that for one moment. However, many others, indeed the majority, who voted to leave were not racist, but had and continue to have strong feelings about immigration. I may well be wrong about this, but I believe that if the European Union had shown some flexibility on the free movement of labour, this debate might well not be taking place. I might add that if the EU examined the issue now, there might well be far more ammunition for the parties of the far right in the 27 states.

As so many of my hon. Friends have pointed out, leaving the European Union must not lead to a backward right-wing agenda. Many laws have arisen from membership of the EU, on, for instance, protection for workers and the combating of gender discrimination—and, indeed, any sort of discrimination. Rules and regulations of that kind must be defended at all costs. Since the start of my political life, and perhaps even before that, I have fought discrimination, in Parliament and outside, and I shall continue to do so until the cremaatorium makes its claim.

Leaving the European Union must not mean less co-operation in the combating of criminality and other problems. Above all else, the Government must learn this lesson about the royal prerogative: the ongoing negotiations that will take place must be subject to
debates in the House from time to time. There must be statements from Ministers. We cannot have a situation where Parliament is silent until the outcome of the talks; a sovereign Parliament, which we say we are, has a right to have statements and to have questions put to Ministers about what is going to go on in the next two or so years on this very important issue.

7 pm
The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).
Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 15).

That, at this day’s sitting, the Second Reading of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until midnight.—(Mr Lidington.)

Question agreed to.
Debate resumed.

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

7 pm
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this historic debate, and it is right that we have the opportunity to discuss the triggering of article 50 and the passage of this Bill.

My postbag has been heavy with correspondence from many constituents writing to ask me what happens next. The British people voted for a change in our relationship with the European Union. They went to the polls to vote on the future of the UK’s relationship with the EU, many because they wanted to preserve the status quo and some because they wanted change. Indeed, for a lot of people it was simply the first time they had the opportunity to have their say on the relationship between the UK and the union it first joined in 1973.

This was a national referendum with a huge turnout on both sides of the debate. The country voted to leave, and, although I was of the opinion that we should remain in the EU and voted that way, I fully respect the democratic process, and I respect the result. My constituency of Cheadle also voted, with a high turnout, to remain in the EU.

There have been many arguments about whether the referendum was advisory, or whether we as MPs should vote with our conscience or according to our constituency result. In my view, I must vote in line with my understanding and belief when I went through the Lobby and voted for the legislation to enable the referendum to take place. I believed that whatever the result, the intention was to uphold the majority view of the people of the country as expressed in the referendum. However, in common with many Members who have spoken today, I understand that there will be people in my constituency who voted to remain who are not where they want to be today, but the question was put and the vote taken, and it is right for the Government to proceed with triggering article 50.

It has been said that this vote is not just about business and the economy, but about the future and what is good for our children and grandchildren.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very clear point. I, too, was of the opinion to remain, but my constituency voted out and I am going to abide by the views of my constituency and the country. Does she agree that we must now make the absolute best of this, and show everybody that this is the right thing and we will do the right thing by them?

Mary Robinson: I agree with my hon. Friend. This is about looking forward. It is about the future of our children and grandchildren, and I believe that, in building a strong economy and providing the jobs our children need, we are doing our best for them. Indeed, thanks to the good work of this Government over the past six years, unemployment has halved in my constituency and stands at 1.3%. Therefore, support for business should be, and is, at the forefront of my thinking. We have to make sure that, when leaving the EU, we get the right deal for businesses, not only those with existing strong and historical trading relationships with the EU, but also many more businesses that would like to embrace the opportunities to trade across the world. Many international businesses are headquartered in my constituency and they must be confident following this vote that the Government will put their best interests at the forefront of negotiations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), who is no longer in his place, spoke about his hopes and aspirations for the west midlands and the opportunities for regions and devolution. I have often spoken in support of the northern powerhouse. I do not doubt the resolve of the people and businesses in my region to rise to the challenge of life outside the EU, or our ability to continue to create jobs and growth, to rebalance our economy and to make a success of new trading relationships.

I believe that we have a lot to be optimistic about. We should build on Britain’s strengths with an industrial strategy that will back Britain for the long term. The north of England is recognised across the world as home to billions of pounds-worth of exciting opportunities for international investors, and we must capitalise on that. Indeed, the Government have already supported significant investment to rebalance our economy and usher in a new era of manufacturing and innovation. This includes spending £13 billion on transport, investing in state-of-the-art scientific projects and supporting small and medium businesses, which are the lifeblood of my constituency. In Greater Manchester, this will be backed up with a landmark political deal to give powers through the Government’s localism agenda.

We have the opportunity, at this moment of national change, to step back and truly think about the country we want to be, and to redefine our relationship with the rest of the world. We must use our most precious and abundant national resource, the determination of our people, to build a competitive economy on which to create a society that works for everyone. We have done this in the past, and I am confident that this will not change as we contemplate life outside the EU. It is with confidence in my constituents, in our businesses large and small and in the resolve of the British people that I rise to support the Bill.

7.6 pm
Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I am pleased that the Leader of the House moved the motion for extra time, and I am pleased to have been called to speak early in that extra time. This has been a long debate on a Bill
that will confer power on the Prime Minister to notify the European Union of the UK’s intention to withdraw from the EU. The decision to withdraw was made by the people in a referendum. Referendums divide opinion, and this one was no exception. I was a little disappointed in the Secretary of State’s opening remarks. He did not set the right tone, in that he did not say to those who voted in a different way that we were going to speak for the whole country.

The electorate of Ynys Môn voted to leave the European Union. The people of Wales voted to leave the European Union, as did the people of the United Kingdom. The turnout in all those areas was more than 70%; it was 74% in my constituency. I said during and after the referendum campaign that I would respect the vote of the people. I said the same thing in 1997 when we had the referendum on setting up the National Assembly for Wales. That referendum had a much smaller turnout and a much narrower result, and I accepted that result. I was also one of the few supporters of the alternative vote, but I accepted that our country did not want to change the voting system. I have made that pledge to respect the vote of the people, and for that reason I will, with a heavy heart, support the Second Reading of the legislation that will trigger article 50.

I have also pledged to continue to get the best deal for my constituents and for the country, and I will stick to that. The best possible deal would involve a clear plan and participation in the single market. It is important to get the language right when we talk about participation; it means working with our near neighbours in the single market. I welcome the White Paper that was presented to the Government by the First Minister of Wales and the leader of Plaid Cymru. It is important for the UK Government to consult the Governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, including through the Joint Ministerial Committee. I shall therefore support Labour’s new clause 4 in Committee. I hope that the Minister is listening, because the Government have said that they want to work together, and now that we are triggering article 50, we should continue the good partnership that we have with the people of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland through the devolved Assemblies. We also need the Government to publish an impact assessment so that we can determine the impact of leaving the single market and the customs union, and we have tabled new clause 5 to that effect.

On the vital link between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, I was pleased by the announcements of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union about the common travel area, because my constituency is Ireland’s gateway to the United Kingdom. The plan that we have heard so far quite rightly talks about the importance of the hard border with the north of Ireland, and it is essential, for reasons already given, that there is an agreement between the Republic and the north of Ireland. In addition, there is the porous border between Ireland and Wales, Scotland and, indeed, England through the ports, and I want clarity from the Government about what that will mean for the free movement of people, goods and capital.

I also have an interest in energy. Our internal energy market is vital for our security of supply. We have interconnectors between the Republic of Ireland, the north of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and I want the Government to make a clear statement about the impact that that situation will have on the negotiations.

After we trigger article 50, it is imperative that we have a White Paper as soon as possible, as the Secretary of State said, because the sovereignty of this Parliament hangs about ensuring proper scrutiny of the Executive. I look to the Government to honour that pledge. We need amendments that will scrutinise the Government.

I have not taken my decision lightly. Two years is a long time, but it will shape the next 20 or 40 years, and the decision must be built on trust. It is imperative that every Member works to unite our communities and our countries, works with the devolved Administrations, and wins the trust of the people, so that we have a post-Brexit United Kingdom that stands proud in the world and does not ignore any part of the United Kingdom. I will support the Bill, but I will be looking for amendments in Committee and on Report before I make any further decision.

7.12 pm

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), particularly because his constituency is my home island, and I value his contribution. My remarks will be brief. Like most Members, I supported the idea of having a referendum. I felt that it was right for the British people to decide our future relationship with the EU. We have all heard the many contrary views about whether we should remain part of the EU, so it would have been wholly wrong for just this House to make that decision—it was right that the view of the British people was taken.

I voted to leave because the approach of the EU, as I think I heard the hon. Gentleman say a moment ago, is somewhat arrogant. Our former Prime Minister travelled the breadth of the EU trying to get a deal, and the fact that the member states did not listen was a great disappointment and shows a little arrogance, which added to the frustration felt by many British people. The hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) talked about the free movement of people, and he is right that the result might have been different had the EU listened to people’s deep concerns about free movement and made some alterations.

I agreed with what my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) said about the campaign. I was uncomfortable with some of the campaigning by both sides—it was not necessarily our finest hour—but I have been really frustrated by some of the post-referendum comments. Some people claim that those who voted to leave did not know what they were voting for, but that shows complete arrogance and a real misunderstanding of people’s concerns and frustrations. The people who have really angered me are those who say that some people who voted to leave did so out of prejudice or racism. That is frankly disgraceful. I have spent most of my time in Parliament fighting prejudice and racism, and I am not one to vote just because of them. I voted as I did because I believe that our destiny will be better if we make our own decisions. However, it is also possible to have real concerns about immigration and not be a racist. It really annoys me that some think
that if a person wants to limit the number of people coming here, they are somehow prejudiced. No, it is about being pragmatic and sensible so that our communities can cope with the numbers of people who live in our area.

When it comes to trust in politics, we have to listen to our constituents—to the people of this country. When I voted for the referendum I knew full well that the result would be what the majority of the people of the whole United Kingdom decided, so I will be representing the views of the British people. I will also represent those in my constituency who did not want us to leave by ensuring that I regularly write to the Department, and I am grateful to the Department for its answers.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman talks, as others have, about the verdict of the British people, but the citizens of this community are fractured, with the majority of people in Scotland wanting a different outcome. How will the Government cope with that in the negotiations?

Stuart Andrew: As I said, it was a vote of the whole United Kingdom. I hear a lot from SNP Members about the people who voted to remain, but I never hear them stand up for those in Scotland who voted to leave.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn talked about the referendum in Wales, in which I campaigned heavily for a no vote. I lost that campaign, but I completely respected the view of the people of Wales and accepted the result. That is what we should be doing today.

Our Prime Minister has set out an ambitious and exciting future for this country. Her 12-point plan has gone down incredibly well with many of my constituents. We are not little Englishers; we are now big Britainers.

We are looking for the great opportunities that we have here. It is now incumbent on EU countries to offer and are trying to give very clear support to EU nationals here. It is incredibly important that we do that very quickly.

Albert Owen: A number of the hon. Gentleman’s colleagues have raised that important issue. Will he therefore be supporting the helpful amendments to get clarity from the UK?

Stuart Andrew: I can understand the Government’s point because I am stuck in the middle. My brother has just got engaged to a Polish girl who wants to stay here and, on the other hand, my father lives in Spain, and he wants to ensure that his rights are protected. I can see this from two angles. The Government have made the offer and are trying to give very clear support to EU nationals here. It is now incumbent on EU countries to do the same for British nationals living abroad.

I am optimistic about our future. We have some interesting times ahead of us, but we can be a truly global Britain. I am not harking back to the good old days, but we have an opportunity in front of us that we should grab with both hands. I will certainly be voting for the Bill tomorrow.

7.19 pm

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): I campaigned hard for Britain to remain a part of the European Union. For 10 years I was a Member of the European Parliament and I learned at first hand the worth of European co-operation to the United Kingdom. For some 12 months I was the Labour party’s Front-Bench spokesman on the European Union. It is therefore true to say that I am a passionate European, but I respect and accept the result of the referendum, because we live in a democracy. Labour Members supported the referendum legislation. From a constitutional point of view, it could be argued that a referendum result is not binding, but morally it is binding on us. During the campaign, all parties clearly accepted that the result was the result and that certain actions would follow, so we are morally bound by that.

For me, the question is now not whether or not we leave the European Union, but the form of our departure and the nature of our future relationship with the EU. Article 50 is only the start of the process and, in some ways, it is far from the most important part. I wish to discuss two issues of extreme importance, which will become more important as time goes on. The first relates to my belief that it is almost inevitable that there will have to be a transitional agreement between the UK and the EU; few people seriously believe that the negotiations will be completed within two years. The nature of that agreement needs to be fully discussed. Whether Britain is part of the European economic area or there is some other arrangement, we will have to discuss the pros and cons of that agreement.

Secondly, it is important for us to focus on the so-called great repeal Bill, which will be coming to this House. In effect, it will be an act of entrenchment, taking the European acquis communautaire and putting it into British law. It is important that we make sure that in our devolved country those powers are not kept in Westminster where it is not appropriate to do so, but devolved out to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We must watch that carefully.

Albert Owen: My hon. Friend is right about that, which was why I made the point that the continuation of consultation with the devolved Governments is essential and should be put on a statutory basis.

Wayne David: Indeed it is important, and ideally it should be on a statutory basis, but in any case negotiation and co-operation have to take place. It is also important that we focus on ensuring that all European law that is supposed to be in that great repeal Bill is actually there. In that regard, we are particularly concerned about employment rights and environmental protection. We need to make the point that this is an ongoing process; once that piece of legislation is in place, that is not the end of the story. It will still be up to this Parliament, if it so wishes—I hope it does not—to unpick that legislation and erode this country’s hard-won rights on employment protection and environmental protection in the EU.

What cannot be underestimated is that for the next few years will be incredibly difficult and complicated. Nobody can seriously suggest that from now on it will be plain sailing—that is not the real world. Therefore it is imperative that for every step of this journey there is parliamentary scrutiny and parliamentary accountability. Like other Members, I am extremely concerned that the Government
have not got off to a good start. They have been dragged screaming to this Chamber, protesting that they do not want to be accountable and developing spurious arguments about having a free hand in negotiation. Who on earth can, having listened to this debate, doubt that it has been good and worthwhile for democracy? This must be only the start, not the end, of that parliamentary discussion that we need to have in our democracy.

In conclusion, we are facing difficult times ahead and it is important for our country to pull together. Nobody can doubt, irrespective of which side they were on during the referendum, that it was a difficult, acrimonious and, in some cases, bitter campaign. It is incumbent on all of us, from all political sides, to make sure that as far as possible we can create a new consensus in this country about how it can go forward together and develop a new relationship with the EU. I believe there is a will to do that among Labour Members, and I very much hope that, despite the rhetoric being employed by the Prime Minister, there is the will for that to happen among Government Members, too.

It is crucial that we do not kid ourselves that, in the modern world, Britain can somehow exist in splendid isolation. The nature of our global community means that we need co-operation, partnership and engagement with other countries. Yes, let us work around the world as well, but let us not forget that we need a new relationship with the European Union. It would be in nobody’s best interests if we were to pretend that our future was somehow distinct and separate from that of the rest of the European continent.

7.25 pm

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David), whom I commend for saying that we should accept and respect the result because we live in a democracy. I shall return to that important principle later in my speech. More importantly, however, he said that morally the result is binding, regardless of what legislation has said or, indeed, what has been said in this House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) also made the good point that there are many complications, both personal and for the country at large, in the route ahead, so we must be careful in the steps we take along the road. Nevertheless, along that road we must travel, so I congratulate the Government on introducing the Bill, which is clear, concise and consistent with the result returned by the British people in the referendum.

I welcome and respect the Supreme Court judgment that led us to this debate. Under our current constitutional settlement, if the Supreme Court decides a matter of constitutional law, it is right that we abide by that decision. That is the rule of law. That is what many people fought for in the referendum: British judges in British courts deciding British law. For that reason, I am pleased that we are here, respecting the rule of law.

I am also pleased that we are able to recognise, through the Supreme Court judgment, that this matter is a United Kingdom competence because it was a United Kingdom referendum. Yes, there were different views in various districts, counties, regions and nations of the United Kingdom, but no single building block of the United Kingdom has a veto. We are one nation and we should respect the result of the country as a whole.

George Kerevan: At this point, no one is challenging the result. No one on my side is asking for a veto. We are asking, because two of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom voted a different way, whether the Government will give assurances that those nations will have a special role in the negotiations.

Mr Jayawardena: It seems to me that the Scottish National party not only does not like referendums—perhaps because it has lost two of them in quick succession—but is not paying any attention to the Government’s extensive work in consulting and working with the devolved Administrations across these islands. I come back to the central point that we are one nation. This is a United Kingdom, and it remains a fact that the people of Scotland voted for that, much to the SNP’s dismay. For that reason, I back the United Kingdom taking this decision.

On the matter of who voted for what, I want to put on record an important point that is perhaps lost in the minutiae of the various points and facts that are bandied around. Other than in Northern Ireland, we do not know how any constituency in this country voted.

George Kerevan indicated dissent.

Mr Jayawardena: The hon. Gentleman suggests that every single result has been published, but he will know that actually it was the results for council districts that have been published. In my neck of the woods, I know that the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight voted for leave. I also know that Hart voted for remain but Basingstoke and Deane voted for leave. It is important that we recognise that as a principle, because it reaffirms my point that this is one nation and that, together as a whole, throughout the country, we voted to leave.

Albert Owen: I just want to correct the hon. Gentleman. Many constituencies are coterminous with their local authorities, so we absolutely know how they voted.

Mr Jayawardena: The hon. Gentleman makes a compelling case for boundary changes to ensure that all constituencies are of the same size. Constituencies in Wales, from where he hails, are much smaller than those in England.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell rose—

Mr Jayawardena: I shall not give way in the interests of time.

Let me be clear: we are leaving. Even the estimates that are being published by various commentators demonstrate a range of views. In my constituency, the number of people voting for leave apparently ranges from between 30-something per cent. and 50-something per cent. How can Members take as credible a position that says that as their constituency voted a certain way, they must vote to remain, regardless of the way in which the country as a whole voted? It is very important that we respect the views of the country as a whole.
Does it matter that we do not know the precise results by constituency? No. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) paraphrased Burke and set out that we are not delegates but representatives who must use our own judgment. I commend the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who said that we should be democrats. Whatever our personal views and however we think our constituencies might have voted, we must respect the views of the British people as a whole, for it is they who have taken this momentous decision. Remainers and leavers must come together. The hon. Member for Ynys Mon is right in saying that we must unite our country. I believe that it is now right that we exercise our judgment to get on with it and to secure the best deal for Britain.

7.31 pm  
Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena). I wish to pick up on what he said about unity in his peroration.

There are moments in our history that mark a real shift in our country’s role in the world, and this Bill is one of them. Since the end of the second world war, the United Kingdom has increasingly shifted its focus in foreign policy towards Europe. That policy was followed in parallel with the gradual disengagement from our empire. It was a policy followed by the leadership of both main political parties at the time. We know that the Conservative party of Macmillan and Heath took the steps that led to the UK joining the European Community and, under Margaret Thatcher, the European single market. Dean Acheson said that Great Britain had lost an empire, but had not yet found a role.

In my political lifetime, we have seen our role as increasingly linked to the continent of Europe. This Bill marks a fundamental change in direction. For good or ill, the result of the referendum was clear: the majority of the UK wanted to leave the European Union. I voted for a referendum and I cannot see any justification for disregarding the result, despite the fact that I campaigned hard for us to remain in the European Union.

The Bill before us initiates the process of leaving the EU and, it seems, turning away from Europe. It is difficult to see how, at this point, the other members of the EU can see it otherwise. The question that then arises is: what is our role going forward? It is really important that we consider that this evening. The Prime Minister has talked about the opportunities in the world, and there are indeed many. I attended an export forum in my own constituency yesterday and heard what exporting companies in Wrexham were doing.

What concerns me about the many representations that I have received is that they focus very little on the future, and more on the acrimony of the debate. What we need to do now is to accept the result. The speech from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) was extremely important, because it showed that the Labour party accepts the result of the referendum. I ask the Government Front-Bench team to take that into account in their future dealings with our party and with us as individuals. Much of the rhetoric that we have heard so far has focused on division. The Conservative party and the Government now need to reach out to the Labour party to try to get the best deal for our country when Britain leaves the European Union.

We have many advantages as a nation: our language, universities, innovation and culture. We must preserve those precious assets, but we also need to build a new, positive relationship with our European allies, albeit outside the European Union. Many of our best businesses, such as Airbus in my constituency in north Wales, have become successes within the EU because of their close relationship with other countries. We need to signal that we do not intend to deregulate in areas such as environmental standards, which have actually driven innovation in our automotive sector, for example, and built the success of our automotive industries.

There is a real concern among many of our constituents that the Government do not believe in labour standards for our people. The Government need to reach out and make it clear that they do and that they do not intend to use leaving the EU as a way of reducing the rights of the people of this country. If the Conservative party signalled that, the Labour party would show a far greater acceptance of the referendum result than we have shown today.

I know that this is difficult for many of my dear colleagues, but I am talking about the Labour party—the party I love—and its future here. We need to accept that Brexit is going to happen and work to forge the best possible way forward for our Labour party and the people we represent in the post-Brexit world. Please, let us put behind us the division—both in the Labour party and more broadly in the country. Let us reach out more and strive for more unity. We have to deal with the post-Brexit world. We cannot simply use the rest of the world as a market as we did when we became the first industrial nation. It is a more competitive world, with nations such as China and India stronger now than ever before. If we want to achieve, we have to work together.

7.37 pm  
Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I voted to remain, and the decision was difficult for me. I did so not out of love for the European Union but because at that particular time I thought it the best way to use my personal vote. At the time, however, I could have also constructed an argument to leave.

I want to back up what my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) was saying earlier about constituencies. In Medway, 64.1% voted to leave and 35% voted to remain. That particular result was made up of two and a half constituencies, so my hon. Friend was absolutely right in saying that we do not have constituency results; I do not have a particular result for Rochester and Strood. However, because of the result in Medway, I will vote to trigger article 50 and support the Government.

Sadly, the campaign was full of false statements and claims. It will always depress me that from some quarters there was a real lack of respect for different views. However, I must point out that I have never thought that people did not know what they voted for and that they did not realise that leaving the European Union would mean leaving the single market or the customs union. I am one of my constituents, and I fully understood that the two things are entwined. I would like those who disagree to point out exactly what they
thought people were voting for if not to leave the single market, bearing it in mind that the single market has three principles.

Alex Salmond: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kelly Tolhurst: May I carry on?

Those three principles are payments, freedom of movement and regulation, which were all addressed by the leave campaign before the referendum. I am fed up with those who argue that we must agree with all the negotiations and that we must vote on the final deal. The final deal will be what it will be. After negotiations with member states, this Government will make a deal with the best interests and prosperity of the British people at its heart in order to achieve the will of the majority of people in the United Kingdom. Yes, there is uncertainty, but there would have been uncertainty even if we had voted to remain. This debate is a distraction. We must get on with the process so we can get the certainty we need. We are debating a process.

My constituents voted to leave for a number reasons and, despite what has been said, immigration was a major factor across Medway, Kent and the south of England. Many of my constituents were fed up with being patronised by the European Union's finger-wagging at the UK. Leaving the EU is an opportunity that we need to embrace. This is a time to get real about immigration, trade, industry and our economy, and to use our sovereign power to dictate the path without having the EU to blame for future difficulties. The sooner we trigger article 50, the sooner we can take a long, hard look at the way in which we do things in the UK, particularly at our love of over-regulating, which has hindered our progress and restricted our potential in some areas.

I voted to remain, and I will be representing my constituents in the House of Commons to ensure that all future UK legislative decisions taken here benefit the people of Rochester and Strood, and others, no matter whether they voted to remain or to leave.

7.42 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Many hon. Members have long believed that the United Kingdom’s interests would be best served outside the European Union. They campaigned passionately for what they believed in, and their view is that we must now leave the European Union. The Prime Minister says that she wants to deliver a Brexit that works for all and that unites our divided country. I, too, want to bring the country back together. Members right across the House will have experienced just how divided the country became in the months leading up to last June and how divided it has become since, but we cannot bring the country back together if we pretend that it has spoken with one united voice.

People who voted to leave did so for all sorts of reasons, many of which have absolutely nothing to do with the European Union, so when the Prime Minister speaks of the will of the people, her interpretation is frankly no clearer or more precise than anyone else’s. Let us not pretend that the people have spoken, because not all of them have. In fact, only 27% of people of the country voted to leave. Some 13 million did not vote, another 7 million eligible voters were not registered and 1 million British ex-pats were not allowed to vote. Even though the futures of 16-year-olds were on the ballot paper, they were denied a say. Only two of the four nations that make up the United Kingdom voted to leave, and there was no quadruple lock. There was no two-thirds supermajority, which is common in all other countries making major constitutional change. Even so, we are told that the people have spoken.

Look at what we have been allowed to become. In a matter of months, our public discourse has been consumed by vitriol and abuse. Hate crimes rose by 40% in the aftermath of the referendum, and we do not yet know what forces will be unleashed on our departure.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Like a number of colleagues including, I am sure, my right hon. Friend, I have been subject to the most orchestrated abuse that I have seen in the past 16 years in this House. Does he agree that there is a danger that the debate is corrupted by a small minority who feel that they are the masters now and that, therefore, any dissent is unacceptable?

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is easy to dismiss views with which you disagree if you never listen to them and just dismiss the people who hold them as villains or enemies of the people.

Yet it is on these terms that we are being asked to rubber-stamp a blank cheque for the Government to deliver the most extreme version of Brexit imaginable. We are being asked to ignore the fact that leaving the European Union will saddle us with a £60 billion divorce bill. We are not going to get tariff-free access to EU customers while rejecting free movement; that is not on the table. We are not going to get a more favourable trading agreement with Europe from outside the single market; that is a paradox. We are not going to come to a full agreement with Europe within two years; believing otherwise completely flies in the face of precedent and all evidence.

Exiting without a deal and falling back on the World Trade Organisation rules is being talked about as though that is a good option. That is totally wrong—it would be an absolute disaster for this country. Even on the optimistic assumption that we can sign trade agreements all over the world, this does not even come close to making up for the loss of the single market. We are facing a return to a hard border in Northern Ireland and a breakdown of the Union with Scotland. We are not reclaiming sovereignty, another promise that falls apart under any scrutiny: we are transferring it to a negotiation behind closed doors.

Doctors are against it, scientists are against it, the financial services sector is against it, and manufacturers are against it because of their exports, but these people are dismissed—and why? Because these days we do not listen to experts. Yes, we are leaving, but it is the EU nations that decide how we leave and what we end up with. Where will this end in 2019? We do not know. Outside the single market, for sure, and outside the customs union, with no trade deal with Europe or anywhere else, our only friend President Trump—a man who has demonstrated why we should worry greatly about a free trade agreement that will probably lead to Kaiser Permanente running the NHS.
We should not fool ourselves. This is not, and never has been, a debate about the economy; it has always been about immigration. We are staring down the barrel of a hard Brexit because immigration has been prioritised over everything else: the economy, jobs, and living standards.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the whole debate on immigration has been completely dishonest in that it has failed to recognise that like all developed, ageing economies, we are going to need migration in order to thrive in the future? We could stop more than half of the net immigration into this country tomorrow, because it is from outside the EU.

Mr Lammy: Absolutely.

We were told during the campaign that we could cut immigration without hitting our economy. We were told the lie that immigrants come here and take more than they contribute. Between 1995 and 2011, European immigrants made a net contribution of £4.4 billion to our public services. In the same period, our native population cost us £591 billion. Our economy cannot exist without people coming here to do the jobs that people in the country either do not want or do not have the skills to do.

It is almost half a century since a Member of this House, in a very different era, made these same warnings of “wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth...children unable to obtain school places” and “homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition”.

How far we have fallen when a black British Member of Parliament, of African and Caribbean descent, has to stand here quoting Enoch Powell. It is the easy option to blame migrants who come here with skills instead of successive Governments, both Conservative and Labour, who have failed: failed to educate our own to compete, failed to build affordable housing, failed to fund our public services, and failed to ensure that growth is felt outside of London and the south-east. A hard Brexit will not deal with any of the long-standing structural problems highlighted by the Brexit vote—it will make them worse. The real tragedy is that Whitehall and Parliament, so consumed with Brexit for the next decade, will have no capacity to deal with these hard-pressing issues.

There are Conservative Members who have been dreaming of a low-tax, low-wage, low-regulation offshore tax haven for decades, and now they have it in their grasp, they salivate at the thought of us becoming the new Singapore. I am not going to stand with them. If we let the Prime Minister pursue this reckless course—this Brexit at any cost—we know who will suffer. It will be the poorest, many of whom are in my constituency. The referendum was not just about votes from the north; 52% of leave voters lived in the south of England, 59% were middle class and 58% voted Conservative in 2015. I remind my colleagues who are worried about this, and who are thinking of voting with the Government, of those things.

Let me finish by asking one simple question, which was once asked by one of our most celebrated parliamentarians:

“Is it prudent? Is it possible, however we might desire it, to turn our backs upon Europe”? When Churchill spoke those words, he was talking about appeasement, and he was going very much against the prevailing wind. The same is true today. Patriotism requires because than just blind faith. We must remember our history, our values, what we represent and what we stand for. Most of all, we must remember what we stand against. For all those reasons, and for the sake of this country that I love, I will be voting against triggering article 50.

7.50 pm

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). He knows that I like him very much, but I disagree with what he has said. I commend the shadow Brexit Secretary for his powerful speech, in which he demonstrated that he believes in our democracy and in the national interest.

The simplicity of the Bill speaks volumes about what it will put into law. As has been said so eloquently by the Secretary of State and many right hon. and hon. Friends and Members, the Bill is about giving our Prime Minister the power to implement what a majority of the British people voted for on 23 June. Members from all parts of the House have made valid and interesting points about aspects of our negotiations and what they would like our final exiting deal to look like, but that is simply not what the Bill is about. Such points, however valid and well made, lead to confusion over the issue at stake: do we leave the EU or do we not? Luckily, that decision has already been made for us. It was made for us because we in this place voted for that most crucial of decisions to be taken out of our own hands and put into the hands of the British people.

I recognise fully that the referendum result was close. The result local to my constituency was even closer than the national result, with 48.4% of Stratford-on-Avon voting to remain and 51.6% voting to leave. That means that I am acutely aware of the need to balance the democratic result of the referendum with a great deal of respect for those who voted to remain. For that reason, along with the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and Daniel Hannan MEP, I welcomed British Future’s “Brexit Together” manifesto. The aim of the manifesto is to voice support for an exit from the EU that is acceptable to both leave and remain voters.

It presents key recommendations on issues that were fundamental in the referendum campaign, such as immigration, security and sovereignty. As I have said, however, now is not the time to discuss and debate those issues. Now is the time to vote to allow our Prime Minister to begin the process of leaving the EU, to allow her to undertake the complex negotiations on the important decisions and to deliver a Brexit that works for everyone.

It is important to bear in mind that the Bill is completely different from the series of votes held to ratify the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties. In those cases, Parliament knew exactly what the terms were and was therefore able to debate the substance fully. In the case of this Bill, we are voting on whether to allow our Prime Minister to undertake negotiations for an outcome that is not yet certain. In order to obtain the best deal possible for the United Kingdom, it is vital that she has as much room for manoeuvre as possible as she embarks on this complex process. Of course we want to see a
White Paper, and her 12-point plan and priorities were very clear, but we do not want to micromanage the negotiations. In my view, any amendments to the Bill that tied her hands or forced her to hold only one negotiating position on any issue would damage her ability to obtain the best possible deal for this country and would harm the national interest. She must have the ability to engage with EU interlocutors freely, not have her position compromised by constraints placed on her by this House. I know there are those in this place who want to put such constraints on her. They want to amend or delay this very simple piece of legislation either to suit their own party’s interests, or because they do not like the decision made in the referendum.

Alex Salmond: If it was so blindingly obvious that leaving the European Union meant leaving the single market, as many of the hon. Gentleman’s colleagues have claimed, why did the Prime Minister take six months to say so, scolding many of her colleagues when they ventured such an opinion?

Nadhim Zahawi: The right hon. Gentleman will recall that both the previous Prime Minister and the previous Chancellor made it very clear, as did many of the commentators in many of the debates that took place during the referendum campaign, that if we are to leave the European Union, we will leave the single market.

My fear is that if Members of this House are seen to be hindering so fundamental a piece of legislation, which simply puts in motion what has already been decided by a majority of the British people, it will only enhance negative perceptions of politicians as arrogant individuals who think they know what is best for the people of this country, even though we politicians voted to give the people their say.

Last night, this House unanimously condemned President Trump’s Executive order banning Syrian refugees and restricting travel to the USA from seven predominantly Muslim countries, labelling the order “discriminatory, divisive and counterproductive”. It was perhaps the proudest I have been of this House since I first came here in 2010. I would be delighted if the House were to give the same backing to this Bill’s Second Reading. We would send a clear message to all our friends abroad that they can rely on our support.

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): In my view, it is a tragedy that we have seen introduced into the House a Bill that will result in our withdrawal from the European Union at the same time as our Government are seeking to embrace an extreme right-wing United States President and Administration who seem hellbent on disrupting a long-standing progressive and multilateral world order based on trade, NATO and the European Union. The American President, whose slogan is “America first”, and who talks in protectionist terms and about a possible trade war with China, hardly seems likely to provide the UK with favourable trade terms, given that the UK has relinquished any leverage it might have had by unilaterally announcing that it is to leave the EU single market. What is on offer from the United States to replace the high-quality consumer standards that EU membership has given us? The answer is chlorinated chicken, beef injected with growth hormones and genetically modified products that do not comply with the EU’s strict precautionary principles.

We have to deal with the world as it is now—the US will not hold elections again until 2020, and the prospects of a second referendum are indeed remote—so I will reluctantly support the triggering of article 50, at least to show what I regard as a modicum of respect for the referendum result, in spite of the fact that the margin was a narrow 52% to 48% and that the debate was littered with untruths and misleading facts, while the largely EU-hostile media represented the interests of their owners.

Let me make this point very clear: the vote is not a blank cheque. If the deal that comes back is bad, I and I am sure many other people will vote against it. If there is no deal and we become dependent on deals struck with the US, Turkey and New Zealand, then God help this country. We risk being isolated in Europe. Why should we buy lamb or butter from New Zealand when we can buy them from France or produce them ourselves? How can we get Turkey to comply with EU consumer standards when they are nowhere near ready to enter the EU—if, indeed, they ever do so? I genuinely hope the Government can maximise their influence to get a good trade deal. The future of this country, and its jobs and prosperity, very much depends on it.

The Foreign Secretary yesterday accused Members of demonising Donald Trump as a Nazi, when a week ago he himself compared President Hollande with a Nazi guard giving punishment beatings. The incompetence and undiplomatic nature of the Foreign Secretary, and other members of the Government, lead me to believe that it is very unlikely we will get a good deal with our European partners. That is not just because of what has been said in recent weeks and months, but because of the history of Eurosceptic Conservative Back Benchers. The Government’s track record is poor. For the sake of this country, our young people and everyone else, let us hope their negotiating skills are far better.

8 pm

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Even today, some seven months on from the referendum, I still view with disbelief and inspiration the enormity of what happened on 23 June. Between 1 am and 4 am on that momentous Friday morning, my whole world view changed: the way I saw my country and my constituency, which voted to leave, was forever altered. Another political event so vast and so improbable is hard to find. The British people’s vote—polite, calm and astonishing—was a vote to ignore the advice of their political leaders, to defy the main parties, and to reject the megabanks and the multinationals. It was a vote that turned down the advice of the CBI, the TUC, the National Farmers Union, the broadcasters, the institutions, the experts and Barack Obama. It was against all odds.

Why did they do that? The British people wanted to re-empower themselves. They were fed up with a dirigiste EU imposing laws, policies, restrictions and costs upon them in an increasingly unaccountable, inefficient and costly way. They wanted to be free of a political union responsible for a failing single currency and rising youth unemployment.
Wayne David: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Suella Fernandes: No, I won’t. The British people voted — [Interruption.]

Wayne David: I thank the hon. Lady for eventually giving way. Would she ascribe any part of the defeat of the remain campaign to the incompetency of her former Prime Minister?

Suella Fernandes: That is very childish and immature. I salute the former Prime Minister for having the courage to put the vote to the British people and respect the outcome with honour. The hon. Gentleman should, too.

In voting to leave, the British people were asserting their self-confidence and their fearlessness. They wanted Britain to forge a different path, one of a global-minded, pluralist, competitive and liberal Britain. That is why it is important that this House and the other place ensure that that happens. The procedure for withdrawal, set out in article 50, is the right way to proceed for two reasons. First, it provides a time limit. The two-year deadline prevents the talks being strung out indefinitely, and provides clarity and reassurance. Secondly, article 50 enshrines the ratification of withdrawal through qualified majority voting, rather than by unanimity. This ensures a greater chance of ratification for the terms of our departure.

Members proposing to vote against the Bill should be mindful of the fact that the House has already voted on and agreed to the Government’s timetable for triggering article 50 by 31 March by a significant margin of 372. We must respect the decision not just of this House but of the British people. Opposition Members who in their intransigence wish to defy the previous vote seek only to prolong and frustrate this process in an illogical and irresponsible way.

More than simply triggering article 50 and leaving the EU in the technical sense of resuming our sovereignty, we should use the Brexit process to address the concerns that pushed people into voting leave in the first place. We need to stand up for the needs of those on lower incomes by reducing the cost of living, we need more democratisation and decentralisation and we need to embrace the unprecedented opportunity of free trade. As Richard Cobden, the 19th century MP said:

“Free Trade is God’s diplomacy and there is no other certain way of uniting people in the bonds of peace.”

He was right. There is no greater barometer of peace than the opening up of an economy.

This is an opportunity that Britain must grasp. We need to think like a global and maritime nation, rather than a continental nation, and as the Prime Minister has stated so clearly, we can only do this by leaving the customs union and the common external tariff and by liberating ourselves from the common commercial policy. We need skilled workers, yes, but we need them from the world outside the EU, not just from within. Crucially, however, we want to determine for ourselves who comes in and in what numbers. We stand on the brink of prosperity, freedom and opportunity as we vote to trigger article 50. That is the prize for our courage as we write the next chapter of our country’s great future.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I am strongly in favour of the reasoned amendments and against the Second Reading of this grudging, threadbare Bill, which will have such profound and damaging consequences for our country. Like the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who again today proved himself to be a true statesman, I did not vote for the legislation paving the way for the referendum, so I am being entirely consistent in my opposition. I did not vote for the referendum because I thought it a reckless gamble with our country’s future by David Cameron—and so it also proved for his future.

In Stoke-on-Trent, next door to my constituency, 70% voted to leave and 30% to remain. In Newcastle-under-Lyme, after a very hard campaign, it was 60% and 40%. As this fraught, long process goes on, I have not given up on persuading another 10%, at least, in my constituency. In opposing the Bill, I am not disrespecting the opinion of the majority: I just think, on this occasion, that it is wrong. I am not failing to trust the people; I just disagree with some of them and agree with the 48% who voted to remain. What I do not trust, however, on the basis of their performance so far, is this Government or their ability to achieve the best for our country if we hand them this blank cheque of a Bill with no safeguards.

We need assurances on many areas, including on tariff-free access to the single market for our goods and services—for the ceramics industry, a major exporter in my area of the Potteries, for instance; on continued membership of the customs union, which not only aids trade in Europe but, importantly, helps to diminish non-tariff barriers to trade; on assurances on visa-free movement to and from the European continent, which we have got used to and which is so important to our people, businesses and the economy as a whole; and on guarantees that the rights of EU nationals living here and of UK nationals on the continent will be protected, not just with permanent leave to remain but with full democratic rights, so that we do not create a second class of Gastarbeiter among our populations. These are fundamental issues that the Government need to address further before being given the green light to trigger article 50.

I and other colleagues will no doubt be the target again of orchestrated abuse, as we have been since the vote in December, for being so impertinent as to even raise these issues. However, I think we can be given a bit of slack for our questioning in the mere seven months since the referendum, when my next-door neighbour, the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), spent 40 years defying the so-called will of the people following the overwhelming vote to remain, by two thirds to a third, in the 1970s.

Let me draw to a close by mentioning a further safeguard that such a Bill needs: the guarantee of a meaningful vote on the terms that the Government negotiate before we exit the European Union. After her trip to the White House, I see that the Prime Minister was in Turkey at the weekend. There was a very effective piece of political advertising during the referendum that entirely changed the terms and the tone of the conversations that we were having in Newcastle-under-Lyme and around the country in the last few weeks of the campaign. That was the big, red banner poster that went up saying, “Turkey (population 76 million) is
joining the EU—Vote Leave”. It was not, of course, and it is not. That was a lie, but the only question that we were asked from then on was, “What are you going to do about the Turks?” It was simply impossible to convince people during the referendum that it was indeed a lie.

Alex Salmond: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman recalls that it was actually the Foreign Secretary, who was campaigning hard for Turkish accession to the European Union, who then, as part of the leave campaign, used that mythical accession as a reason for the UK exiting the European Union.

Paul Farrelly: I remember it very well. It was an abysmal and terrible performance from someone who considers himself one of the leading statesmen of our time and, indeed, an aspirant Prime Minister.

The peddling of myths and falsehoods during the referendum is a very good reason why there should be a second, meaningful vote on the terms of departure—a vote on the facts and not the fictions. Quite frankly, this House and the country deserve better than the type of vote that has been promised so far by the Prime Minister, which is, “My way or the highway”. That is simply not good enough.

When I was growing up, in my late teens and early 20s, I used to organise international youth exchanges. Every summer, teenagers from all parts of Europe gathered to tend war graves in Berlin, where the wounds of conflict were still fresh and the cold war divided the city by a wall. I did that because in Staffordshire, at Cannock Chase by the Commonwealth war memorial, we have the German war graves. I have worked closely with the German War Graves Commission over many years. For me personally, co-operating with Europe is about much more than simple prosperity. I would simply not be doing the right thing by my conscience, nor would it be in the interests of the country or what I believe to be the interests of the people I represent, if I voted for this flimsy Bill. I do not support leaving the European Union and I think this Bill is too blank a cheque for this Government.

8.12 pm

David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): There is perhaps no other subject that will dominate this Parliament and define the future path for our country than leaving the European Union. I fully supported the idea of holding a referendum on British membership of the European Union. It was a clear manifesto commitment at the 2015 election and this is an issue that has dominated British politics since before I was born. I strongly believed that the time had come to allow a referendum, so that the British people could make a decision once and for all on whether we should be members of the European Union or not.

I clearly recognised that a referendum is a binary choice—a yes or no; to stay or leave; membership or no membership. I weighed up the benefits as I saw them. I recognised strong arguments on both sides, but I always believed that the results should be followed. I voted to remain in the European Union, but my town of Northampton voted overwhelmingly to leave, by 58.3%. Whatever my own views, I am now mandated by my constituents to vote how they tell me. I am their representative here and as such will carry out my duty to them by supporting the decision to allow the Prime Minister to trigger article 50. I believe that this is not the time for further division. The days of remain or Brexit are over. It is clear that we are leaving the European Union and it is crucial that in the months and years ahead we work together to get the best deal we can for this country and focus on an international, global outlook. That is where my efforts will be.

8.14 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am pleased to speak today on behalf of my Brighton constituents and indeed of anyone else who continues to be desperately concerned about the enormous risks to this country from the Government’s approach to Brexit. To my mind, the bottom line is this: the Prime Minister has no mandate for the extreme Brexit she is pursuing. It was not on the ballot paper, and I see no contradiction between respecting the outcome of the referendum, which I do—we are leaving—and withholding consent to trigger article 50 tomorrow, when the kind of Brexit that has been set out is so profoundly damaging to the people of this country, and when it is being pursued in profoundly undemocratic ways: with the absence of a White Paper, an absence of safeguards for our economy and with no guarantees for our key social and environmental priorities, either.

I have to say that it is a little surreal to hear so many hon. Members acknowledge that extreme Brexit will be a disaster, yet then announce that they are going to go ahead and vote for it anyway. Very cleverly, the Government have managed to morph a narrow vote in favour of leaving the EU into an apparently overwhelming mandate to leave the world’s biggest trading zone and be cut off from the EU and its agencies. The Government seem increasingly desperate to make deals with any despot they can find—we saw an arms deal with Turkey last weekend, and a trade deal with a divisive and dangerous US President to whom the Prime Minister has already clearly demonstrated she is entirely either unable or unwilling to stand up. That is not what the people voted for.

Nobody voted in the referendum to scrap environmental protection, consumer standards or workers’ rights. Nobody voted to undermine the rights of UK citizens living in other EU countries, or indeed EU citizens living here in the UK. Nobody voted for future generations of young people being denied the right to travel, work and study at a level at least equal to what they enjoy now. And nobody voted for the UK to become a tax haven floating off the coasts of Europe, clinging on to the coat tails of Trump’s America. Yet triggering article 50 under the terms set out will set us on a course that will cause all those things to happen, because they are the logical consequence of the Prime Minister’s extreme version of Brexit.

The Prime Minister’s agenda is essentially about sacrificing the many benefits of the single market on the altar of ending free movement. It may be unpopular to say so, but it needs to be said that free movement has benefited our country in numerous ways. It has benefited British people by giving them the opportunity to work, to study, to live and to love in 27 other countries. It benefits our public services, especially the NHS, and it benefits our economy as a whole because EU nationals
contribute more to our public finances than they take out. We would be a poorer country without the taxes EU nationals pay and the work they do in our hospitals, our care homes and our councils—and, more importantly, our societies and our communities would be immeasurably the poorer as well.

The Prime Minister’s agenda will also see us abandon the customs union, and it threatens a new economic model defined by a race to the bottom on corporate taxation—a model that, despite the Prime Minister’s pledge to unite the country, will likely see inequality in Britain rise, as spending on vital public services such as the NHS is eroded yet further. Again, nobody voted for that on 23 June, either. On the contrary, many voted for more money to be invested in the NHS. I seem to recall £350 million a week—yet, just last week, Ministers released official figures showing that they will be cutting the NHS budget per head in real terms in 2018-19.

Let us challenge this idea that these other trade agreements are somehow going to make up for the difference if we leave the single market. Research has shown quite clearly that even if we manage to do deals with the US, the EU, China, Russia, Canada and New Zealand, they would not anywhere near compensate for the loss to the economy of withdrawing from the single market. For voters who support leaving the EU only if they are not personally worse off, that, I think, is crucial information.

The Government have been forced grudgingly to allow Parliament a say on triggering article 50, but it is massively insulting to squeeze this resentful scrap of a Bill into a timeframe that is entirely disproportionate to the immensity of its consequences—and doubly so when the Bill throws us off a cliff edge.

Mr Baker: I am just enjoying a blog post on a website of 13 July 2015, in which the hon. Lady comments on the Greek situation under the hashtag “ThisIsACoup”. She describes the IMF, the eurozone and the European Central Bank as “the forces of darkness”. She finishes her post by writing:

“It’s time that politicians here in Britain, no matter where they stand on the economics of the Greek situation, take a stand for the simple right of a nation to manage its own affairs.”

Does she still believe what she wrote back then?

Caroline Lucas: I do not see any contradiction between what I wrote back then and the position I am taking now. I have always been critical of certain actions of the ECB and I will continue to be so. That does not mean that we throw the baby out with the bathwater. Only someone who was enormously reckless would think that was a sensible way forward.

What is reckless is a Bill that is going to throw us off a cliff edge, entirely unnecessarily, because it fails to include any mention, let alone give any details, of any transitional arrangements. That means that once the clock starts ticking—once article 50 has been triggered—if negotiations take longer than those two years, we will suddenly be thrown into a world of WTO-only tariffs, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that his constituents will not thank him for that. I do not believe that democracy is well served by such recklessness.

In the last few moments available to me, I want to say a few words about the environment, an issue that has been conspicuous by its absence during most of the debate over the past few days. I am especially concerned about the need for guarantees—real guarantees—to maintain environmental regulation that is at least as strong as current EU regulation. The environment protection part of the European Communities Act—crucially, with its own court of arbitration—might be one way of delivering that, but we also need to ensure that there are clear ways of retaining our relationships with important European agreements such as REACH, on the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals, and with the European Chemicals Agency.

We need UK environmental regulators and enforcement agencies, ready to step into the shoes of the EU institutions that currently perform such roles. Those institutions must be properly funded when the EU is no longer funding them. We need to ensure that the principles that underpin our environmental regulations, such as the precautionary principle, are not lost. At present we have no guarantees, and we deserve to have guarantees before article 50 is triggered. About this, as about so much else, there is no information.

Leaders of the leave campaign famously talk about taking back control. If that means anything, it surely means that control must be not just about our departure, but about our destination. Democracy requires that Parliament has ample opportunity to scrutinise the terms of the Brexit deal that will emerge from negotiations, but it also requires the country to have the right to continue to be given a say in the form of a referendum on the proposed deal. I cannot vote for a Bill that fails to provide those safeguards.

8.21 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is a great honour to take part in this historic debate, and a particular honour to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who speaks about the issue with such passion. As I am sure all Members will agree, we have heard some extraordinary speeches today. I pay particular tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). That masterclass display of oratory and expertise has, perhaps, shown us in the House two ends of a debate that has been taking place in the country for some 40 years.

I, of course, have a slightly different viewpoint, because I was not a Member of Parliament when the European Union Referendum Act 2015 was passed. This is not, for me, a review of past battles lost and won. It is about looking to the future, and it is in that spirit that I shall address the House this evening—briefly, of course.

The Bill is intended to give the Government the power that they need in order to begin negotiations. It is a legal mechanism to enact what the British people decided in the referendum. It is not about the detail of the negotiation, and it is not about the kind of country, or the domestic law, that we shall have post-Brexit. That will come later, with the great repeal Bill. Parliament will debate those matters, but the place for them is not in this Bill.

The referendum that we experienced so clearly and vividly last year was an extraordinary event for the country. In 388 of 650 constituencies, more people voted to leave than voted for the sitting Members of Parliament. The Conservative Party manifesto, on which an overall majority was won, promised that the Government would respect the result of the referendum, “whatever
the outcome”. Parliament voted overwhelmingly, by six to one, to give the people a say. The Government made the position plain, in debate and during the campaign. It told the people, “This is your decision, and the Government will implement what you decide.” The result of the referendum was clear: 17.4 million people voted to leave.

I, of course, was outside this House at the time, and I have a different perspective, but what was clear to me then was that, whatever the result, there was no question that the Government would not implement what the people decided. The Supreme Court has made it clear that its decision had nothing to do with whether or not this country should leave the EU, nor does it have anything to do with the timetable or any future arrangements with the European Union. Those who oppose this Bill know full well that the time to debate that detail will come; they seek simply to tie the Government’s hands at this stage, in the hope, I regret to say, that a series of impossible demands will render any good deal impossible. We must be sure not to be drawn into a debate that is an exercise in delay and obstruction, when the time to debate that detail will come.

I do not pretend that the process of withdrawing from the European Union will be easy, straightforward or brief. It will require significant expertise and a consistent approach, but, with this Government, we have exactly that: expertise and a consistent approach. I am sure that all Members will listen to their constituents, as is incumbent upon all of us, and that is why I spend time in my constituency talking to businesses, charities and the public sector in order to understand how the process of our establishing our new role in the world impacts upon them.

There are challenges, certainly, but there are also opportunities, and we must look to the future with that positive attitude. Nothing is more likely to end up with this country having a bad deal than if we approach the negotiations divided, weak, failing to get behind the Government and make this a success, or seeking to tie the Government’s hands in negotiation.

We have enormous advantages as a country—the world’s sixth biggest military and fifth biggest economy, the world’s most used language, and the Commonwealth, but, above all, a country of people who are clever, inventive and industrious.

It is a time to look to accept that the referendum result has been decided. The British people would never forgive us if, having given them the choice, we decided that we had, in fact, changed our mind, or we could not get together and make a success of it. We must look to the future, embrace the positives and trust the people, and that process must start now.

8.27 pm

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): When I was first elected to this House seven years ago, I knew this job would be hard. I anticipated the soul-searching that would accompany, for example, a decision to commit troops to military action, but what I did not anticipate seven years ago were the fundamental questions about our democracy that I have been asking myself since the referendum last year.

We might talk today about the will of the people, the process which has led us here and the process which follows, but ultimately this debate is about how we take decisions in the best interests of our country and how we respect the diverse views of our electorate. I will vote against triggering article 50 tomorrow evening, and I will be called a democracy-denier. “How can you ignore the will of the people?”, some will cry; “You voted for a referendum. How many times do you want to rerun it?”

Democracy did not start or end on 23 June; it is a process, not an event, and I see it as my responsibility to say it as I see it.

There were circumstances in which I would have voted to trigger article 50. The Prime Minister killed off that prospect for me when she made her speech in Lancaster House: a speech in which she said she would pull us out of the single market; a speech in which she put her desire to reduce immigration above our country’s economic interest; and a speech in which she threatened the countries closest to us with a trade war if she did not get her way. I was ashamed by the words of the British Prime Minister that day, and I resolved then to vote against the triggering of article 50. How we negotiate with our European neighbours is as important as what we seek to achieve. I disagree with the Prime Minister on her priorities and I disagree with the manner in which she is setting about achieving them.

This is the start of a process that we might not be able to reverse. The Government want to take us out of the single market.

Mr Lammy: Did my hon. Friend see some of the headlines in the European papers following that speech, and does she agree that those reactions will make the negotiations much harder in the coming months?

Heidi Alexander: I did see some of that commentary. One of the Spanish newspapers described the speech as a mixture of delusion and outdated nationalism.

I can predict the future no better than anyone else in this Chamber, but my instincts tell me that coming out of the single market will do us harm for many years to come. Last June, the British people were asked whether they wished to leave the European Union. They were not asked whether they wanted to leave the single market or the European economic area—those are different things—and the words “customs union” were barely uttered in the run-up to the referendum. Instead, we had a toxic and misleading debate that inflamed rather than informed.

Some people might say, “Get over it,” but I cannot. We had a Conservative manifesto that promised to safeguard British interests in the single market. We had a leave campaign on the airwaves telling us:

“Only a madman would actually leave the market”.

Even that man of the people, the ex-public school educated ex-stockbroker Nigel Farage, pointed out how countries such as Norway—outside the EU but inside the European economic area—“do pretty well”. And then what happened? A Prime Minister who was crowned her party’s leader without a single vote having to be cast sits in No. 10 and determines what leaving the EU looks like. That might be democracy to some but it is not democracy to me. Parliament or the British people should determine whether we leave the single market. Article 127 of the EEA agreement states that a party to
the agreement must notify its intention to leave 12 months in advance. There is a key democratic imperative for more people than just the Prime Minister to have a say.

Some colleagues here today will vote to trigger article 50 when in their heart of hearts they are deeply fearful of the economic and social repercussions for our country. They will do so for good reasons, including the need to reflect in their own minds the broad wish of a majority of those who voted in the referendum. I cannot do that, because as the reality of Brexit Britain emerges over the next few years, I want to have acted in line with my conscience. I fear for our economy. I fear for the livelihoods and living standards of my constituents. I also worry for jobs in Swindon, the town where I grew up and a place with a big Honda plant whose supply chain spans Europe. Yes, we might make some gains as a result of new trade deals elsewhere, but what of the losses we incur from coming out of the single market?

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentions the impact on the car manufacturing sector. If we had to operate under WTO rules, an additional 10% tariff would be placed on car exports. What impact would that have on her community?

Heidi Alexander: The impact would be felt across the country. The ease with which British firms trade with other firms in Europe is absolutely integral to the strength of our economy.

I also worry that immigration controls might result in a bureaucratic system whereby we cut off our nose to spite our face. I worry about the business of government being dominated by efforts to disentangle us from the EU, with endless hours being spent recreating systems that, by and large, currently work quite well. And what of the things that the Government will not be able to do as a result of Brexit? There is an urgent need to find an answer on how we fund our NHS and social care system, how we upskill our population and how we rebalance the economy to ensure that no town or community is left behind. We can kiss goodbye to those things as Brexit will suck the oxygen from Whitehall and Westminster.

I am not normally a pessimist, but I feel I am watching a slow-motion car crash and I have to do something about it. Over the next 12 months, Europe is likely to experience the political turmoil that we, along with America, have experienced over the past 12 months. Now is not the time to be making threats and burning bridges. Now is not the time for party politics. My country comes first and that is why I will vote against this Bill at the first opportunity.

8.35 pm

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): I rise to support the Bill, respect the referendum and trigger article 50, so that we can forge a new path for our country as a confident, self-governing democracy. We are the good European neighbour and a global leader in free trade.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander). I am more optimistic about the outcome, but I pay tribute to her for the concerns she expressed, and I pay tribute to contributions from Members on both sides of the House and both sides of the debate. The truth is that the Bill puts all of us to the test. Some do not like the outcome of the referendum, and I can understand that. Some think the judges interfered in a matter we asked the people to decide, and I can understand that, too. However, we cannot reinvent the basic tenets of democracy, from referendums to the rule of law, whenever it produces a result we do not much care for.

Likewise, reasonable arguments are being made from all quarters about White Papers, timing and procedure. I respect those arguments and sympathise with some of them, but we cannot allow process to trump substance, delay the timetable or impose the kind of fetters that would only weaken our leverage and strength as we go into the crucial Brexit negotiations. Tomorrow, every democrat in this House will have their cards called. Do we stand by the high-minded statements of democratic principle that we all espouse, or do we find some reason or pretext to justify escaping the inexorable requirements of the referendum, when we placed our trust in the people of this country? I know how seriously all Members will take that decision.

We also have an opportunity today to turn the page, to draw a line under the referendum and to build a stronger national unity of purpose. Those who, like me, voted leave need to listen and recognise the understandable anxieties around Brexit. We all need to realise that despite the polarising political debate and media coverage most people, whether they voted leave or remain, had some doubts. They felt the force of arguments on both sides, and they overwhelmingly now want to make Brexit work for our country, for our children and for our future.

That is why the Prime Minister’s Lancaster House speech was so welcome and should give every hon. Member the confidence to support this Bill. The Prime Minister gave the country a detailed plan and, above that, a clear vision for a Britain where those who make the laws of the land are accountable to the citizens, a Britain that is open and outward looking but does not take for granted, ignore or scorn people’s legitimate concerns about the scale or pace of immigration, and a Britain that is leaving the EU but holds out the hand of friendship to the nations and peoples of Europe on trade, security and wider co-operation. It was a vision of a global Britain with a broader horizons, great ambition, a big heart and a noble mission to champion free trade. Whether it is about businesses that export, workers’ wages or cheaper prices for consumers making ends meet, let us not forget that that mission is good for Britain. It is good for raising global living standards. It is good for our European friends, including the continental firms that sell us £60 billion more each year in goods and services than we sell them. It is good—no, it is vital—for the poorest African nations, currently languishing under the yolk of hypocritical western protectionism and for whom free trade is the surest route to real independence. This is not some grubby agenda but a lodestar for modern Britain. That is why, according to YouGov’s poll after the Prime Minister’s speech, the British public back the plan by three to one.

The British economy is strong and, with £1 trillion-worth of UK finance supporting European businesses and jobs, our negotiating leverage and, even more important, the scope for a win-win deal with our European friends is clear. We have the plan and we have the vision, so let us go into these negotiations with some ambition and self-belief befitting the character of this great country.
I fully accept that it is easier for me to vote against article 50 because my constituency voted remain. I have been overwhelmed by the support for my position that I have received from my constituents and Labour party members, but I completely understand that some colleagues, particularly those in areas that voted heavily to leave, will find it more difficult to do this. In the end, however, as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) so ably reminded us, we are elected representatives who are called upon to use our own judgment about what is in the best interests of our constituencies and the country. Do we believe that cutting ourselves off from our closest friends and main trading partners will hurt or help our constituents and our country? Do we honestly think it is in our national interests to hitch ourselves to this American President? We will all be judged in the future on how we voted on this Bill.

Finally, let me say that I am disappointed and saddened by the decision of my party’s leadership to try to force Labour MPs to support this Tory Bill. Even more, I regret that we are being whipped to vote to curtail our detailed debate to just three days—and this on the biggest issue of our lifetimes, which will have repercussions for generations to come. Scores of amendments to this Bill have been tabled, yet there is no chance of most of them being debated or voted upon. The situation is completely unacceptable and this is a dereliction of our duty as parliamentarians and as an Opposition.

Mr Bradshaw: If my hon. Friend does not mind, I will finish now.

I will therefore vote against the Government’s programme motion to curtail debate. For the first time in nearly 20 years in this place, I will be voting against my party’s three-line whip on a Bill. In doing so, I am reflecting what I believe to be the majority view of those who elected me, and the view of millions of others in Britain who oppose this Government’s choice to pursue the worst and most destructive form of Brexit, and all the negative consequences that that will bring.

8.46 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), who argued his case with his characteristic clarity and eloquence. I campaigned for the UK to remain in the EU and I do not resile from a single argument I made in favour of that position—I happen to think I was right—but I recognise that I lost the argument. I did not agree with the referendum result, but I respect it. I am absolutely clear that democracy demands that we vote to trigger article 50 and that to do otherwise would be democratically unsustainable. Let me take a few moments to explain why.

The first point to make is that our relationship with the EU had to be resolved. Wherever one stands on the question of whether we should have been closer to or further away from the EU, the reality is that the UK’s relationship with it lacked democratic legitimacy. The boil had to be lanced; the referendum had to take place. Some say that we should have not let the people have their say. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), whose speech was a masterclass
that I was privileged to witness, set out his view that this is not a matter that the people should decide. That might have been right in 1970, 1980 or 1990, but the culture of our country has moved to the point—whether we call it the collapse of the deference culture or something else—where a decision of this House on something of such enormous constitutional significance would not have the currency that the British people required. It had to be them who made the decision.

I stood on a manifesto that promised to offer the British people the referendum and to honour its result. The manifesto clearly stated:

“We will honour the result of the referendum, whatever the outcome.”

To betray that would be unconscionable. If that were not clear enough, on Second Reading of the Bill that became the European Union Referendum Act 2015, the then Foreign Secretary said that that Bill “has one clear purpose: to deliver on our promise to give the British people the final say on our EU membership in an in/out referendum”—[Official Report, 9 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1047.]

How can anyone in this House who voted in favour of that somehow ignore the position now? How is that democratically sustainable? I say that as somebody who did not welcome the result, but I have to accept it.

During the campaign, I do not recall that it was ever suggested by anyone on either side of the debate that somehow the vote would or could be ignored. Everyone understood the vote’s significance, and not a single person I spoke to suggested that the result might not be respected. If there were any doubt about that, should we not reflect on the 72.2% turnout? The reason why the turnout was so great was because the British people recognised that they were being asked not for their advice, but for their instructions.

George Kerevan: Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a difference between voting to come out of the EU and coming out of the single market? Opposition Members are trying to argue that the Government are rushing to judgment on the single market.

Alex Chalk: I make two points in response to the hon. Gentleman. First, I am concerned that those who fasten on the point about the single market are using it as a fig leaf—an excuse to try to avoid the referendum result. Secondly, I am perfectly clear that I would have preferred to stay in the single market, but it has become tolerably plain over the past six months that that was never a credible option, because the four freedoms that the EU holds so dear—goods, services, labour and capital—are perceived to be utterly inviolable. There was never any flexibility on offer.

My personal view is that it would have been in the interest of the European Union to offer some flex in respect of the free movement of labour. Had that been offered to the former Prime Minister, we might have remained in. Indeed, had it been offered to our current Prime Minister, we might have remained in the single market, but that has never been on offer. Edmund Burke said:

“A state without the means of some change is without the means of its own conservation.”

The EU may, in due course, come to rue the decision not to offer some flexibility.

Caroline Lucas: I do wish that Government Members who say that we have to go for an extreme Brexit would stop rewriting history. At the time of the referendum, plenty of people, including Dan Hannan, were saying things like, “Absolutely nobody is talking about threatening to leave the single market.”

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. The hon. Lady has already spoken. Other Members present have not yet spoken, and the speech limit will already have to come down at some point, so I implore people who have spoken not to intervene, please, because it is literally taking time away from other Members.

Alex Chalk: True democrats must now turn to the future. What kind of country do we want to be? As the Prime Minister said, 23 June cannot be the moment when the United Kingdom stepped back from the world. It must be the moment we stepped forward. We must be more open, outward-looking, tolerant, international and global.

Little England has no appeal for me. We must remain a magnet for international talent and a beacon for those who want to come here to study, to work. We must act quickly to resolve the status of EU nationals, who contribute so much to my constituency and the wider United Kingdom. That is the territory on which we must now fight. I am a European and I am a Briton, but I am also a democrat. Democracy demands that all those who voted in favour of the referendum last year do their duty tomorrow evening.

8.53 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk). My speech will follow in a similar vein, except to say that it is the duty of every Member of this House to do what they believe to be in their good conscience. Whether that is supporting or opposing the Bill, I will respect each and every Member for the decision that they reach.

This is a speech that I had certainly hoped not to make, in a debate that I had hoped would not be necessary. I made my maiden speech in this House on Second Reading of the European Union Referendum Bill. I believe today, just as I believed then, that Britain would be stronger, safer and better off inside the European Union. I made that case on the doorstep, in my constituency, in print, on the airwaves, in the Treasury Committee and in the Chamber. I have heard many powerful speeches today, particularly from my right hon. and hon. Friends, reminding me of why I made that case, but ultimately we must accept that the moment to make those arguments was during the referendum campaign, and we lost the debate throughout the country.

In the immediate aftermath of the referendum, I told my constituents that I would honour the result and hold the Government to account to secure the best possible deal for our country outside the European Union. That remains my intention today on a point of democratic principle. I have reflected deeply on the consequences of the decision taken on 23 June, and on what it means for our economy and our security, on what it says about how we see ourselves and our place in the world, and on how difficult it will be to extract ourselves from one of the most sophisticated and successful political and economic alliances in the history of the world, but I have also
reflected on the consequences of what would happen if this Parliament overturned the result of a referendum in which a clear choice was offered and a clear verdict was given.

We sometimes underestimate in this place the extent to which this Parliament operates in the context of a political crisis—a crisis of faith and trust in politics and politicians. Across western democracies, we are already witnessing the consequences of what happens when people abandon their faith in mainstream politics to deliver. At a time when liberal democracy feels so fragile and precious, it is hard to overstate the damage that this Parliament would inflict on our democracy were we to reject the outcome of a referendum in which 33.5 million people voted.

This was not an advisory referendum. None of us went to the door asking for advice. We warned of the consequences of leaving, and the majority of voters and the majority of constituencies voted leave with the clear expectation that that would actually happen. I say very simply to those lobbying Parliament to ignore the result, “My heart is absolutely with you, if only that were possible.” Let us be honest with ourselves and with each other: if the vote had gone the other way, we would have expected Parliament to abide by the result.

Just as those of us on the remain side must abide by the decision of the people, so must the victors. Many promises were made during the referendum campaign, so it might be just as well that so many of the leave campaign’s leading lights find themselves around the Cabinet table, well placed to deliver on their promises. Just as Brexit means Brexit, so too does £350 million a week to the NHS mean £350 million a week to the NHS. The right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) said £100 million a week, so perhaps he would like to intervene so that he can address that point. Is it £350 million a week or £100 million a week?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman is making a great speech—I am a huge admirer of his—but I ask him to show fidelity to the record. We actually gave more than £350 million every week to the EU. We said that we should take back control of that money and spend it on our priorities. Specifically during the campaign, I argued that £100 million be spent on the NHS. If he wants to be economical with the actuality, that is for him, but fidelity to the record matters.

**Wes Streeting:** That contribution was rather too long to fit on the back of a bus. Leave campaigners do not like being reminded of this promise and they come up with every excuse they can find, but if people were promised a vote to leave and that is what we deliver, the additional funding for the NHS that they were promised should be delivered, too. The NHS message was one of the most prominent slogans of the campaign. It was particularly persuasive to Labour voters and NHS workers, and they expect the promise to be delivered. A heavy weight of responsibility rests on the shoulders of our Prime Minister as she embarks on negotiations that lie ahead. Some of those great enthusiasts for parliamentary sovereignty during the referendum campaign seem to have gone off the idea now that this Parliament demands a role in shaping the future of our country, but we should absolutely shape the future of our country in the interests of not the 52% or the 48%, but the 100% of people whose interests are riding on the success of these negotiations.

Our priority should be protecting jobs and living standards, and the Prime Minister needs to do a hell of a lot better than a bad deal or no deal. No deal is a bad deal. People value our trading relationship with Europe and they were promised that our position in the single market would not be threatened. That is why I have tabled an amendment that would allow Parliament to debate our future relationship with the single market. The Prime Minister has a mandate to leave the European Union. She does not have a mandate to take us out of the single market or to drive our economy off a cliff.

The Prime Minister must maintain Britain’s strong global role and our co-operation with our European partners on defence and security, preventing international terrorism, tackling climate change, supporting science and innovation, and promoting democracy and human rights across the world. She has a duty to safeguard the rights and protections of Brits abroad, and a moral duty to the many EU citizens who have contributed enormously to the success of our country over many years. She also has a duty to this Parliament. It would be totally unacceptable—in fact it would be an outrage—if every other Parliament across the European Union, including the European Parliament, got to vote on the deal before this Parliament. If their voices and votes were to carry more than this Parliament’s, how would that be taking back control? Why will the Prime Minister not make a commitment today?

My party must once again reflect on the painful consequences of defeat at the ballot box. This is not an easy time to be a social democrat. We live in a time of surging nationalism and a growing instinct towards closed economies. We are wrestling with fundamental, profound economic and political change across the world—an industrial revolution of a pace and scale that the world has never seen. It is increasing the risk of inequality within and between nations, and it raises fundamental questions about community, identity and how we live alongside each other in a world with increasingly scarce resources.

I say to my party that if we want to be in government again and to create the world that we want to see, we must first engage with the world as it is. The reality of where we find ourselves today is that people have chosen to put this country on a very different course, outside the European Union. I wish that it was not so, but under the next Labour Government, that will be the reality. We must engage with it, shape it and earn the right to build a future for our country in the interests of everyone.

**Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), whose speech was, as ever, impressive, principled and considered.

Today’s debate is to my mind about a straightforward decision that will mean that our country embarks on a necessary but inevitably complex journey to leave the European Union. As has been mentioned, this legislation is about the process. It is not a substantive Bill about the
merits or otherwise of leaving the European Union—that was for the referendum debates—and nor is it about the future deal that will come later in future legislation. It can be summed up in a few words, such as “respect the will of the people” and “respect the result of the referendum”. However, I have a good reason for adding a few more words during today’s debate.

I represent a constituency and borough that voted heavily to remain in the European Union. In Enfield, 76,000 people voted to remain, while 60,000 voted to leave. In my constituency only 37% voted to leave while 63% voted to remain. Among Brexiteers, I have the largest percentage of remain voters; after the Richmond Park by-election, The Daily Telegraph helpfully pointed out that I could be next in the firing line, although I will be avoiding a by-election if I can help it.

Inevitably, I have received many representations from constituents urging me to vote against the Bill and follow the example of Members such as the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms): to do what the majority of their constituents voted to do and to follow their consciences. However, it will be no surprise that I will not be following that course. I want to explain why and to urge hon. Members, particularly those representing remain-voting constituencies, to join me in the Aye Lobby tomorrow evening.

It should not surprise my constituents that I support the Bill. In 2015, following up our manifesto commitment to hold a referendum, I made it clear that unless we controlled our borders I would be campaigning to leave the European Union. When the then Prime Minister returned with his deal, he was unable properly to answer my questions in the House such as how he could reconcile the inadequate controls on freedom of movement in the deal with my expectations and those of countless party workers and supporters over a number of years. Emblazoned on our leaflets was our party’s commitment to control our borders. We need to follow through on that commitment.

Brexit gives us the opportunity to regain control of our borders—not in the way President Trump is pursuing, which is a thinly veiled attempt to discriminate against Muslims and involves offensive nationalism profiling, which must be strongly condemned at all levels. I look forward to control of our borders that is more, not less, welcoming of the skills that we most need in our country, and more, not less, welcoming of the refugees who need our sanctuary most. Of course, I also look forward to Parliament’s regaining control of our laws and our money as well.

The wider concern of my constituents was that politicians should do what they say. I am doing what I said I would do: I am voting out of a matter of conscience, judgment and duty to trigger article 50. My vote is not just about my constituency; it is about what Parliament intended in the UK referendum. The European Union Referendum Act 2015 gave us the legal authority for the historic referendum result. The intention of Parliament was undeniably that the result should be respected and enacted; the majority in favour of the Bill was huge, at 10 to one. During deliberations on the referendum Bill, the issue was about ensuring that the campaign was fair to enable confidence in the result. There were a few concerns that the referendum was unclear or unfair. It was mainly left to the Brexiteers and, indeed, the Scottish National party to lead the scrutiny to ensure that the purdah period was not misused. However, the leaflet, costing £9 million of taxpayers’ money, was still sent out to convince the public of the merits of remaining in the European Union. The most important words on that leaflet were:

“This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide.”

During the deliberations on the European Union Referendum Act, few really questioned the legitimacy or finality of the decision. We knew what we were getting ourselves into, providing an act of direct democracy to the British people to make a decision on the important question of European Union membership. It is important to recognise that that view came from all sources and many parties in the House. The leader of the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), said at the time that it was a once-in-a-lifetime decision—no word of a second referendum from him then.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), who is not in place, also said on the BBC last year that this House

“is a place of great pomposity, a lot of wasted words”,

and that it is “more theatre” than it is any good. Does my hon. Friend agree that this House and the express will of the British people deserve better than haughty disdain from the Liberals?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. As there are many interventions, they need to be short.

Mr Burrows: I recognise those words spoken by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). This is all about restoring our parliamentary sovereignty and the authority of our Parliament. There is an absence of respect for this House on the Opposition Benches, and it speaks volumes.

The then Europe Minister, who is now the Leader of the House, is in his place. At the end of the deliberations on the European Union Referendum Act, he said that the package would ensure a referendum

“in which the whole country can have confidence.”—[Official Report, 7 September 2015; Vol. 599, c. 117.]

The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said that the referendum was a mechanism for the British people to make a judgment, but that

“the really important thing is the decision itself.”—[Official Report, 9 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1063.]

A decision has now been made and we must respect it. It was not an advisory survey, but a mandated decision.

As the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) said in his very considered speech today, the result of the referendum, whether we like it or not, must be respected. The current Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), said that

“the decision about our membership should be taken by the British people, not by Whitehall bureaucrats, certainly not by Brussels Eurocrats; not even by Government Ministers or parliamentarians in this Chamber. The decision must be for the common sense of the British people. That is what we pledged, and that is what we have a mandate to deliver.”—[Official Report, 9 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1056.]
Well, the decision has been made and we now have a duty to deliver by formally starting the process.

What should hon. Members with majority remain constituents such as mine do? On this occasion, I would follow the advice of the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who said that “17 million people voted for Leave, many in some of our poorest areas. How would it look if a bunch of politicians and commentators in London turned around and said, ‘We know you voted to leave but we are just going to ignore you.’ That would be very undermining of democracy.”

I agree with her; we must not undermine democracy.

My remain-voting constituents are not being ignored by my voting to trigger article 50—my solemn duty is to respect the will of the majority throughout the UK—but I will continue to respect their concerns and challenges, and to bring them to Ministers’ attention. I recognise that their concerns have to be heard.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op):
I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman’s analysis. I will vote to invoke article 50 because of that respect for democracy. He mentioned heeding the views of the remain voters in his area, so does he believe that we should have a meaningful vote on the deal, and not a yes or no rejection of it?

Mr Burrowes: I agree, and there is a commitment to that. Once the negotiations have happened, we should have a full debate and a full vote. I will ensure that my constituents’ concerns—whether remain or Brexit—all come to bear so that we deliver for our country. That is what it is about. Now is not the time or place to sidestep the decisive result of 23 June, nor to undermine the decision of 17 million people. Let us get on with it and make the best of Brexit for all my constituents and for people throughout the United Kingdom.

9.9 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I campaigned passionately during last year’s referendum for Britain to remain in the EU and still feel passionately about it. I remain deeply concerned about the outcome and what is to follow, but the British people voted to leave. As strongly as I hold my views, it is only right that the wishes of the majority of the British people should be respected, because the real decision to trigger article 50 is not taken tomorrow night—it was taken on 23 June 2016.

It is fair to say that although the referendum question asked voters whether they wanted to remain in or leave the EU, it did not detail what “leave” actually meant. That argument still needs to be thoroughly addressed. Simply to say that out means out is not a policy—the issue is far too complicated for that. The result of last year’s referendum did not point to the door through which we should exit. There are many doors and exit strategies to consider. If those who voted to leave did so to “take back control”, then surely it should be Parliament that decides through which door we should leave.

There are many questions to answer. What is to be the final article 50 deal? What will a future free trade agreement between the EU and the UK look like? What will be the consequences for jobs? Will the assurances given to Nissan also be given to other sectors of the economy? What will our relationship be with the customs union? There are questions around workers’ and consumer rights, as well as the environment and, of course, immigration. I would like to see an agreement that reforms free movement and allows tariff-free and unimpeded access to the single market, with a transitional arrangement, if necessary—as it probably will be—to prevent our economy from falling off a cliff edge. Even the International Trade Secretary has said that he wants “at least as free a trading environment as we have today.”

The Prime Minister has said she wants to give companies “maximum freedom to trade with and operate in the Single Market”. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that people did not vote “to become poorer”. I want this House to hold them to this.

If there is one thing that the result of the referendum proved, it is that we need a new settlement on free movement, but it must be balanced with what is best for the economy. To have a lasting settlement, there should be a Europe-wide agreement. Pulling down the shutters on the rest of Europe is not the answer. People did not vote to have fewer rights at work, yet I see that the Prime Minister has committed to those rights only while she is in power. I can understand that, but what happens next? I do not want to see a race to the bottom. I want the people I represent to be protected against future challenges, of which there will be many. There is a mandate for Britain’s exit from the EU, but there is no mandate on the manner in which we leave. That is why the Government must come to this House to inform Parliament of their progress throughout the negotiations, and we must be given a vote on the final deal. We should also be given an impact assessment of the effect of the deal on the economy and all its sectors, and this country’s future.

As the Prime Minister searches for trade deals that we cannot start negotiating formally until we have left the EU, she should consider the manner in which she proceeds. The Prime Minister knows the dilemma this country is in, but she must consider her demeanour. She shows too much haste, especially in securing a state visit for the President of the United States seven days into his presidency when President Reagan waited 17 months to visit the UK. It was not even a state visit, and we all know how close President Reagan was to Margaret Thatcher. All this reveals that the Prime Minister’s haste is undue. Some say that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations would be a risky agreement between the US, representing 350 million consumers, and the EU of 28 countries, representing half a billion. Wait until we see what is on offer from President Trump, who puts “America first”, when he knows he is negotiating with one country of 65 million people that is desperate for a deal. I do not believe that this fact will have been lost on the arch-dealmaker himself. If the Prime Minister is prepared to walk away from the EU because “no deal for Britain is better than a bad deal for Britain”, will she walk away from a trade deal with the US on the same basis? The Government want to see us as a great global trading nation, and I do as well. So to avoid us standing on the street corner, cap in hand, I would not walk away from the EU without a deal being struck. Without a deal, I would stay at the negotiating table until I got one—walking away is not an option.
I know that my voting to trigger article 50 may come as a disappointment to some of my constituents, while others may believe that leaving the EU is the correct course. The debate in the House of Commons over the next two weeks will be the start of the process, not the end. I reserve judgment as to my future voting intentions. We need to get what follows right. As much as I do not like the result of the EU referendum, neither can I ignore it. I will therefore continue to exercise my duty in good faith, with the wellbeing of my constituents and the country at the forefront of the decisions I make. I quote the Secretary of State for Brexit:

“If a democracy cannot change its mind, it ceases to be a democracy.”

9.14 pm

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), and I share many of his concerns. I also campaigned and voted in the EU referendum to remain, and the majority of my constituents voted to remain. Like the hon. Gentleman and many others in the Chamber, I did not expect this result. On 23 June, I was not happy with the result. I am still not happy with the result, but I recognise that it is a national vote.

Many Members have quoted from the leaflet that was delivered to every single household in the United Kingdom. I do not have my original leaflet, but I have kept the leaflet that a constituent gave me, in which is pasted, on all the picture pages—if hon. Members can remember those—more thoughtful and in-depth articles. I kept it because I always thought, “I wish that this had been the leaflet that everybody had received.” The text pages are intact, and it is true that on page 14, the leaflet states:

“This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide.”

The month before the referendum, my constituents voted in another election. The majority of my constituents and I voted for the Conservative candidate for Mayor of London, who did not win. However, in the first few days after Sadiq Khan became Mayor of London, I wrote to him as the MP for Twickenham outlining some of the issues on which I wanted to work with him, and I am grateful that he is representing London and doing good things for Twickenham.

In that vein, I will be voting to trigger article 50, because I believe it is in our best interests but also because I would be a hypocrite if I tried to block it. I know very well that if the result had been 52% to remain and 48% to leave and if my colleagues in the Chamber were trying to block that, I would be vehemently opposed to what they were trying to do.

There is an argument that I should vote according to how my constituency voted, and that is a valid argument. Apart from the fact that if every MP voted according to the results in his or her constituency, article 50 would probably still be triggered, my reason for not voting in that way is that I believe to do so would entrench existing divisions. It would alienate voters—remain voters and leave voters—who went into the polling station or filled out their postal vote believing the leaflet that stated: “This is your decision.”

We need to seek the best possible access to the single market, tariff free and barrier free. I will continue to maintain my position that EU nationals working and living in my constituency and throughout the United Kingdom should be guaranteed their rights, and that that should not be part of the negotiations. I hope that in the negotiations we will have migration controls but not arbitrary restrictions. We should welcome students, workers and family members from the EU and from non-EU countries.

The White Paper will give us a chance to provide scrutiny. I value the scrutiny carried out by the Select Committee on Science and Technology, and I value the fact that the Committee is made up of MPs who voted to remain and MPs who voted to leave. I am proud of the fact that we had unanimous Committee reports while I was interim Chair, and that we have continued to do so under our new Chair. Our reports on the EU are about striving to get the best deal for scientists and science projects.

I remain a remain voter and somebody who wishes the referendum result had been different, but as was said by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who is no longer in his place, our task is now to bring people together, and I will influence the course we are now on. To that end, I will accept and respect the validity of the referendum, and I will vote to trigger article 50.

9.20 pm

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias). You can always tell when Members are listening, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the Chamber is quiet, and it was quiet throughout her speech, which she delivered with great aplomb. Now, you can cue the noise because the SNP are about to speak.

In Scotland, we were told in no uncertain terms in 2014 that we are a family of nations, and that we must keep this family together. The one nation mantra was conspicuous by its absence: “We don’t want you to leave the Union,” was the cry. “We want you to lead the Union.” At the very point that we suggested we might just be about to take the UK at its word, those words are feeling more than a little hollow. To make those words a reality, discussion in the Joint Ministerial Committee is not enough; we must see real and tangible signs that our proposals will be agreed to.

In my view, this is not one nation. By definition, it is a collection of four nations. Some would say it is a family, albeit with very grown-up kids. In any family, regard is always paid to the differences between the members of the family—they do not buy shoes of the same size, and they certainly do not apply the same rules or follow the same path—but ultimately, if they listen and respect such differences, they can remain a family. Even that, however, is contingent on continuing and demonstrable mutual respect.

In this so-called family—one of equal partners, as we were told—the UK must do more than merely talk with the nations within it and say, as it repeatedly asserts, that it is taking their views on board. The UK must go beyond such discussions and act on those views, and it must demonstrate that it understands the dynamics that underpin the stability of this Union. That is how a family can be kept together. It cannot be done by simple binary prescription. What people cannot do in any family is simply run the line, “You voted to be in this family, so you now have to do what we all do.” It would not work for our own families, and it will not work for this one.
We are living in a modern world, and small countries no longer fear the world, but see its opportunities. There are Parliaments in each of our nations. Each is carving out a different path, just as in any normal family. Each nation in this Union has distinct cultures, political views and, indeed, accents—and each of those nations delivered a different verdict on 23 June. For this family to remain intact, as I am certain is the intention of Conservative Members, specific allowances must be made for these differences.

Richard Arkless: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Arkless: I will not give way, because I am conscious that I am only the third SNP MP to speak, and we have been in the Chamber for about 10 hours.

Despite what seems to be the conventional wisdom among Conservative Members, there are indeed ways to keep everybody here happy. The UK can leave the EU and Scotland can remain in the single market. Scotland can continue to benefit from the free movement of labour while the UK leaves the customs union, so that the UK has the ability to restrict EU migration to the nations that voted leave, all within the existing parameters of the UK.

The proposals from Scotland can be found in “Scotland’s Place in Europe”. It is crucial to mention at this stage that this document represents a massive compromise on the part of the SNP and the Scottish Government. We are willing to accept that Scotland and the UK as a whole leaves the EU—I would be glad if that was not the case, but we will compromise. We are even willing to take independence off the table, at least in the short to medium term—again, we are willing to compromise. However, for that to happen, we need compromise on a similar scale from the UK Government. That is how families should operate. If it can be done for Nissan, it can be done for Scotland. None of the options in our report is impossible, but all require the will of the rest of the family to get behind them. That, I fear, will be their downfall. In short, our proposal is for Scotland to maintain its membership of the single market and continue to benefit from the pillar of free movement.

Mr Baker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Arkless: I have already explained why I am not going to take any interventions and my mind has not changed.

While accommodating Scotland’s wishes, in parallel we set out a way for the rest of the UK to leave the single market and free movement, and to remove the entirety of the UK from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. I have never had a problem with the ECJ, but, as I say, we are in compromise mode.

We have heard today from those on the Conservative Benches that the single market is apparently an internal EU market, and that leaving the EU de facto means leaving the single market. Well, that is just plain wrong. Members of the EEA are in the single market but are not members of the EU—Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland have that status. Switzerland is a member of the European Free Trade Association, but is in neither the EU nor the EEA. Bespoke solutions are out there. It just requires the political will to pursue them.

I often hear that different rules across the UK would weaken the Union. In fact, the complete opposite is true. If proper and substantive regard is not paid to these differences, tensions in the relationships will come under strain—that much should be obvious to all. It is not the SNP who have put independence back on the table, but this Government. If it is back on the table, it will be only because this Government do not listen. Scotland’s distinct mandate and voice must be respected.

9.26 pm

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): This has been a fantastic debate, which has focused on parliamentary sovereignty. And how good it is to see the Deputy Leader of the House starting on chapter one of “Erskine May”, such is his inspiration from the speeches that have been made today. It is never too late to start.

I was reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), who has monitored everything we have said over the past decade—he pointed out to the leader of the Green party her anti-European stance a year ago—that my maiden speech, over a decade ago, was on Europe. I was in a sandwich between the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), if you can imagine that, Madam Deputy Speaker—stuck between a hard Europhile and a tough Brexitee. I was somewhere in the middle. I described the European Union then as out of touch and a relic of the past, because Europe did have its faults: I would fight to my last political breath to stop us entering the single currency, the social chapter was a step too far, and the way that mass immigration has been handled has been a disaster.

However, I remain, with my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias), a remainder. I campaigned for remain, and I can see the huge virtues and benefits of being a member of the European Union. I will, however, vote to support the Bill. It is a difficult thing for me to vote for. My constituency is solidly remain and has benefited from being a part of the European Union. We have benefited in so many ways that during the campaign I tried hard to see what the downsides were. As an MP, I could not think of a single law where Europe had got in the way—not even when voting for the brilliant education reforms of the former Education Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). At no point did Europe trouble the sovereignty of this House, but it has given this country so many opportunities.

I approach the coming Brexit with a degree of nervousness. There is no point in crying over spilt milk. I absolutely accept the logic that if one backed the referendum by voting for it in this House, one then has to respect the result. One cannot use one’s privileged position in Parliament to stop the Brexit result. We can and must, however, hold the Government to account on a range of different issues. We promised in our manifesto that we would stay in the single market, but we all know that leaving the EU means we have to leave the single market and the customs union. We want to see how the Government will square that circle.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the plight of EU nationals. I have been inundated with emails from my constituents. One came in about an hour ago: “I am one of your constituents and I am still scared after
seven months. My home is the UK, my Government is British and my Member of Parliament is you. I do not want to lose everything.” This lady is French. She has come over here and taken our jobs. She is a civil nuclear engineer: a highly skilled person providing a vital role in the UK. There are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people like her in the UK, and they need certainty as soon as possible. I understand the Government’s negotiating position, but I want some reassurances.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is hard to be a remain with remain constituents firing off such emails on an hourly, never mind a daily, basis. Would my right hon. Friend agree, like me, that the best thing we can do for them is fight with every fibre of our being to make sure that this deal is absolutely everything they need it to be?

Mr Vaizey: Yes, and I will stand solidly with my hon. Friend on that. I want to protect the position of my constituents who are EU nationals and I want to protect the position of EU nationals in the UK.

The constituent I quoted is a scientist, which leads me to my third point. I am so angry with the Government over their position on Euratom. Not a single Minister has contacted me, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) or my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell). The Culham research centre, the site of the Joint European Torus, employs hundreds of people and is at the heart of nuclear fusion research. We have all been inundated with countless emails from people who believe they are losing their job. The European Space Agency is in my constituency. If the Government are to make such an announcement in the explanatory notes of a Bill, at least they could alert the relevant MPs beforehand, and at least they could provide my constituents with a definitive statement about the future of European co-operation on civil nuclear engineering. I hope that Ministers will meet me this week and provide me with some material to give constituents of mine who are worried about their jobs, who have bought houses in this country and who want to know what the future holds.

I also wish to mention what was a personal passion as a Minister: the creative industries and technology. We need the skills from the European marketplace and we need certainty regarding the broadcasting directive. Many broadcasters, based in this country and providing thousands of jobs, are able to broadcast throughout Europe. And let us not forget culture. When we had the argument about TTIP, the first thing the French did was cut out culture from any free trade deal, and they will try the same when we negotiate our trade deal with Europe.

Talking of trade deals, one thing that really irritates me about this debate is the fiction that on day one of leaving the EU we will be handed a suite of lovely trade deals and we will simply sign them. We have already heard about this from Members. The campaigns and demos when we try to sign a free trade deal with the US, particularly on issues such as agriculture and manufacturing, will be huge. It will take years to negotiate them. I accept that they will happen, but I ask Members please not to mock others’ intelligence by pretending we are going to sign a suite of trade deals on day one of leaving the EU.

Also, please do not call us remainers “unpatriotic”. I had a meeting with constituents last week on Brexit, and I am having another at the end of this week, and many of those present are scientists. One in particular struck me when he stood up and said, “I’m a remainer. I have worked in science all my life. I have contributed to British science, and I am being made to feel unpatriotic because I work closely with my European counterparts and passionately believe that British science is better off in Europe.”

Finally, can we talk about the process? Again, I am sick and tired, considering that we are now restoring parliamentary sovereignty, of being told that to ask as a remainer that the Government be held to account, report back every three months on the process and progress and publish a White Paper is somehow trying to stop Brexit. It is not. If you are a Brexiteer and you believe in parliamentary sovereignty, or if you are a remainer and you hold on to the silver lining that parliamentary sovereignty is coming back, the logic is that it is incumbent on us all—

Michael Gove: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Vaizey: I give way to the man on the rocks of whose leadership bid—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. The right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) has actually run out of time.

9.33 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey). I agree with much of what he said about trade and parliamentary accountability.

After a great deal of thought, I have decided to vote against Second Reading tomorrow night, for a number of reasons that I would like to set out precisely. First, the Government’s behaviour since the referendum result has influenced my decision. The new Government have acted as though the vote gave them carte blanche to engineer the most extreme kind of arrangements for the UK leaving the EU, though in truth the referendum asked only whether voters wished to remain or leave and had nothing to say about the nature of the subsequent arrangements the UK should adopt.

The Government have embarked upon this approach without any kind of consultation across party or any meaningful involvement in Parliament, which, as the Supreme Court has just reaffirmed, is the sovereign power in the land. Consultation across parties should be the norm when dealing with proposals of serious constitutional change. It has not happened. We would not have this Bill before us now had not the courts, when asked, upheld our constitution and made it clear that prerogative powers cannot be used to remove the rights of individual citizens that have been conferred by statute. Yet the judges in the High Court were vilified for doing their job and attacked by a Cabinet Minister, who said that their judgment was “an attempt to frustrate the will of the British people” and was “unacceptable”. The Government are looking distinctly authoritarian in their demeanour and how they operate.
Michael Gove: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Maria Eagle: No, I will not give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Michael Gove: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): It had better be a point of order.

Michael Gove: No such statement was made by any Cabinet Minister and I hope the hon. Lady will withdraw.

Maria Eagle: I do not intend to respond to the right hon. Gentleman. He had his chance earlier.

This authoritarian demeanour is alien to our British tradition, and the sooner the new Government realise it and mend their ways, the better. Secondly, the nature of the exit that the Government seem intent on pursuing has influenced me. I think that this extreme, right-wing exit that they are pursuing, without any authorisation from this Parliament or the people of this country, will damage the jobs and economy of the UK, undermine our standing and position in the world and hit the poorest, like many who live and work in my constituency, the hardest.

I disagree that the Prime Minister should simply give up on single market membership—something that has benefited and could continue to benefit our people as workers and consumers greatly—without even bothering to negotiate on it, even though she was elected on a manifesto in the 2015 general election that promised to stay in the single market. It said:

“We are clear about what we want from Europe. We say: yes to the Single Market.”

Why did the Prime Minister not make pursuing membership of the single market part of her negotiating position?

Thirdly, although we have recently been given vague promises of further votes in this place after the negotiations, it remains unclear to me whether they will be meaningful in any way. This Bill therefore represents the only real opportunity that Parliamentarians have to make their concerns known and shape the kind of exit that we get. I think the Government intend it to be the only opportunity we get, and let us remind ourselves: they did not intend that we should have this one. Once article 50 is triggered, time is set running and at the expiry of two years, the UK is out of the EU, unless all 27 countries agree to some alternative arrangements for those negotiations to continue in the interim. Simply by the effluxion of time, whatever the state of the negotiations, the reality will be that we are out—over a cliff edge, over a precipice. The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) let the cat out of the bag in his speech, and the Government themselves argued before the courts that the process is irrevocable once set in motion.

The expropriation of the House precisely how important objective I was to the regeneration of Liverpool in those dark times?

Maria Eagle: It stopped the city from falling even further than it had already fallen, and it gave us a real boost in starting the regeneration of the city. That is perhaps why Liverpool voted to remain.

If we leave the EU in the way in which the current Government want, it will be people such as my constituents, who have had almost seven years of coalition and Tory Government public spending cuts, who will be hit again and hit disproportionately. I fear that the extreme exit that the Prime Minister has decided we are to pursue will, over a few years, destroy our industrial base and our manufacturing industry. Of course, with such a divisive, irreconcilable and irreversible vote, some of my constituents will not like what I do whatever I do, but as their MP, I owe them my sincere judgment, and that is what I am giving them tonight.

I accept that the Government will get their way tomorrow night, and if they do, I expect to support the many excellent amendments being put forward by my Front-Bench team and others to try to improve the Bill, but I hope that the Government will, even now, see the benefit of accepting some of the amendments and try at this late stage to proceed in a way designed to bring the country together and not to ride roughshod over those with whom they disagree.

9.40 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): “God’s diplomacy”.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) reminded us how Richard Cobden described free trade—and it is a description I very much wish I had had in mind last Friday, when I was asked rhetorically to describe free trade. The same person went on to ask me how, without taxation and redistribution in Europe, we would foster a culture of “diffused reciprocity”. After I had had a while to try to work out what that meant, I realised that I believe that trade is a far better way of showing people that we are co-dependent in this world—that we depend on one another for our livelihoods, our prosperity and our happiness—than tax and forced
me into politics, because I thought it important for power always to originate with the people. Similarly, I think that if the House were to refuse the passage of this Bill, we would suffer in this country a political implosion whose nature we can scarcely imagine.

Today, I believe, we can objectively say that only one party is capable of forming a stable Government, although I would prefer there to be two. I believe that if we were to go ahead and refuse to pass the Bill, even our own party would suffer grave consequences. It is in all our interests for it to be passed.

With that in mind, I should like briefly to defend the former Prime Minister, who has been described today—most unfairly, in my view—as reckless. I dare say, and I think that the record will bear it out, that I have done more than any other Conservative Member in the last year to organise opposition to David Cameron, and it is for that reason that I feel able to say that, in my experience, everything he did was motivated by the very highest concerns for this country. He needed to keep our party together so that it could survive a referendum that was necessary, and still be capable, as it is today, of being strong, united and determined to see through the best interests of the country.

Although we differed in the judgment, I am absolutely sure that David Cameron campaigned for remain because he believed that it was in the country’s interest. I believe that far from being reckless, as he was accused of being earlier, he served this country with profound decency, and, above all, with the pragmatic conservatism which—in his view—led him to campaign for remain in the best interests of the country. Of course I disagreed with him, and I am glad that we are where we are. If I have a lament, it is that he is no longer here—

Sir Gerald Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Baker: I cannot, because others wish to speak.

If I have a regret, it is that David Cameron is not with us today. [Interruption.] I mean that he is not with us in the House today. [Laughter.] I am grateful for the lighter tone.

I hope very much that in years to come, when future generations look back on this moment—not only on this issue, but on social reform and the reform of our public services—David Cameron will be seen as the great statesman he is.

9.48 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), who made an interesting speech. [Laughter.]

I am a passionate supporter of the European Union, with both my heart and my head. I am married to a Dane, and both my daughters were born in Brussels. I have lived, worked and studied in a number of European countries, and I have first-hand experience of how inspiring and productive international political co-operation and economic solidarity can be. I campaigned passionately for remain, and I am in no doubt that the result of the referendum will eventually weaken our economy, erode our sovereignty, and diminish our place in the world; but I am, above all else, a democrat. The debate in this country was had. The votes were cast, the ballots were counted, and my side of the argument lost. The rules
are the rules, and any attempt to frustrate the process will serve only to corrode our democracy further, and to cause deep and lasting damage to our institutions.

The Brexit process will have two phases, as stipulated in section 1 of article 50. The first will be withdrawal. That will be done through the triggering of article 50, a process limited in scope to the detailed terms of the divorce, and to the specific mechanics of disentangling Britain from the European Union. Then comes phase 2, the process through which we establish our post-Brexit relationship with the EU27 as a non-EU member state. That will be conducted through article 218. This second phase will take several years and will require ratification by 38 parliamentary Chambers, from Brussels to Berlin, from Warsaw to Wallonia. It is the article 218 process that will address the core questions that have come to dominate our politics for the last year or so, namely free movement of labour and the status of our relationship with the single market and the customs union. So, in spite of all the sound and fury we have heard today, the success or failure of Brexit will in fact depend on the terms of the article 218 package, not on the details of what is agreed under article 50.

In her Lancaster House speech, the Prime Minister claimed that it would be possible to negotiate both the terms of the article 218 package, not on the details of success or failure of Brexit will in fact depend on the terms of the article 218 package, not on the details of what is agreed under article 50.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Why was it, then, that Michel Barnier, the EU commissioner charged with Brexit negotiations, said he wanted the negotiations finished within 18 months, and then six months for the ratification process to take place? Was he not telling the truth?

**Stephen Kinnock:** Michel Barnier was referring to the article 50 process; the article 218 process, which will define our future end-state relationship with the EU, is a completely different matter. It is worth noting as well that Michel Barnier has quoted a figure of €60 billion as the cost of leaving the EU.

It is therefore time that the Government levelled with the British people. The very best we can hope for is an acceptable article 50 exit deal, alongside an interim transitional package that avoids the disastrous cliff edge of resorting to WTO rules. And what is the most likely form of this interim deal? It is quite clearly the European economic area. The EU will not be minded to do a bespoke interim deal for the United Kingdom. Why should it when the EEA is a ready-made, off-the-shelf solution? It is therefore beyond doubt in my opinion that our EU partners will simply insist that we transfer to the EEA while the article 218 process runs in parallel.

We do not know how long this holding pattern would last, but what we do know is that the EEA, as a halfway house, would be infinitely preferable to the train crash option of a WTO Brexit. A WTO in Brexit would mean crippling tariffs, job losses, the decline of our automotive and steel industries, the hollering of our financial services industry and the probable demise of our entire manufacturing sector. The British people will not stand for that. The Government have a mandate for us to leave the European Union, and this House has an obligation to enable that mandate to be fulfilled, but there is no mandate for this Government to use Brexit as an excuse for wrecking our economy, slashing the minimum wage and sparking a bonfire of workers’ rights, environmental safeguards and hard earned-social protections.

Tomorrow marks the end of the phoney war. Since 23 June, we have had endless debates about process, but once article 50 has been triggered the focus will at long last move to substance. Once article 50 has been invoked the real choice facing this Government, this House and this country will become clear: will we choose an interim deal that truly protects the national interest, or will we tumble head first into a WTO Brexit that will have a catastrophic impact on our economy, our communities and our place in the world?

We know that the currently dominant nationalist wing of the Conservative party will hate the idea of an interim deal, as it will inevitably be based on the EEA model, but surely this country has had its fill of Prime Ministers who place personal ambition and party management ahead of the national interest. I therefore urge this Government to learn from the mistakes of the past and to commit unequivocally to basing their approach to Brexit on securing the safe haven of an interim deal. The alternative would result in the warping of our country into a European version of the Cayman Islands, and that is an alternative that we cannot and will not accept.
I want to comment further on the rights of EU nationals. I was one of five Conservative Members of Parliament who supported the Opposition motion to grant automatic rights to EU nationals, and I am still strongly in favour of doing so. The conversation has been about whether we should do that unilaterally or through the negotiations. It has also been commented that the Government have a responsibility to look after the interests of British citizens in other EU countries, and that is undoubtedly true, but I do not believe that it is legitimate to hold one as a counterbalance to the other. I therefore ask the Government to look again at this issue, and to investigate a third option of securing rights bilaterally rather than multilaterally or unilaterally.

One of the Government’s most important tasks in this context is to reduce uncertainty. That will be tremendously important as we move into the negotiations. We will enter into those negotiations in a spirit of friendship, but negotiations are not about friends; they are about interests. If we are honest, we need to point out that it will be difficult for the European Union to reach a deal. We would like to see our points at the top of its agenda, but it is a complex organisation with multiple levels of interests and many other issues that affect that agenda. It is important for the EU to signal its intent by giving the UK the opportunity to have a parallel track on a free trade agreement while we are negotiating our exit agreement.

It is also important for the Government to prepare the British public for the sharp choices that we will face in two years’ time. That will be important if we are to reduce uncertainty, and the Government must be clear that that is their primary goal. Certain options present themselves. The first, and easiest, involves a transitional agreement, but I would point out that such an agreement is completely different from an extension of the negotiations. A transitional agreement goes towards an agreed objective. An extension just means carrying on talking. Extension maintains uncertainty and is without doubt the worst choice for this country. It is a far worse option than the clean break of going to WTO tariffs, which has been much ridiculed and derided by some in this House. The WTO option would provide certainty. It may be uncomfortable and would certainly need accommodation, and it is worse than a clean, new free trade agreement with Europe, but it is better than maintaining uncertainty. The Prime Minister was right when she said that no deal is better than a bad deal. It is the Government’s responsibility to prepare the British public for that option.

10 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller). We sit together on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, and his speech was characteristically erudite and thoughtful.

The question asked of the British public in June last year was:

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

The public voted to leave. Listening to the debate, both today and in the preceding months, one would imagine that we face a rerun of the same referendum question. We have been told that to vote against the Bill would be an affront to last year’s result, but I have read the Bill—it did not take long—and nowhere does it ask whether we should remain in or leave the European Union. The question we are answering is fundamentally different to that put to the electorate. We need to decide whether our country is ready to begin the process of separation. The referendum result did not tell us when we should leave, the terms upon which we should leave, or what new relationships should replace the existing one. Those are all decisions that the Government and this sovereign Parliament must take.

We are embarking on the most perilous of journeys. The most precious thing our country has—our economy—is being taken to a new place, and yet we have no clarity at all about the destination. I saw at first hand what it took to make our economy great. My dad left school at 14, was in the Navy by 16, and was a door-to-door salesman by his mid-twenties. By the time he reached his 50s, he was a company owner who employed dozens of staff, creating jobs and wealth for my family and our country. I saw what it took: the personal sacrifice, the seven-day working weeks, and the constant travel. By the time he finished, he had built a phenomenal company that imported specialist materials from across Europe and sold them across the UK.

My dad is retired now, but when he asks me, “What does Brexit mean for companies like mine?” the only way I can answer is with, “I don’t know.” The truth is that the Government do have a plan for leaving the EU, but it is only a wish list for what comes next. That is not good enough—not for me, not for wealth creators like my dad, and certainly not for the community I represent. All I want is what the Brexit Secretary told us he would deliver. In July last year, he said that “within two years, before the negotiation with the EU is likely to be complete, and therefore before anything material has changed, we can negotiate a free trade area massively larger than the EU.”

We are six months on, but where is the outline of this “free trade area massively larger than the EU”?

Is it not wise to want to know what awaits us at the other end of this one-way street before we set off? The Brexit Secretary used to think so and I still do. I will not gamble with my community in the way that this Government are gambling with our economy, which is why I will not be voting for the Bill tomorrow.

Respecting the small majority who voted leave means getting things right, and I have three tests for the city that I represent that must be met before I can in all conscience support the formal process of leaving the EU. In a city with an outward-looking economy and the head offices of American Express and EDF, is it likely after Brexit that talent and goods will be able to travel uninhibited to and from the continent when our local economy demands it? Will our two universities still have visa-free access to students and teachers from EU countries, and will their £10 million of annual EU funding be protected in the long term? And will Brexit have a negative impact on Brighton and Hove’s tourism economy, which relies on 8.5 million visitors a year, many from EU countries?

Ever since the referendum, the Government have failed to listen to the concerns of both sides. Many millions of people who voted to remain feel powerless, anxious about the future and ignored. There has been no attempt to reconcile our country and no attempt to bring people together, which is why many people feel that the priorities of the Conservative party are being prioritised over the needs of our country.
If our EU past is symbolised by rules on the shape of bananas, our future looks increasingly likely to be symbolised by the Prime Minister and Donald Trump holding hands. This is the perfect time to reflect, to engage and to listen more carefully to the people, whether they voted to leave or to remain. Political expediency is pushing this House into a darkness with unstoppable force. It is my belief that, for generations to come, British citizens will wish that we had prioritised getting this right above getting it done fast.

10.5 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a great privilege to be called to speak this evening, particularly after so many masterful speeches. I particularly pay tribute to the hon. Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), the latter of whom spoke just a few moments ago, for their cogent and clear explanation of the democratic principle that we are all here to represent. Although I, too, campaigned for remain and am a passionate advocate of co-operation with our European partners, I stood on a manifesto that asked the people to give me their delegated power on all matters but one. On that one matter I pledged in the manifesto to hold a referendum. I voted for that referendum and the people told me what they think. The decision has been made.

It is not now for me to tell my commander that he is wrong. It is not now for me to go over the arguments that we have been debating for six months or a year but for 40 years. It is simply not true to say that this referendum lasted only a few months. Certainly since the beginning of the European Union, or our membership of it, and most particularly since Maastricht, this is a conversation that our country has been having on at least a weekly basis, and frequently on a daily basis.

I find myself today with no choice but to accept the order of my boss, the British people. This morning I had the great privilege of going to one of our great institutions, and walking around the British Museum I was struck by various objects—[Laughter.] Sadly there were no claymores. I was struck by various objects, and the most impressive of them was the Franks casket, which those who have studied any archaeology or Anglo-Saxon history will remember is one of the great treasures of 8th-century Northumbria—when the Kingdom of Northumbria was independent, and the Kingdom of Kent, too.

The Franks casket symbolises exactly what we are. It symbolises the fact that we are a union of peoples and that we are a combination of our past and our future, because it is inscribed in runic and in Latin. It has stories of Romans, of Jews and even of pagan Germans, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was particularly struck because, of course, this debate is part of a long, long series of discussions that our country has been having not only with itself but with our community in Europe and the wider world. That conversation is democracy. That conversation is humanity. There is an idea that there is a final part or an end state that we are about to hit—the departure from the European Union or the vote to invoke article 50—but they are not end states in any real sense. We are still going to be part of a European community, because we are 20 miles from the coast of France. We are still going to be part of a global community, because our cousins live in America, India, Canada and even Zimbabwe. We are part of this international world, so this is not an end state—it is merely a stage. It is our duty to make sure that the next stage, the only one we have any ability to control, is successful.

That is not just down to us and it is not just down to this Chamber, so we must be realistic. When we look at Europe and at the world today, we must realise that although Brexit is important, it is not the only thing that is happening. A French election is coming, and I do not know whether Macron, Fillon or Le Pen is going to win, but that will be seminal. Dutch elections and German elections are coming, and many other decisions will be taken by many other people. Therefore, it is the duty of not only this House, but Her Majesty’s Government, our diplomatic corps and our whole Government to be part of that conversation with our friends and neighbours to encourage co-operation.

In that, I simply urge one last thing: when people talk about the reaction of our friends and neighbours—and they are our friends and neighbours—may we please avoid words such as “punishment”? The truth is that all countries and all peoples must act in their national interest, and the decisions they take must be respected. The decisions they will be taking in years to come will not necessarily be punitive; the truth is that they will be taking decisions for themselves, and we must respect them.

10.11 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), who has been struck by various objects.

I have to say at the outset that I wholly accept and respect the decision taken on 23 June when the British people voted to leave the EU in principle. They made that choice on a number of grounds—they were told that they would have more money, market access and lower migration—but in fact, as we know, instead of having £350 million a week for the NHS, this will, according to the Chancellor, cost us £300 million a week. We also know that there is going to be another year of austerity. We know that we will not get free market access and that there will be tariffs. On migration, everyone was told that we would shut the door in two years’ time, but we know that as a result there has been a huge surge in it. We know that 85% of people over the age of 65 voted to leave, but now they are facing 5% inflation, reducing the value of their savings. People’s earnings are going down by 5%. There is going to be another year of austerity and pensioners are going to be hit after 2020. Of course, the young are being hit as well in terms of their opportunities.

I therefore put it to the House that people now feel that they have not had their reasonable expectations fulfilled, which is why, although I accept the vote to leave in principle, I believe there should be a vote—a final say—of the people on the exit package for Britain. Such a vote would allow the people to decide whether that package meets their reasonable expectations and whether it is better than currently being in the EU—if they do not agree, they can stay. The way to facilitate that is, of course, by delaying the triggering of article 50 so that people can have the chance to have the final say.
I know that there is a massive rush to get through article 50, but the simple fact is that it says that after we trigger it, we are, in essence, handing in our EU membership card and then the EU27 will decide that they are going to kick us out—nothing they can do about it. All this stuff about negotiation is mythical, as we see when we look at article 50. We should not delude ourselves about that. The EU27 will decide. What is more, the key players, France and Germany, are having their elections in May and October. They will not be engaged in the negotiations until October, so article 50 should be delayed until then at least.

Some people say that article 50 can be revoked. There is nothing about revocation in the legislation—that would require the 27 to come together, negotiate and agree. It is a bit like saying, “If I walk down the motorway in the middle of the night, I might not get killed”—it is probably not a good idea to do it in the first place. Basically, it is like having a family argument in which Harry walks off into the garden and then says, “Actually, I’ve decided I want to come back in,” but nobody wants to let him in. This is the moment: the triggering of article 50 is a one-way street to the future.

On the negotiations, the Government are simply throwing away three cards by triggering article 50 on their specific timetable: first, membership; secondly, timing, because if we say we are not going to trigger it now, the EU is more likely to come to the negotiating table; and, thirdly, because if we say there will be a vote on the exit package before we trigger article 50, the EU will know that there is some prospect of our staying in and will come to the negotiating table.

There are those in my party who are concerned that if we do not go ahead with article 50, there will be an immediate election and all the rest of it. My view is that the economy will turn sour when the tariffs kick in, and we will be accountable to the British people. We are moving towards a new situation in which we are turning our back on 44% of our trade—some 56% is already with the rest of the world. The idea is that we go to a country—we can pick one out of thin air—and say, “We want to negotiate with you,” but if they know we are desperate because we are turning our back on the EU, we will get a much worse deal.

As for Trump, in his inauguration speech he complained that countries were ravaging America’s economy, selling their own products, taking America’s jobs and stealing its companies. If anybody on the Government Benches thinks we are going to have a good deal from Trump, they have got something else coming. The Trump Administration will strip away our public services and public health, our environment and our rights at work, because those things will no longer be protected by the European Court of Human Rights. That is the future we face: as some sort of low-tax haven, with low skills and low standards. We will try to get into the European market and rightly be penalised by EU tariffs.

The British people have a right to a final say. We in this House should delay the triggering of article 50 and give them a final chance to make their decision. If the suit does not fit—if it is not what they ordered—they should be able to send it back. If I sold someone a mobile phone and said it did colour photographs when it did only black and white, they should have the right to reject or accept it. People will not be given that right and it is a disgrace. This is not democracy at all. The British people deserve the final say.

10.18 pm

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), although I hope that my tone will be a bit more positive than his. I am not entirely sure that I would buy a second-hand motor from him, let alone a mobile phone.

I strongly support the Bill. My support for leaving the European Union was clear, and the view of my constituency was also clear: approximately 60% were in favour of leaving, which is 7.5 percentage points more than the proportion of my constituents who voted for me at the general election. Like me, they voted to take back control of our laws, money and borders. I will vote in favour of the Bill because I believe in respecting the voters and respecting our democracy.

I understand Burke’s argument that as MPs we owe our constituents and the country our judgment, not simply our delegated authority. In 2015, we exercised that judgment overwhelmingly when the House voted that it was the right of the people to decide and that we should hold a referendum. On 23 June last year, each of us got the opportunity to vote with our conscience—on an equal basis with our constituents—at the ballot box. When we vote with our consciences tomorrow, we are voting not on whether we should leave the EU, but on whether we respect democracy and the decision of the people.

This is an admirably simple bill, and I commend Ministers for its clarity. Members on both sides of the House often extol the benefits of simplicity and clarity in legislation. They often say that we should simplify the tax code, close loopholes and simplify the rules around benefits so that they are more easily understood and more equitable, and that we should simplify our many regulations across sectors to cut red tape and reduce burdens on our businesses and individuals. Yet some now complain that this Bill is such a model of simplicity and clarity. Such objections are spurious and misunderstand what this Bill does. We are authorising the Government to take a single action: to carry out the will of the British people.

The debates on treaties such as Maastricht and Lisbon lasted so long because the treaties themselves were long and complex. Each of those treaties ran to some 260 pages. The devil was in the detail, so weeks and weeks were required properly to scrutinise them. As the Prime Minister has stated, not only will we have days and days of debate as negotiations proceed, but the entire body of European law currently applying to Britain will be converted to UK law on our exit from the EU, so each individual item can be scrutinised, amended, repealed or kept as this Parliament sees fit.

Whether we supported remain or leave is no longer relevant, as the UK voted to leave. I hope very much that we all remain passionate supporters of democracy, as we all were when we stood on a manifesto that committed to give the voters this decision. Indications for the negotiations are good. Many countries have expressed a desire for deeper bilateral relations and trade deals with the UK. I understand that, over the weekend, Spain indicated its desire not to be bound by any recalcitrant attitudes that may linger in Brussels. Our Prime Minister has already shown her mettle and great sense in rallying the US behind the NATO alliance.
We have heard some excellent and incredibly impassioned speeches today, I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) on the way in which he delivered his speech. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) is always eloquent and impassioned. Occasionally he is wrong, but it was great to hear from him. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) made an impassioned plea on behalf of EU citizens who already have citizenship here, and he was absolutely right to do so.

Leaving the EU is an outward-looking process and we should therefore direct our gazes globally, rather than at the innards of procedure. We had a referendum, we had a motion and now we have a Bill. Let us proceed outward and into the world. I look forward to voting for this Bill tomorrow, and I hope that my colleagues do, too.

10.23 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It should come as no surprise that on a day such as today when we commemorate the Clyde revolt, in which my predecessor, the late noble David Kirkwood, was a major participant, I, the Member of Parliament for West Dunbartonshire, am announcing my intention not to vote with the Government tomorrow. Furthermore, as a constituency MP from Scotland, I can think of no greater honour than to follow my fellow Scottish National party Members in voting against article 50.

Like the nation of Scotland, my constituency voted to remain, which is why I am making this contribution. I am mandated by my community and by my nation to do so in the hope that the United Kingdom Government acknowledge and listen to their concerns. Some may refuse to represent and stand up for their remain voting constituents, and instead meekly act as a cheerleader for the United Kingdom Government as they rip my nation out of the European Union without a plan, hellbent on placing my constituents in a precarious position economically, socially and politically. I am proud that the Scottish National party will not behave in such a manner.

During the referendum campaign, those advocating a leave vote spoke of Britain taking back control, yet what we have witnessed is the United Kingdom Government stumbling along with no strategy and no clue. They are losing control and rushing through this Bill in a bid to avoid full parliamentary and public scrutiny. What have they got to hide? Instead of bringing back control to a political state, control and influence have been given to the unelected—not only to that bunch of warmehrs in the House of Lords, but to global corporations that are carrying out dodgy deals with the British Government behind closed doors.

We need look only at the deal involving Nissan to see where control lies. The Government offered support to Nissan and assurances that they would try to secure tariff-free access to the single market, although they have refused to publish the letter containing those remarks. Of course, that was before the British Prime Minister kiboshed the idea of staying in the single market. This is not taking back control. This is giving away power, and the Government need to get their act together before they lose control completely.

In addition, pressure is now mounting on the UK Government from Goldman Sachs to ensure that the City of London is protected from Brexit—more millionaires and billionaires, with no thought given to the impact on the rest of the country, including my constituents. This leadership is steering the economy into a political maelstrom hellbent on wedding us to a flotilla led by a reactionary isolationist who places America first. As we leave the European Union, we seem to be going towards a new pax Americana, in which the United Kingdom might as well be floating off in a cloud of narrow-mindedness, ignorance and intolerance.

Power and increasing influence are being given to those with no political mandate—for the record, for Hansard, I should say yet again that that includes that unelected, unaccountable House of warmehrs at the other end of the corridor. Power is being removed from the Parliament of Scotland and its Government, for they are being ignored. It is particularly insulting that that unelected House of Lords will have a greater say on article 50 legislation than the elected institutions of my nation of Scotland, as well as those of Wales and Northern Ireland. So much for a Union of equals.

Let us go back to a critical matter that in times past would have involved more debate in this House and will be affected by Brexit: the position of Northern Ireland. Like many hon. Members, I represent a constituency with a substantial number of the Irish diaspora, reflecting every aspect of Irish society: nationalist, republican and Unionist. Where is the debate? How is this House putting its foot down and demanding that we bring forward legislation through amendments to make sure that the Ireland Act 1949 is not repudiated by the Government of the United Kingdom, undermining the peace process? The issue impacts not only Northern Ireland, but our nearest European neighbour and communities the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. We have silence from the British Conservative party. At least some in the British Labour party have guts and will follow us through the Lobby tomorrow—the less said about their leadership, the better.

10.28 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. As we have just heard, many contributions—there will be more tomorrow—have displayed passion, frustration and at times great thoughtfulness. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias). During her speech, she displayed the challenges she faced in coming to her decision about how she will vote. For many people, that will be indicative of the difficulties and challenges that a debate such as this can create.

One of the first campaigns I fought when I got into politics was to save the pound—something that I felt passionate about then and still do now. I stood as a candidate for our party in the 2010 general election on a manifesto in which the issue of the EU was growing in importance. I failed in that election campaign, but that issue continued to make progress. I was elected in 2015 on a manifesto to give the British people a referendum, which was incredibly important. The country was asking for a referendum, and I heard that message on the doorsteps of Aldridge-Brownhills. The referendum took place on 23 June last year, and there is no going back.

I struggled to decide how to vote in the referendum. I have a background in business, so I know how much
easier it is to trade across open borders, but I also know the frustrations that EU red tape has brought to business. I struggled because I felt in my heart that the security of our country was absolutely paramount, and it still is. I decided that I would vote to remain, but I made it clear to my constituents from the beginning that I would honour the decision of the referendum, whatever it was, because it was the British people’s opportunity to have their say, and that is what they did. We can debate which issues led to the decision—immigration, the free movement of people or a whole load of others—but on 23 June, the British people said, “Enough is enough. We want British politicians and the establishment to hear that we want some change.” In Walsall borough, 32.14% voted to remain and 67.86% voted to leave. I, for one, respect that decision.

Today we debate a straightforward Bill that is a step forward in the process of exiting the EU. The debate is not about whether we leave, nor is it about whether we should have another referendum. It is about getting on with the job that the British people have asked us to do. There are passions on both sides of the argument, as we have heard today and as was evident during the campaigns. There were times when I found some of the arguments on both sides not just difficult, but quite unpalatable. Some of my constituents found that too. However, now is not the time for recriminations or to rake over the embers of the campaign. Now is the time to respect the will of the majority, but it is also the time to respect both sides of the argument and to come together constructively. The Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street in the summer and talked about bringing together our country. It is incumbent on all of us in the Palace of Westminster to do that and to ensure that we get the best possible deal for future generations.

10.33 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), but it will be no surprise to her that I do not agree with her position. My colleagues and I have arrived at a different destination.

Despite what the Government have claimed, the question facing this House today is not the choice to remain or leave that was faced by the public in the EU referendum on 23 June last year. Rather, it is a question of whether the Government should be given the power unilaterally to reshape the politics of Britain and Northern Ireland with no accountability from Parliament. It is a question of whether the Conservative party should be allowed to lock us out of the single market and into a global race to the bottom. Fundamentally, it is a question of whether a Prime Minister with no personal mandate should be allowed to appoint herself the sole interpreter of last year’s referendum result. In my opinion and that of my party, that should not be the case.

The Government have consistently fought against parliamentary scrutiny and accountability on their handling of Brexit. We are glad that that came to an end with the Supreme Court judgment. We have been told that Brexit is simply too important to be subject to the usual scrutiny that we would give to any other Government policy or proposal. On those grounds, the Government have fought to deny devolved institutions substantial input regarding our future post Brexit and avoided answering any questions that might cause the Prime Minister political difficulties.

Now that the Supreme Court has forced the Government to come to Parliament, rather than wake up to their hubris, the Government have made a further mockery of this House by presenting a one-page piece of legislation, with two short clauses, on the most important issue that this Parliament will ever consider during its mandate. The Government have committed themselves to doing the bare minimum that they can legally get away with. After the referendum result that showed the deep divisions across Britain and Northern Ireland, the Government should have sought to ensure special status for Northern Ireland. Instead, the Prime Minister has insisted on imposing uniformity across Britain and Northern Ireland, and introduced an arbitrary timeline intended to minimise opposition. As a result, the Government have put political expediency ahead of getting the right deal in Northern Ireland—even at a time of political instability there.

As I have said before in this House, exit from the European Union poses huge questions for the principles of the Good Friday agreement, because that was built on our continued membership of the European Union, for the border on the island of Ireland, and for our economy. These questions have not been answered previously, and nor have they been answered by Government Members during today’s debate. That is why I and my colleagues in the SDLP will vote against the triggering of article 50. Northern Ireland voted by 56% to remain within the European Union. My constituency of South Down voted by 67% to remain.

Central to the Good Friday agreement and the peace process it enabled was the commitment that Northern Ireland’s constitutional future would be governed by the principle of consent. For many years, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and his allies campaigned to the effect that EU membership was the fundamental constitutional question of our times. Now, having got their way in the referendum, the Government seek to deny that exit from the EU will represent any change in our constitutional position in Northern Ireland. Clearly, that is wrong. I accept that membership of the EU is a fundamental constitutional issue. That means that Northern Ireland’s place in the EU should be a decision for the people of Northern Ireland alone—it should not become tied into wider questions of national identity or anything else. Nor should EU membership, or lack of it, become an external impediment to the people of Ireland’s decision on our own constitutional future.

In the time since the referendum, the Government ought to have worked openly and transparently with the Irish Government, the European Commission and the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill
his maiden speech so late that nobody could remember it. The next time he gave a speech, the Prime Minister, Robert Peel, wrote him a congratulatory note on his maiden speech. I hope that despite the hour, I will be listened to and remembered this evening.

After the storms of the referendum and its immediate aftermath, the country was understandably divided into leave and remain. It seems to me, having listened to 10 hours of this debate, that two new groups have emerged and become the real divide in Parliament. The first, and by far the larger, group consists of those who accept the mandate of the referendum and who want to implement it in full. As many have said tonight, that includes leaving the single market, the customs union and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. However they voted in the referendum, they are primarily focused on how we can make a success of the life to come.

The second group consists of those who are not yet able to accept the mandate of the referendum, or who do so in word only and seek to diminish it in reality. They look back in anger, remorse and regret, and they are unable psychologically or intellectually to reorientate themselves to the new world and to ask the real question that is before us today: what comes next? In a free society, there is no obligation on anyone to change their views to conform with the majority but, as my right hon. Friend for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) said so eloquently, there is an obligation on all of us to act in the national interest. The path of the second group is not in the national interest.

I do not believe that the people of Newark sent me to Westminster at a time of such historic importance to point fingers—to say, “What about the £350 million for the NHS?” or, “What about the recession that you predicted, but as the noble Lord Hague would say, some of us will be here in 20 or 30 years’ time, and we intend to make a success of Brexit.” As Shakespeare would say, “some have greatness thrust upon them”.

Greatness has been thrust upon each of us in this House and across the country as a result of the referendum, and the only question is how we meet it. As Shakespeare would have finished: “be not afraid of greatness... Thy Fates open their hands. Let thy blood and spirit embrace them.”

10.46 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): We have been told that “Brexit means Brexit”; that the Government will secure the best possible deal; that there will be a red, white and blue Brexit; and, latterly, that we will become a global player. However, experts are available to inform us—such as “Scotland’s Place in Europe”, and “Securing Wales’ Future”—“Sicrhau Dyfodol Cymru”—which was agreed between the Government of Wales and the main Opposition party, which is my party. Careful study of the documents will yield some interesting facts, which I will now mention.

For me in Wales, the most obvious fact is the estimate that we will lose £680 million every year. I pressed the previous Prime Minister, David Cameron, several times to give me a guarantee that that sum would be made up in future—and he of course gave me no such guarantee. We are therefore looking down the barrel of a gun in losing £680 million every year.

What does our exit from the EU mean for Wales? There are people in poor constituencies, including my own, whose communities are so poor that we qualify for European Union cohesion funding. That funding is otherwise made available to former communist regions of eastern Europe, which shows how low the economy of Wales has got under the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We receive EU cohesion funding.
and we are very glad of it. However, that is a poor substitute for a proper UK regional policy. We need a proper UK regional policy, rather than the default position of favouring one region above all others—that is, favouring the south-east. Leaving the EU does not mean going back to some comfortable status quo ante. When we do eventually leave the EU, we will insist that this Government or any future Government adopt a proper regional policy.

What does exit mean for other sectors in Wales, such as manufacturing, agriculture and our universities, including my own in Bangor, which benefits greatly from the European Union and has very strong links across the Irish sea with universities in Ireland? What about worker protection and environmental protection? What about the future of multiculturalism and multilingualism in this state? All these questions are extremely important to us.

What does exit mean for democratic accountability within these islands, and for the constitutional settlement? Leaving the EU is not just a matter of leaving the EU; it has profound implications for the constitutional set-up in the United Kingdom itself. I am sure the Government realise that they are not only dealing with the hugely complex matter of leaving the EU, but risking the severest possible implications for the continuation of the UK as it is.

For those reasons alone, we should have the fullest possible debate. I say that in particular to people who voted, sincerely and in good faith, to leave the EU, thinking it was a straightforward matter. They were assured by the experts that it was simply a matter of pulling the plug and it would all be decided very quickly on the basis of a very attractive prospectus. I will not refer this evening to the promises made, not least the £350 million a week for our NHS, as they are matters for future detailed debates. However, I refer the House to my new clauses 58 to 75, which deal with some of the promises made by the leave side. I look forward to expert responses from the other side explaining how those promises are not to be fulfilled. To those good people who think that it is all done and dusted, I have to say that this will be a marathon and not a dash.

Since 24 June 2016, we in Plaid Cymru have been clear and consistent in our approach as to a preferred model for a United Kingdom outside the EU. Our concern is Wales’s national interests, of course, and that means prioritising the economy. That means ensuring full and unfettered access to our important European markets. For no matter how many “special relationships” the Prime Minister scrapes with other countries, or bespoke deals she eventually strikes, I fear we will not enjoy the same levels of free trade if we leave the EU single market.

We already know that uncertainty means businesses are pulling out of investing in Wales and that confidence is low. We cannot afford the luxury of time. Canada’s deal took 10 years and TTIP is in trouble. We cannot afford the luxury of time waiting for a WTO deal to be struck, because that will be far from unproblematic. Some 200,000 jobs in Wales are supported by our trade with the single market, with 90% of our food and drink exports going to our EU partners.

I will finish on this point. If our agriculture, which is the backbone of rural Wales, is threatened in this way, what future is there for us? What future is there for my culture and my language? I will ask one question. It is a rhetorical question, but I look forward to an answer from across the way on the Government Benches and perhaps from the Labour Front Bench. It is a very short and simple question: how much lamb can we possibly hope to sell to New Zealand?

10.52 pm

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams).

This House was right to decide in 2015, with just 53 votes to the contrary, that an in/out referendum should determine Britain’s continued membership of the EU. The referendum was the biggest exercise in democracy since the 1992 general election. The majority voted to leave and this House, this seat of democracy, would set a worrying precedent by frustrating that result tomorrow.

When I went into the polling station with my wife on 23 June, I did so knowing, as I had told many voters in the previous days and weeks, that our votes would count and that it was important to vote. It was important because there would be no going back and the result of the referendum would settle the question of whether or not we remained in the EU. Ironically, given the position of his party today, it was the leader of the Liberal Democrats who said:

“there is one thing on which I can agree with the Leave campaign: This is a once-in-a-generation decision.”

The very high turnout in the referendum suggests that is what the majority of people understood.

For all the arguments advanced now about binding and advisory referendums, not one person told me that they voted on 23 June thinking that Parliament might override the result at some later stage. They were right to have that confidence, because that is what they were told by multiple sources: the Conservative manifesto; the Government’s official referendum leaflet; the leave campaign; the remain campaign; and leaders of political parties. In those circumstances, it would be unconscionable to block the result of the referendum. As the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) said in a powerful speech, that is simply not an option.

We are being urged to go back on those clear avowments, by a minority of people—and I think by a minority of people who voted to remain—who want to find a way to block a result that they, like me, find disappointing. I want to explain why I disagree with the four main arguments they make.

Nicky Morgan: Is it not ironic that the Liberal Democrats, whose second name is “Democrats”, want to block the democratic decision—much though I disagreed with it—taken last June?

James Berry: That point is not lost on me or the House.

The first objection is that MPs in constituencies said to have voted remain are obliged to respect the result in their constituency and block article 50. We are told that we should act not as representatives in the sense that Burke instructed but as delegates. There are several problems with that argument. The first is that the referendum was a straightforward exercise in direct democracy applicable to the UK as a whole. The rules
were not for a two-stage electoral college process including a vote in this House. If those had been the rules, the votes would have had to be counted on a constituency basis, which they certainly were not in England—it is likely that my constituency voted to remain, but we will never know. In practice, had those been the rules, it is estimated that the leave campaign would have won by a country mile—by more than 2:1. To get around this inconvenience, a second main argument is advanced: that all those MPs in seats that voted to remain should vote to block article 50 anyway in the national interest. To those arguments, I simply say: you cannot have your cake and eat it.

The third main argument, reflected in one of the amendments—one with which I respectfully disagree—is that the referendum gave no mandate to leave the single market. Whatever else can be said about the leave campaign—and I have a lot to say about the leave campaign—it was certainly clear about taking back control of immigration policy, laws and EU spending, none of which would be possible as a member of the single market. EU leaders said at the time, leave campaigners said it, remain campaigners absolutely said it, and I know I said it, because staying in the single market was one of the main reasons I voted remain, knowing what a leave vote would entail.

The fourth main argument is that MPs who like me voted to remain have a duty to hold fast with that view and vote to block article 50: we were convinced that the best thing for the country was to remain in the EU last June, so what has changed? I say nothing has changed. I made a careful decision, having considered the arguments on both sides, and decided that it was in the best interests of my constituents, many of whom work in the City of London, and of the country to remain in the EU. I recognise, however, one straightforward fact: my side lost. We in the House are nothing else if not democrats. The democratic process of the referendum, set in train by a vote in this House, has run its course and delivered its result, and in this country, we respect the results of the democratic process.

A good number of my constituents who voted to remain have in the last few days and hours asked me to vote to block article 50. They will be disappointed by my vote on the Bill. I respect their views, I understand their desire to remain a member of the EU and I share their concerns about the uncertainty inherent in the article 50 process, but the consistently high turnouts in my constituency tell me that my constituents care about democracy. The majority of my constituents, and the majority of the people in the UK, would not expect their MP to try to obstruct the result of a democratic process just because that MP was on the side that lost.

I have come to the clear conclusion that the right thing to do—indeed, the only thing to do—as a democrat is to accept the result of the referendum, to avoid prolonging this damaging uncertainty and to focus on arguing for what I think is the best relationship with the EU once we have left, both for my country and my constituents. For me, that means the closest possible relationship with the EU consistent with the referendum result, and it means a liberal, tolerant, outward-looking, internationalist Britain that leads the world in free trade, the rule of law, the fight against terrorism, international development, research and innovation and environmental protection, all in close co-operation with our EU friends and allies.

That was the positive vision set out by the Prime Minister in her Lancaster House speech, and she has my full support in seeking to deliver it, but she can do so only if we vote to trigger article 50 tomorrow—the inevitable and required result of the EU referendum.

10.59 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), although I fear that we do not agree. I am pleased to have the opportunity today to explain to the House why, although I respect the position taken by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and agree with him that this is a very difficult matter, I will be voting against the Bill on Second Reading tomorrow.

My constituents voted overwhelmingly—by more than 75%—to remain in the EU last June. Across the country, almost half of those who voted, voted to remain in the EU, and a further 27% of the population did not vote at all. During the campaign, the leave campaign made a series of commitments, on the basis of which many people voted. The most significant was the pledge of an additional £350 million a week for our NHS. On other issues, however, there was a complete lack of clarity—for example, about whether leaving the EU would mean an end to freedom of movement and retained access to the single market. The vagueness and undeliverability of those commitments unravelled almost immediately. The narrow referendum result, on a question that contained no detail about what Brexit would mean and informed by a debate that was full of false promises and inconsistencies, does not provide a mandate to the Government on any terms, within any time scale or at any cost.

There are three things that are important to me as we debate our future relationship with the European Union. The first is the values that matter to the communities that I represent. Many of my constituents feel a profound sense of distress at the referendum result. They are concerned about the serious practical implications, but they are also concerned about the implications for the values that are important to them. These are values of internationalism, tolerance and diversity; of working closely and collaboratively with countries that share our values and standing up to those who do not; and of celebrating the contribution that people from all over the world make in our communities and our economy. We share so much with the other nations of Europe, yet we see our Prime Minister cut adrift, failing to establish the relationships with other EU leaders that are necessary to secure the best possible outcomes for the UK in the Brexit negotiations.

We see our Prime Minister so desperate to secure trading relationships outside the EU that she has apparently lost any moral compass at all in our relationship with the US. Let me be clear: the people of Dulwich and West Norwood do not share Donald Trump’s values. We do not believe that the world can be made safer by excluding people based on their religion or nationality. We condemn torture and human rights abuses. We do not believe in abolishing environmental protections or denying climate change. We do not believe in limiting access to healthcare for the most disadvantaged groups;
nor do we believe in the denigration of women, disabled people and Muslims, or the appointment of white supremacists to high office or, indeed, any office. Without the European Union, we are left with far fewer close international partners who share our values and we are diminished in many ways as a consequence.

My second concern is about the terms of the proposed exit. A narrowly won referendum does not give the Government a mandate to exit the EU on any terms or within any time scale. It does not give a mandate for a reckless hard Brexit, which will put our economy at risk and which makes no attempt to reconcile the country and build bridges to the 48%. The detail matters, and the detail is complex—on the rights of EU nationals living in the UK, which I have asked the Government to confirm several times in this House; on our access to the single market; on the status of the many protections for our environment, workers’ rights, equalities and human rights; and on the implications for science and our universities.

The detail matters, and we have a right to know and to have the opportunity to debate what the Government propose Brexit will look like and what its implications will be. This is a decision that will define our country for a generation. It will directly affect what life is like for our children and grandchildren and for communities across the country. It should be undertaken carefully, rigorously and with attention to every aspect of the detail. We must know what the Government’s negotiating objectives are and have the opportunity to have a say on whether they will deliver a secure, stable and prosperous future for the UK.

Twelve bullet points of a speech, a two-clause Bill and less than a week of debate are completely unacceptable. The Government should be publishing their White Paper ahead of the legislation and should be setting out in detail how they propose to secure a Brexit deal that safeguards the things that matter most to our communities, and we should have the opportunity to debate and vote before an irrevocable step to trigger article 50 is taken.

Finally, the electoral promises made during the referendum campaign matter, and the Government, in acting on the referendum result, must be held to account for delivering them. My constituents are overwhelmingly opposed to Brexit, but our NHS trust is in crisis, and we should have the opportunity to debate and vote before an irrevocable step to trigger article 50 is taken.

We talked in the constituency of Boston and Skegness at great length about what it would mean to control immigration. We talked at great length about that one single issue—not to the exclusion of all others, but certainly more than any other issue. While I agree with many of my right hon. and hon. Friends that much of this debate was about taking back control of our laws and our money, it is disingenuous to pretend that immigration was not—certainly in my constituency and many others—the single key issue on which many made their decision to vote one way or another.

Let me make two key points on immigration. First, if we are to control our borders, we must leave the single market. To those who say that leaving the single market was not on the ballot paper, I say it absolutely was to anyone who was having the conversations in my constituency. From talking to others about the vital new relationship Britain would have going out into the world after we left the European Union, I know that it meant making our own bilateral trade deals with countries. That means leaving the customs union. It absolutely was on the ballot paper.

The sophisticated, in-depth and detailed debates in the run-up to 23 June were on the deal that the Prime Minister now proposes to take us through over the coming two years. When it is said in some quarters that this negotiation is a hard Brexit or a soft Brexit or some kind of Brexit that people do not like, that is patronising the electorate, who knew exactly what they were doing and who chose to make a new relationship with the world.

We might have a simple Bill today, but it stems from a complex debate that led to a very simple question. That question was resoundingly answered in my constituency, and I suspect it will come as no surprise to anyone when I say that I will vote with the Government to trigger article 50 tomorrow.

Sir Edward Leigh: My hon. Friend and I, both representing Lincolnshire, were on opposite sides of this argument in the referendum campaign. It was easy enough for me to go with my constituency, but I think the House views my hon. Friend’s stance as a courageous one, and I think he is respected for what he is telling us now.

Matt Warman: That is a kind comment from my constituency neighbour—it is either courageous or bonkers, but we will leave that to the voters to decide in 2020. As I say, I hope that whatever we do in this House, we are rewarded for sticking to what we believe, and that brings me to my second fundamental point.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I believe that more Poles live in my hon. Friend’s constituency than in any other constituency. Does he accept that the free movement of people has also been bad for countries such as Poland, which have seen a massive brain drain as highly skilled workers have left, and that the system was wholly unsustainable?

Matt Warman: I entirely agree. I think that, throughout Europe, we are seeing a recognition that the free movement of people does not work for a host of countries, for a
[Matt Warman]

host of reasons. That, I think, is why the rights of workers in my constituency should be protected, but it is also why we should acknowledge that free movement needs fundamental reform.

The central point I want to make is that there has been a sense—not over the last 18 months or over the period of the referendum campaign, but over the last 40 years—that the policies promoted by Westminster have become ever more remote from constituencies such as mine. There has been an increasing sense that there is not consent for the kind of free movement to which my hon. Friend referred, and that there is not consent for the kind of relationship that we have had with our European neighbours. We all want free trade, but not everyone wants the kind of free movement that we have seen. The social changes that it has wrought on small market towns such as Boston are not something for which the people voted at any point, and that disconnect has fundamentally diminished the reputation of this House, of politics, and of politicians throughout the country.

What we have today, and what we will have in the vote tomorrow, is an opportunity to take a small step towards restoring some of the faith in this place. What we have is an opportunity to demonstrate to the British people that after the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, promised that we would deliver a referendum, the House kept that promise, and that now the House will deliver on what the referendum mandated us to do. It is only through politicians keeping their promises that we will do the greater thing, which is to seek, and I believe, to achieve the restoration of some kind of faith in politics as the sole means to make our country better.

There are those who say that to vote with one’s conscience is to suggest that one knows better than one’s constituents. I know that there are some issues on which we are asked to make decisions on behalf of our constituents, because there has been no referendum on every Bill, but in this case there has been a very clearly expressed view from each and every one of our constituents, and it appeared to me that that very clearly expressed view was a wish for us to trigger article 50. I accept that there are other views, but when it comes to voting with my conscience, my conscience tells me not only that I should trigger article 50, but that if I do anything else I shall risk undermining not just faith in this party and not just faith in this Parliament but faith in democracy itself. I do not believe that I could vote with my conscience and do that shameful thing, and I am not sure that many others in the House would seek to do it either.

11.13 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in a debate that the Government strained every sinew to prevent. I rise to oppose the motion, and to speak in favour of the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), supported by my hon. Friends and, now, Members in all parts of the House.

It is not just because my constituency voted remain that I oppose the Government, although, as the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) has just explained so eloquently, that is an important consideration for any Member. It is not just because every local authority area in Scotland voted remain that I oppose the Government. It is not even just because 62% of the Scottish people voted remain that I oppose the Government. Tonight, I am opposing this Government’s vision of Brexit Britain and the flawed process taking us there. It would be one thing if we were to see attempts by the British Government to achieve a united position on Brexit among the four nations, but instead we have unilateral decisions on leaving the single market, and we see the British Government taking a political decision not to consult the devolved Governments on the terms of this Brexit Bill.

The Supreme Court deemed that the UK Government are not legally compelled to consult the devolved Governments on the Bill, which makes an absolute folly of the 2014 independence referendum promises and the Scotland Bill promises of the year before last. The Sewel convention is no longer worth the paper it is written on. Sewel is now a political choice for this Government, and it is a choice they can and should still take. If they will not formally consult the devolved Parliaments on this, the most important of constitutional changes that has such a profound impact on areas of devolved responsibility—if they will not formally consult the Scottish Parliament on Brexit—what will they consult us on?

There were a great many predictions before the Scottish independence referendum about the outcome of a yes vote or a no vote: one has been confirmed today, and one has been rubbished today. Some said that, if we vote no, we give the UK Government carte blanche to treat Scotland as they wish—to kick us down the road and discard our views on the issues that matter to the people of Scotland but are the responsibility of this place. How long will the people of Scotland be willing to accept this treatment? I tell the Government that it will not be very much longer.

The other promise, which was absolutely rubbished today, is that voting no meant we kept our place in the EU. Voting no has in fact forced Scotland out against its will. It would be one thing if we were to see a respect shown for the people who voted remain in Scotland and a middle ground sought, but instead we see a unilateral decision to leave the single market and a unilateral decision to pursue a hard Tory Brexit, whatever the cost.

As a result, we see a desperate and pandering appeasement of a US President who has been roundly condemned by other liberal leaders around the world. While Justin Trudeau, Angela Merkel and our own Nicola Sturgeon have taken a lead in calling out Trump’s disgraceful actions of the past week, the British Prime Minister literally and figuratively holds the hand of the man who wants to build walls, persecute people of Islamic faith and leave those fleeing persecution in destitute limbo. This is where the Tory vision of Brexit Britain is leading us: cutting ourselves off by choosing to leave the single market, and desperate to do deals, at whatever cost to our principles and our reputation in the world, on human rights, religious freedoms and tolerance.

That is not a vision that I have for my country. I want better than that for Scotland, and indeed for the rest of the UK. I, like everyone else, want the best possible outcome from the precarious position in which the former Prime Minister’s referendum gamble has put us.
We are leaving the EU, and in that regard I respect the result of the referendum and those who chose to vote as they did. But there is no doubt that the Government’s chosen path means that our precarious position is getting ever closer to the edge of the cliff that is so often spoken about. So, to paraphrase the wonderful comment from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) earlier, I will be voting against the Government with my conscience clear.

11.18 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Mr Speaker, you have taken me completely by surprise. I know it is traditional to be called this late. I am given an hour to speak, so I am delighted with that. You told me it would be a miracle if I was allowed to speak, but here I am speaking, and it is a great honour to do so.

There have been some excellent speeches right across the House, and, contrary to what some Opposition Members may think, I do respect the remain view. However, I urge all those who still wish to stay in the EU to realise that we are not going to do that. The decision has been made; it is final, and I want—I know that everyone in the country wants—our country to stay together, and to go forward together, as a United Kingdom, to a very exciting new future. I am absolutely convinced—and I know the people of Scotland are, funnily enough—that that is the way, together, to tackle all the challenges that lie ahead. I am hearing lots of commentary from SNP Members. May I suggest that they learn to use the powers that they have been given properly? Then, when they have done that, perhaps they can come back here and start talking a little bit more sense.

Mr Speaker: Order. The more jocularity there is, the greater the danger that Members who want to speak tonight will not do so, not for disciplinary reasons but because we will run out of time. So please, in your own interests, cut it out.

Richard Drax: I want to pick up on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), whom I respect and who is no longer in his place. He used the analogy of someone checking that they had a parachute before jumping out of a plane. I believe that the reason we are leaving the aeroplane—whether we check the parachute or not—is that it is on fire. The EU as it now stands—the political experiment that was put in place—is over. It is finished, and the people of Europe are beginning to realise that. The British people have led the way, and others are now seeing the light. I hope that where the United Kingdom leads, others will follow.

I hope for a peaceful and ordered change for Europe, which we all love. We love Europe, and we want to remain friends and allies with it. If we look back in history, I think we will find that Britain has been the best ally that certain countries in Europe could ever have hoped to have. The future for us in this country and our European allies will be sound. I have used the example of Airbus on many occasions, and I will use it again tonight. The fuselages are built in Germany and France, and the wings are built in Wales and Bristol. It is a fantastic European enterprise, and I cannot imagine any sane, sensible politician or bureaucrat wanting to get in the way of all those thousands of jobs. I believe that, over the next two years, the EU will come to us. It will see the pragmatism of having a future with us that involves sensible trade and friendship resulting in the prosperity and wealth of us all. In fact, I have no doubt about that whatever.

Many Members have talked about their fear of what we will do when we become our own country again and when we take control of our destiny, which we have not had for 40 years.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there should be no veto from any region of the United Kingdom over the democratically expressed opinion that all of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland should leave? Does he also agree that article 50 should be invoked by 31 March and that no region should say no to that?

Richard Drax: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why we are here tonight, and it is what the vote will be about tomorrow. We are all going to vote to trigger article 50. We will then have at least two years of negotiations to find out exactly where we are going to be. Who knows, that might take even longer, but I have every confidence in our Government and in our Prime Minister, who could not have been clearer about the direction in which this country is going. She has said that no deal is better than a bad deal, and I entirely endorse that view. If we have to fall back on WTO rules, so be it, but I am convinced that common sense and pragmatism will ensure, over the next two years, that that will not happen.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend talks about pragmatism. Given our huge imbalance of trade with the European Union, does he agree that it would be hugely in the EU’s interests to strike a better deal with us rather than reverting to WTO rules?

Richard Drax: I have already mentioned Airbus, and I cannot think of a better example. It would be crazy for politicians—

Claire Perry: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Richard Drax: I am afraid that I cannot give way. I know that other people want to speak. I would love to give way to my hon. Friend—[Interruption.] All right, I will give way to her—

Mr Speaker: Order. To put it bluntly, may I suggest that the hon. Gentleman gets on with it? Get on with it, man!

Richard Drax: I was giving way to my hon. Friend—[Interruption.] Right, okay, so I cannot give way to her. Forgive me.

Many Members have talked about the fear of losing workers’ rights, money and all the other things that EU gives us and our regions. I long to hear the Government Front-Bench team say to those people, “What about our £200 million, our £60 million or our £50 million?” That is our money. When we leave the EU, we will have a sovereign Parliament and it will decide where that money will go. We will lobby Government—whomever
they may be—for our good causes and use the money raised by the taxpayer sensibly. Every country should be allowed to do that.

I cannot understand those who ask about workers’ rights. We live in one of the oldest and proudest democracies in the world. If we cannot decide what rights workers should have, then God help us. Why do we need tens of thousands of bureaucrats to tell us how to run our country? We do not need them. I fear that the vitality of this great country of ours has somehow been sucked out over the past 40 years or so. We live in a welfare state with handouts that are our money. The whole thing could not be more ironic. The future is about common sense, pragmatism and negotiation, which I am convinced the Government will do well on our behalf, leading to a prosperous country that will at last have control of her destiny, with all the decisions that govern our lives being made in this place.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. The limit will now be four minutes per speech. I am afraid that that is the reality of the matter. People can intervene on each other if they want, but that will just stop other people getting in.

11.26 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): In following the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), I have to say that I will not be one of those who will be patronised into the confidence and comfort that he thinks awaits us in this somewhere-over-the-rainbow picture that we are being painted of where the Brexit course will lead us. The fact is that the Bill in front of us is short. There is more substance in the reasoned amendments—even those that have not been selected—than in the Bill itself, but that does not mean that it is not pregnant with serious implication. That is why it is bizarre to see in the explanatory notes statements such as

“The Bill is not expected to have any financial implications.”

Tell that to the households that will lose money over the years ahead. Tell that to the many regions that will lose access to vital European funding and programmes. Tell that to the universities and to people working in research in our health service who will be denied access to European consortium funding.

Paragraph 14 of the explanatory notes states:

“The impact of the Bill itself will be both clear and limited, therefore mechanisms for post legislative scrutiny are not necessary.”

Clear and limited? A whole series of amendments have already been tabled for next week that are all about ensuring more scrutiny, getting proper answers about the processes that are afoot and getting the Government to take due heed of several key principles and priorities that must be borne in mind as this course is pursued.

Paragraph 16 tells us:

“Given the need to introduce legislation as quickly as possible, it has not been possible to formally discuss with Parliamentary Committees.”

There was plenty of time to introduce this legislation, but the Government and those on the Government Benches were in denial about legislation being necessary. They were saying that this matter could be pursued with no scrutiny in this Parliament and with no scrutiny by or say-so from the devolved Assemblies—it would be left entirely in the hands of the Executive under the royal prerogative.

I agreed with a point made by one Government Member who will be voting to trigger article 50. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) said that he wants the “best relationship with the EU...both for my country and my constituents.” That is what I want and that is what my colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) and for South Down (Ms Ritchie), want, too. The best relationship with the EU for my country of Ireland—my Unionist neighbours and their constituents would say Northern Ireland—would be one in which we can continue to enjoy access not only to EU funds, but to the other benefits of EU membership, which are built into the workings of the Good Friday agreement.

I remind the House yet again that, when the Good Friday agreement was negotiated, the common EU membership of Britain and Ireland was taken as a given and was written into the terms of the agreement between the two Governments—it is written into strand 1, strand 2 and strand 3—so we want to make sure that in future there is a special status for Northern Ireland so that we can enjoy a lean-to position with the south on the benefits of the EU and access to the single market.

That is why the whole question of membership of the single market and the implications of the customs union has to be spelled out by the Government and tested by this Parliament, and it is why we will be tabling a number of amendments to see whether the lip service that the Government are paying to the Good Friday agreement actually means anything. We cannot just accept the simple lip service that they mean no harm to the Good Friday agreement and have others lip synching along with that lip service as though it offers us any sort of reassurance or protection.

11.30 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): At a point in history when international co-operation has never been more important, I believe that as a nation we would benefit from being a member of a collaborative organisation like the EU, but the EU took a calculated gamble when Britain asked to renegotiate its terms of membership. The proposed reforms did not address the fundamental concerns of the British people, so voters made their voices heard; we have to accept that.

The priority now has to be to set aside our differences to get the best for our country, our constituents and, indeed, the thousands of businesses that make our country a great place to live. We are a great nation with great people and a Government who have a firm and optimistic view for our country. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) is right that we have to use our judgment on whether the Bill is the right approach, and it is my judgment that, by amending their process and presenting this Bill, the Government have demonstrated that they understand the rule of law and the democratic process, and I support the Bill because of that.

The country has voted to leave the EU, and the Bill starts that process. I welcome the Government’s announcement that the Bill will be followed by a White Paper to be published shortly. Although it is vital that the Government have the mandate of this place for their
approach—the mandate will come from the White Paper, from this Bill and from the great repeal Bill—this is not the forum to negotiate the specific terms of any agreement.

Of course we want to know the terms of engagement and the strategy that will be followed, but to bind the Government’s hands would be sheer folly. Negotiations are, by definition, a series of trade-offs, and we must not bind the Government’s hands, which would result in a much worse deal for our country. Frankly, accountability is baked into our system—it is called the 2020 general election. The Prime Minister has clearly set out a very positive vision for our future, putting at the centre of her approach control of our laws, control of immigration and clear rights for EU nationals in the UK and British nationals in the EU. I have spoken to EU nationals living in my constituency, and I think it would be right for the UK and the remaining EU states to resolve the matter of British and EU nationals as soon as possible because giving them certainty as quickly as possible is fundamental to who we are as a nation.

The Government have also been clear about the importance of fully protecting and maintaining workers’ rights by translating the body of European law into domestic regulations. The Government have also been clear about giving priority to protecting everybody’s rights and treating people equally and fairly, regardless of their gender, race, religion, disability, sexuality or age, not because we are a member of the EU but because it is a fundamental part of who we are. Much of those protections is already enshrined in UK law but as a respected lawyer, the Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union, my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), who will respond to this debate, knows that the law itself is not sufficient. We need to disentangle 50 years of institutional collaboration on enforcing those laws—I believe that leaving the European Court of Justice behind is a must, although it will create new tensions—if we are not to see the erosion of protections such as they are in my constituency. I hope he can indicate that he will be looking at that in the White Paper.

Time is short, but I reiterate that we are not leaving Europe, we are leaving the EU. We are not changing our values of fairness and decency.

11.34 pm

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): This hard Tory Brexit has unknown ramifications, but we in Scotland know one thing: it will be painful. Bitter experience tells us that. My constituency faces its local industry being decimated by the UK leaving the EU. Last year, prior to the referendum, Müller, the German dairy producer, announced it would be investing an additional £15 million in its Bellshill plant. The single market means that its imported ingredients are tariff-free, helping to keep production costs down. Likewise, the single market means that Scottish exports to the EU are tariff-free, which helps to keep consumer prices down and encourages growth. My constituency has faced years of deprivation because of Thatcherism and de-industrialisation. The growing Scottish food and drinks industry has provided new hope, but we again face decline as a result of short-sighted Tory policy and a looming hard Tory Brexit. I have heard several Members quote Edmund Burke and I remind all of them of this quote, which I most associate with the Scottish and European referendums:

“The people never give up their liberties but under some delusion.”

That is the real reason behind both referendum results.

I hold in my left hand the Bill, this poor excuse of a sick note. It is what the Westminster Government have produced in seven months by way of an explanation to the people of the UK of what a hard Tory Brexit means. Let us contrast that with what I hold in my right hand: the Scottish Government’s considerably compromised proposal to Westminster. As befits of an equal partner in a difficult negotiation, where due consideration must be given to the other party’s position, compromise is involved. I say that for the benefit of those on the Government Benches, who perhaps need it spelled out to them. It is therefore only fit and proper that the House, and in particular the Government, consider this document, “Scotland’s Place in Europe”, and fully engage as an equal partner with the Scottish Government on how to get the best Brexit outcome for Scotland and the UK as a whole.

I shall highlight some of the key points as best as I can, although time does not permit me to go into this as deeply as I would like. We in the Scottish National party concur with those who believe that the leave prospectus put forward during the referendum was deeply flawed. The lack of preparation for leaving done by those responsible for that campaign remains a deeply damaging aspect of the current constitutional crisis. The lack of any plan seven months after the vote illustrates perfectly that the Brexiteers were the dog that finally caught the bus; having done so, they had no clue what to do with it and no plan for implementation. This situation is not of the SNP’s making. It has been caused by the original flawed decision to hold an EU referendum and the fact that the vote to leave was the result of England and Wales voting leave.

The contents of the Scottish Government’s paper represent a significant compromise by them. I hope the Prime Minister is listening and that she learns from this great example of strong, informed and communicative leadership. This is what transparency looks like when there is a plan. The paper sets out the Scottish Government’s vision of the best Brexit outcome for the whole of the UK. It presents evidence of the negative impact of any other approach on the economic and social prosperity of Scotland and, by extension, the UK as a whole. Again, we can contrast the Scottish Government’s document with the UK Government’s document. This Bill—this sick note for seven months of absentee governance in respect of a clear, evidence-based Brexit plan—is a joke.

The Westminster Government would do well to take a leaf from the Scottish Government’s Brexit plan. In fact, they should not take one leaf of “Scotland’s Place in Europe”— they should take all 50.

11.38 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Parliamentary sovereignty has exercised and excited a lot of Government Members today. The hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) asked who governs this country and said that the Bill answers that question. The Bill does not give Parliament the power to trigger article 50; it gives power to the Prime Minister. It does not give power to Cabinet Ministers collectively or to the Crown in Parliament; it gives the person of the Prime Minister the power to decide, on her own initiative, when article 50 will be triggered. There is no sunset clause and no sunrise clause that the vote to leave was the result of England and Wales voting leave.
clause, and there are no further checks or balances. This is not a parliamentary power; it is almost a presidential power—I wonder where she might have got a taste for that from.

This is only a taste of things to come, because those Government Members who think that sovereignty is somehow being reinvested in this Parliament are kidding themselves—they should wait until the great repeal Bill is published to see that. All the hated regulations on straight bananas and electric lightbulbs that so frighten the Brexiteers on the Government Benches will not be amended by primary legislation. It will be the sweeping powers of statutory instruments and Henry VIII provisions that the Executive will take for themselves in the great power grab. The sovereignty that people thought they were voting for is going to disappear like the wick in a candle.

In Scotland, our tradition is one of popular sovereignty, so I accept that 22% of my constituents—we did get a breakdown by constituencies in Scotland—voted to leave the European Union, but they did not vote for the hard Tory Brexit that is now being proposed. At the same time, 78% of my constituents voted to remain in the European Union, which is why I will proudly support the Scottish National party’s reasoned amendment in the Division Lobby tomorrow evening. Nobody in Scotland voted to leave the single market; that was not even in the Conservative party’s manifesto.

Everything we were warned would happen if Scotland became independent now appears to be happening under the Tory Brexit vision of independence: the currency is collapsing; our holidays will be more expensive; and we will not get access to medicines. The Fraser of Allander Institute warns that 80,000 jobs are at risk in Scotland as a result of the hard Tory Brexit.

There is now a choice of two futures: the progressive, internationalist, outward-looking vision for Scotland that my party has always promoted; or Trident, Trump and the transatlantic tax haven that the Tories now seek to take forward. There is no White Paper, so we are being asked to sign a blank cheque. People might think that they are taking back control, but they should be careful what they wish for, because if this Government can ride so roughshod over Scotland’s popular sovereignty, parliamentary sovereignty will be next.

11.41 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): There is no question that our coming out of the single market will have an economic impact. My constituency has a major aerospace contingent and the complex supply chains that snake across Europe will be affected. People here talk about freedom of movement as a bad thing, but we should remember that for the people trapped behind the iron curtain and the Berlin wall, it was incredibly precious.

In this country, EU nationals contribute to our communities and public services. Some 130,000 of them are health and social care workers—doctors, nurses and the people who might be looking after our relatives. The Nursing and Midwifery Council has reported a 90% fall in nurse registrations from Europe since last July. That is going to affect England, which has a nurse vacancy rate of almost 10%.

We, too, benefit from freedom of movement. We get to travel, settle, work or study anywhere we like in the EU. We key to doing that is the possibility of our moving our social protection and healthcare rights with us, so if we work and live in the EU in the long term, we qualify like any other citizen. If we are there for less than two years, as a student or traveller, we take our European health insurance card, which we also take on holiday. For pensioners, there is an S1 form. More than a quarter of a million of them are using those forms in France and Spain, which means that they have guaranteed healthcare like any other citizen. Even if they are given the right to remain in the EU but lose the right to free healthcare, some of them might have to come back, which will put pressure on this country.

We are not looking at the benefits we have gained from agencies such as the European Medicines Agency, which I have mentioned at Prime Minister’s questions. It has given us quicker access to drugs than other markets. The EMA also drives research into rare and ultra-rare diseases. Combined with Horizon 2020, it has made the EU the biggest research network in the world, but that works only if there is freedom of movement for academics, and we should be aware that some of them are already leaving this country.

We have benefited from environmental improvements in water and air quality, and from food and safety controls that might now be under threat from a free trade deal that our Prime Minister will have gained by-grovelling to the most appalling man in the western world, the new President of America. We might all have to go vegetarian if we want to avoid chlorine-washed chicken and hormone-fed beef. Exactly what will be the impact on our NHS if the large US healthcare companies force their way in?

Conservative Members say that we should just get over it, but they should recognise that 62% of the people of Scotland voted to remain. I would like us to be independent in the EU, but my Government in Scotland have come forward with what is an absolute compromise for us. I request that people read “Scotland’s Place in Europe” and treat it with a bit of respect, instead of just not bothering with it and rubbing it in. We do not want to veto the right of England and Wales to come out of the EU; we just do not want to be dragged out with them.

11.45 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I was much touched by the interesting speech made by the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat). Significantly, he spoke about what he defined as the national interest. I implore the House to consider that we are talking about the family of nations. We are seeking to effect a compromise that respects the position of England in wanting to come out of the single market. In turn, we are asking this House to respect our position.

When we faced our referendum in 2014, it was the Conservative party, in both London and Edinburgh, that told us that if we stayed within the family of nations in the United Kingdom, our future in Europe would be guaranteed. Well, that has changed. We recognise that not only has that changed, but that our economic future now looks very different. As a response to Brexit, the currency has fallen against the dollar by more than 15%. Some commentators talk about inflation rising to...
between 3% and 4%, yet this Government’s programme means that those on working benefits will not get any increase in pay-outs over the course of the next four years. To put it simply, the people of our country will become poorer, and we cannot stand back and allow that to happen.

Fraser of Allander has made it clear that 80,000 jobs will go in Scotland. The average worker will be poorer to the effect of £1,200. We have been sent here to stand up for Scotland and to represent our constituents, and we have an absolute duty and obligation to say that we need to make sure that Scotland is a destination in Europe, and that we can drive prosperity and a fairer society. We say to Westminster that if it wants to come out of one Union, it might, unless it respects our position, end up coming out of two. Westminster should work with us and allow us to retain access to the single market, or it will face a situation in which we have no position, and that will go in Scotland. The average worker will be poorer, and we cannot stand back and allow that to happen.

I voted, of course, with my colleagues against this ill-thought out and vastly underprepared referendum. Not only that, but, at the time, my colleagues and I said that, if there was to be a referendum, we wanted the maximum franchise possible, and this Government did the reverse. They denied the vote to the people whose future is most at stake—the 16 to 18-year-olds. Of particular concern to us at the time were the EU nationals, who were refused a vote in the referendum, but who had been allowed a vote in the Scottish referendum. I think that I was the first Member of this House to raise the issue of EU nationals.

Before the vote took place, a horrific immigration debate was unleashed, which bordered at times on xenophobia. I talked to two of my constituents, who said that they felt so upset at the whole process that they were leaving the country the week before the vote and were deciding their future. Sadly for me, they are selling their house and leaving Scotland for good. They should have been welcomed here. What happened after the people who made the immigration argument had won? Their leader horsed off to help a president get elected in the United States, pushing the same kind of vicious immigration xenophobic debate that got that man Trump elected.

On this of all days, we should remember a different Republican president. On this day in 1865, the House of Representatives of the United States passed the 13th amendment to the constitution, abolishing slavery in America. The amendment read:

“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude...shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

There was a statesman—Abraham Lincoln! I will end with some of Abraham Lincoln’s favourite lines, which will be recognised by many and that he carried with him all his life:

“Then let us pray that come it may, (As come it will for a’ that), That Sense and Worth, o’er a’ the earth, Shall bear the gree an’ a’ that.
For a’ that an’ a’ that, It’s coming yet for a’ that, That Man to Man, the world o’er, Shall brothers be for a’ that.”

11.52 pm

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): I have learned something today: I can sit through an entire 11 hours of debate and actually enjoy it. There have been some wonderful speeches, and I have learned a lot. I was particularly taken by the speech made by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), my friend from the Treasury Committee. I thank Members on the Government Benches for staying until the end of this very long debate; I just wish that there had been more interest from other quarters in what is the most important debate that we are going to have.

I want to address two charges levelled at my party. The first is that in some way we are trying to thwart the will of the electorate. I recognise that on 23 June the people of England voted to leave the European Union. They want to leave, so the UK will leave; that is a done deal and we cannot thwart that. In fact, I will go as far as to say what the hon. Member for North East Somerset encapsulated: the English nation was reborn on 23 June. There is a new polity here.

What is important for my party is how we reconfigure the relationship between the different nations of the United Kingdom. As the hon. Member for North East Somerset will know perfectly well, the British constitution has always been flexible—that is its strength. When Scotland joined the Union in 1707, we kept our own legal and educational systems. All we are asking now, in the Brexit era, is that we get a similar bespoke deal. We want to stay within the single market. We could probably not stay within the customs union—fair enough.

My real point, and the reason why we will be voting against article 50 tomorrow, is that there has not been enough discussion between the Government and the devolved Parliament on whether there can be a bespoke deal for Scotland. Government Members say that that is not possible, but let us discuss it before we trigger article 50.

The hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller) made an interesting and reasonable point, saying that we have to move quickly to invoke article 50 because if we do not, there will be a period of uncertainty before we get around to finishing the negotiations, and that will harm business confidence. Our argument against that is that if we give the Prime Minister the right to trigger article 50 in March, a two-year clock will start ticking. At the end of that two years, all that will be left if we cannot get a deal will be the World Trade Organisation rules, which are no way as usable as the hon. Member for Bedford thinks. Ultimately, there is no deal on tariff allocation and no sensible dispute resolution system, so the WTO rules would be dangerous.
The other charge is that we are arguing this as a subterfuge so that we can have a second Scottish independence referendum. Hon. Members have dealt with us in all-party parliamentary groups and in Committees. Forget the banter of this Chamber; we are serious people. We are offering a bespoke deal whereby Scotland will stay within the United Kingdom if we can stay within the single market. Put us to the test. If hon. Members think we are bluffing, call our bluff. The onus is now on you. Give us a bespoke deal and we can live within the UK in the single market.

11.56 pm

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The people have spoken. This House must now act accordingly.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Stephen Barclay.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft West of England Combined Authority Order 2017, which was laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.—(Stephen Barclay.)

Question agreed to.

School Funding: Greater London

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Stephen Barclay.)

11.56 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to have this short debate on the impact of funding changes on London’s schools. I apologise to the Minister for his drawing the short straw of having to respond to a debate at midnight, although I suspect that this will be the first of many such debates.

London Members of Parliament have some grave concerns, although I know that other parts of the country are affected by changes to the funding formula and by the wider squeeze on schools funding. In my constituency—this experience will be replicated widely, particularly in London—the story of school progress over recent years has been one of the great public policy successes. In the mid-1990s, our school estate was crumbling. We were teaching children in badly ventilated, overheated and old-fashioned buildings that had not received investment for decades. I remember when North Westminster community school, which was a sprawling three-centred school, achieved in the last year before its closure just 18% GCSE grades A to C, including English and maths. It was one of the worst results in the country. I remember when half our secondary schools and a number of primary schools were in special measures, despite some frankly heroic efforts by a number of teachers and heads. I remember when there was virtually no provision at all for pre-school education.

Over the course of the past 15 years, the situation was transformed by a number of measures, including the London challenge programme—a focused management and good practice sharing policy that, under the inspirational leadership of Tim Brighouse, was widely understood to be a key factor in driving change in London schools. The transformation was also brought about by the new infrastructure, with magnificent new buildings across the city. It was brought about by the investment that went into the Sure Start children’s centres and the early years programme. Critically, it was brought about by money. The additional funding that went into London schools was used particularly to invest in teaching and improved teacher pay; in support for schemes such as Teach First; and in generally giving headteachers the ability to marshal resources to support a better learning environment. We have seen the outcome of that investment—both human and resource investment—in the hugely improved outcomes in school performance across the capital.

In the days before the London Challenge, London was the worst performing region in the country at key stage 4 level. By the end of that programme and the additional investment that accompanied it, we were the best performing region. Yet we know that the job is not done. Despite the improvements, there are still too many children who are not going into secondary school having achieved the standard at primary that is our benchmark. Across the country as a whole, we are still not managing to close the gap in attainment with some of our competitor nations. That is, as the last few hours of debate have confirmed, more of a challenge to rise to than it was previously. More than ever, the country as a
whole but London in particular requires an education system that will allow us to be a world leader creatively, technically and economically, with an education system to support that.

The pressures and challenges that face London education are as great as ever. We have problems of deprivation that are still acute, and problems of churn. I appreciate very much that the Government have, for the first time, introduced a churn or pupil mobility indicator into the funding formula. I remember having an Adjournment on this very topic 10 years ago, when I wanted a factor of mobility to be brought into the funding formula for policing, for health and for education. I welcome the introduction of the indicator, but none the less schools face enormous pressure in some cases. I know of primary schools where not a single child at key stage 2 was there at the completion of the key stage 1 process. This is a very real difficulty for schools. We know of the challenges of English as an additional language and, critically, of the higher salary, building and other operating costs that London schools have to face. Even my borough of Westminster—the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), who was a Westminster councillor, will recognise this—despite its reputation as the glittering centre of the capital that people see with Oxford Street and, indeed, the Palace of Westminster and so forth, has the seventh highest child poverty in the whole country.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. The impact of child poverty on educational attainment is very much the subject and the driver of the work we are doing in Hounslow with Hounslow’s promise. Does she agree that there is tremendous concern about comments I have heard from headteachers suggesting that schools may be reluctant to accept pupils with significant needs, who may also be quicker to be excluded, because those schools do not have the resources to deal with some of their in-depth needs? Will she, with me, congratulate Hounslow Council, which tonight, with Tory and Labour councillors together, has called on the Government to consider again the impact that these changes will have on Hounslow schools’ ability to maintain the highest standards in quality of provision?

Ms Buck: I am happy to congratulate Hounslow Council, and I completely endorse what my hon. Friend has said. I will come in a second to the comments of headteachers and councillors from across London who have expressed their dismay about the effect of the funding formula changes.

I want to finish what I was saying about the level of deprivation. I think that it is either not understood or glossed over by too many of the representatives from the shires, who want to negotiate a better funding settlement for their own schools—that is something that I completely understand and appreciate—but who do not always recognise the extent of the expense and the pressures faced by the capital city, which is experiencing a redistribution away of funding to meet those needs. Seven of the 10 local authorities with the highest levels of poverty in the UK are in London, so it is horrifying that the new Government formula for distributing schools funding hits London particularly hard. In briefing me for this debate, London Councils and the Mayor of London have made it clear that they are extremely concerned about that.

A higher proportion of London schools—an estimated total of 1,536—will see a reduction in funding than in any other region. Seventy per cent. of London schools face a fall in funding, compared with 58% of schools in the north-west and 53% in the west midlands—and the figures for those areas are bad enough. Eight of the 10 local authorities that face the highest percentage losses in funding are in London. Worst affected are councils known for high levels of deprivation and challenge, such as Hackney, Camden, Lambeth, Lewisham, Haringey, Tower Hamlets and Hammersmith.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this important debate, even at this late hour. I have written to all the headteachers in my constituency over the last few weeks, and they tell me that the pressures of the increase in national insurance contributions and the cuts to their funding are already forcing them to make very difficult decisions about cuts to support staff, in particular, and to SEN provision and so on. Does she agree that those are precisely the kinds of resource that have enabled London schools to be so successful over the past 10 years?

Ms Buck: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Friend, and I will reinforce that point in a minute. The modelling undertaken by London Councils indicates that at constituency level the national funding formula element of the changes alone will mean that 28 schools lose in Barking: 35 in Bermondsey; 42 in Bethnal Green; 41 in Poplar and Limehouse; 37 in Tottenham; and 48 in West Ham, to list just a few. Leyton will lose £4.5 million—equivalent to 6.8% of its funding; Deptford £6.1 million or 7.6%; Hammersmith £5.5 million or 7.6%; Brent North £9 million or 7.3%; and Hendon £5.5 million.

My council, I am happy to say, is not one of the worst affected. We are still waiting for some of the modelling data, but I think that that is to do with the churn factor that the Government have introduced. Even allowing for that, many individual schools still stand to lose. Westminster Academy, for example—last time I looked, it was the seventh highest on the free school meal indicator, making it one of the most deprived schools in the country—will potentially have its funding cut by a quarter of a million pounds. According to analysis undertaken by the council, all but two secondary schools are potential losers, including Westminster Academy, Paddington Academy, St George’s, St Augustine’s, Pimlico Academy, St Marylebone and Westminster City. Primaries that face losses include George Eliot, St Joseph’s, St Luke’s, Robinsfield and Barrow Hill. Many Westminster children attend schools across the borders in Kensington, Camden and Brent, which are hit even harder. A number of local parents will be affected by the impact of the cuts on schools outside the boundary.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate, which comes at an important time. She is talking about the indices of deprivation, which are important. In the London Borough of Barnet, we do not suffer to the same extent as other people, but we have a significant number of one-form entry schools. Yesterday, I visited Etz Chaim Primary School, where the staff explained to me that economies of scale mean that they will find themselves in a very difficult financial situation. Does she agree that the Government should be looking at that as part of their
funding formula? It is not just the shires that suffer from that problem; so do some local authorities in inner London.

Ms Buck: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The pattern of school development in London—not just inner London—means that we have a historically large number of smaller schools and one-form entry schools, which are taking a particular hit from this formula.

Our troubles do not of course end with the impact of the redistribution through the funding formula. We know that the changes will coincide with the wider spending shortfall identified by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and by last month’s National Audit Office report on the financial sustainability of schools. The report identified a £3 billion squeeze, reflecting the fact that education is protected in real terms, but not against inflation, the pressures arising from salary increases and national insurance contributions—my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) mentioned that—or pension contributions, the impact of the rates revaluation, the apprenticeship levy and other costs.

Taken together, the funding formula implications and the unfunded cost pressures hitting schools are turning what would already be a challenging situation into a nightmare. Schools spending next year will be reduced by £6.6 million in Westminster, £23.3 million in Newham, £13.5 million in Enfield and £11.1 million in Ealing. For some individual schools, such a scale of cuts is equivalent to £1,000 per pupil per year.

As both my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) have said in respect of their own local schools, heads and schools are also contacting me to describe their fears about the consequences of this reduction in funding. Many are anxious not to be individually identified at this stage, as in many cases they are not absolutely certain which of the many unpalatable decisions they may have to make to balance the books they will have to make, and they are keen to stress their concerns.

Heads point out that many of them are struggling to recruit at current pay grades, and trying to retain more experienced staff is of course more expensive. For others, the cuts mean the loss of teaching staff, and particularly of support staff, and some very worrying cases of special educational needs support being under threat are emerging. The early intervention services relating to mental health, speech and language, and SEN support are in some cases being targeted as areas where cuts are more possible to make than they are in the number of teaching staff. In many of those cases, schools are already grappling with the consequences of the loss of funding through child and adolescent mental health services.

One of my long-standing concerns, which I know is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood, is the issue of gangs and serious youth violence. That issue has a crossover with child protection, and it is having an impact even down to primary schools, not just secondary schools. Early intervention and support in schools is absolutely vital if we are to turn what is, unfortunately, once again a rising tide in London. At the extreme end, two teenagers have already lost their lives in the past fortnight. I know that this is a particular concern for the Mayor, who is being briefed on the impact of school budget cuts with particular reference to early intervention.

Our outstanding nursery schools are also coping with pressures because of unrelated and already extant changes to their funding. One told me yesterday that the payment for the 30 hours provision for early years that they expected to begin in September is exactly half of what they were getting per child two years ago.

Why are we putting the quality of our children’s education at risk when, facing so much uncertainty, we need skills and creativity more than ever? Why would we risk undermining London’s crucial role as an economic driver for the whole country? The Government must think again, not choose this moment to inflict damage where it will hurt most—in the foundations of our future.

I want to end my speech by asking the Minister a few specific questions. I hope he will be able to answer them now, but, if not, that he will be kind enough to write to me after the debate. Although I appreciate that some parts of the country have historical spending patterns that are perceived as unjustly low, is it fair that the deepest cuts are being proposed for schools in the poorest local authorities in the country, most of which have to cope with the impact of very high staffing and other operating costs? What specific recommendations are the Government making to heads in respect of efficiency savings, which are cited as a way in which schools could accommodate both the funding formula changes and the £3 billion spending squeeze identified by the NAO? Will the Minister tell us what efficiency savings are being recommended to schools to achieve these savings?

What guidance will be given to ensure schools do not seek to meet shortfalls by seeking additional contributions from parents, as is increasingly being flagged up by schools across the capital? What action will the Minister take to ensure that special needs and pupil support are protected within school budgets, and what protection is available to schools hit by the combined impact of reductions under the funding formula and cost pressures? I know that a cap is being applied to school funding, but not to the additional cost pressures, which actually have a larger total impact. I hope that the Minister will be able to address some of those comments, and I look forward to what he has to say.

12.14 am

The Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. I hope I can assure her about some of the issues she raises.

Whenever a national funding formula is introduced, no matter what weightings are attached to the factors in the formula, there will be winners and losers. If we apply the formula to the current year, 2016–17, and produce an array of figures for each of the 23,000 schools, there will by definition—mathematically, it has to occur—be winners and losers. In the interests of transparency, we are showing the effect of the new formula, the factors and principles of which were agreed
in principle when we consulted last year. We have applied the new formula, with the weightings we discussed in the second consultation, to all 23,000 schools. It shows, of course, that some schools gain and some schools lose. That will happen no matter what national formula anybody in this House produces. If we want a national funding formula—we committed to that in our manifesto—that is the consequence of doing so on the basis of this year’s figures.

We have committed to protecting school funding in real terms over the course of the Parliament. It stands at a record high of £40 billion at the moment, and is projected to grow to £42 billion as pupil numbers grow over the spending review period.

I share the hon. Lady’s view about the success of London’s schools. Their academic standards have soared in recent years, bucking the trend of inner cities throughout the world. The Government are equally ambitious for the rest of the country. All children should have an excellent education that unlocks their talent and creates opportunity regardless of where they live, their background, their ability or their need.

The Government are, because of this ambition, prioritising spending on education. We have protected the core schools budget in real terms, so that as pupil numbers rise so too does the amount of money for our schools. This means that schools are receiving more funding than ever before: a total, as I have said, of over £40 billion this year.

The current funding system prevents this record amount of money from getting to where it is needed most. Underfunded schools do not have access to the same opportunities to do the best for their pupils. It is harder for them to attract the best teachers and to afford the right support. That is why the Government are introducing a national funding formula for mainstream education and for the high-needs support provided for children with special educational needs.

The national funding formula will be the biggest change to schools and high-needs funding for well over a decade. Such change is never easy. That is why previous Governments assiduously avoided doing it. However, it will mean that for the first time we will have a transparent system that matches funding to children’s needs and the schools they attend.

In the current system, schools and local areas receive significantly different levels of funding with little or no justification. For example, a primary school in Westminster teaching a pupil eligible for free school meals, and with English as an additional language, would receive £4,973 for that pupil this year. However, if that same pupil were in a school in Greenwich, the school would receive £6,676 this year, a difference of £1,703. Under our national funding formula, they would receive the same amount.

These anomalies will be ended once we have a national funding formula in place; and that is why introducing fair funding was a key manifesto commitment for the Government. Fair funding will mean that the same child with the same needs will attract the same funding regardless of where they happen to live.

We launched the first stage of our consultation on reforming schools and high-needs funding systems in March last year. We set out the principles for reform and the proposals for the overall design of the funding system. Over 6,000 people responded, with wide support for our proposals. Building on that support, in December we were able to proceed to the second stage of the consultation, covering detailed proposals for the design of both the schools and high-needs funding formula.

Our proposals will target money towards pupils who face the greatest barriers to their education. In particular, our proposals boost the support provided for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who live in areas of deprivation but who are not eligible for free school meals, whose families are just about managing. We are putting more money into supporting pupils who have fallen behind, both in primary and secondary school, to ensure that they, too, receive the support they need to catch up.

Overall, 10,740 schools will gain funding, and the formula will allow them to see those gains quickly—54% of schools will gain. There will be increases of up to 3% in per pupil funding in 2018-19 and up to 2.5% in 2019-20. Some 72 local authority areas are due to gain high-needs funding, and they will also do so quickly, with increases of up to 3% in both 2018-19 and 2019-20. As well as providing for these increases, we have listened to those who highlighted in the first consultation the risks of major budget changes for schools, so we are also including significant protections in both the formulas. No school will face reductions of more than 1.5% a year, or 3% overall, per pupil, and no area will lose funding for high needs.

London will remain the highest-funded part of the country under these proposals. Schools in inner London will attract 30% more funding per pupil than the national average. Despite the city’s increasing affluence, London’s schools still have the highest proportion from disadvantaged backgrounds and the highest labour market costs in the country, so our formula matches funding to those needs, which is why those schools are funded better than those elsewhere. As a result of our proposals, 17 of the 27 schools in the hon. Member’s constituency will gain funding. That is 63% of schools in her constituency.

Some schools in London, however, will see some reduction in their current funding, and this reflects significant changes in relative deprivation between the capital and the rest of the country over the last decade. For example, the proportion of London pupils eligible for free school meals dropped from 27% in 2005 to 18% in 2015, as London became more affluent, but the current funding system has taken no account of these changes. It has simply built on an anachronistic, atrophied system, over 10 years, under which we simply increase the amounts, year on year, based on a formula designed for life in 2005. It is well past time that our funding system reflected the levels of deprivation that exist today, not those that existed a decade or more ago.

For those schools that will see a budget reduction, the significant protections we are proposing will mean that no school will face reductions of more than 3% per pupil as a result of this formula. This will mean that they can manage the significant reforms while continuing to raise standards. All schools need to make the best use of the resources they have, ensuring that every pound is used effectively to improve standards and have the maximum impact for children and young people. To help them, we have put in place, and continue to develop, a comprehensive package of support to help schools
make efficiency savings and manage cost pressures, while continuing to improve the quality of their education.

To be specific, which the hon. Member asked me to be, we are preparing a national buying scheme for things such as energy and information technology, but we are also providing advice to schools about how to manage staff and ensure the right combination of staff to reflect the curriculum they are providing.

We are using a broad definition of disadvantage to target additional funding to schools most likely to use it, comprising pupil and area-level deprivation data, prior attainment data and English as an additional language. No individual measure is enough on its own. Each picks up different aspects of the challenges that schools face, and they work together to target funding. Where a child qualifies for more than one of these factors, the school receives funding for each qualifying factor. For example, if a child comes from a more disadvantaged household and lives in an area of socio-economic deprivation, their school will attract funding through both the free school meals factor and the area-level deprivation factor. That helps us to target funding most accurately to the schools that face the most acute challenges, while not ignoring the needs of children who face some barrier to achievement, and of course the school will continue to receive additional funding through the pupil premium to help them improve the attainment of the most disadvantaged.

There are specific reasons why funding as a whole rises by 0.7% in the hon. Lady’s constituency, and they include the growing affluence, as I have said. Historically, Westminster has been one of the lower-funded inner-London local authorities. As a result, it sets higher basic per pupil funding than most other local authorities in England, and the difference between Westminster’s basic per pupil funding rates and the national funding formula rates is not as substantial as in other parts of London. The majority of schools in Westminster North are primary schools rather than secondary schools. The Westminster formula is currently marginally more generous to secondary schools than under the national funding formula, so primary schools benefit from a slight adjustment to the primary-to-secondary ratio that we are introducing. Schools in Westminster North gain from the national funding formula deprivation and low prior attainment factors.

Westminster Council currently chooses not to use IDACI, the income deprivation affecting children index, factor for primary schools at all—it does for secondary—so its schools are gaining from the broader measure of deprivation that we are using in the national funding formula. The national funding formula’s prior low attainment factor is also more generous than Westminster’s formula, at £1,050 plus the area cost adjustment under the national funding formula, compared with £722 under the Westminster formula.

On that note, I hope that I have assured the hon. Lady that this is a fairer funding system, but I shall be happy to discuss the details with her in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

12.26 am
House adjourned.
Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed. All compliments gratefully accepted.

Ian Blackford: A hard border would be disastrous for communities that live along that border, especially in economic terms. What assurances can the Secretary of State offer that the common travel area will be top of the agenda in any Brexit negotiations? Will it be more important than restricting the freedom of movement elsewhere in the UK, for instance? Will Ministers assure us that the common travel area is part of any trade deal done with the European Union?

James Brokenshire: I have already indicated the priority that is given to securing the common travel area. This is a very strong commitment that this Government have given, and a point that I have underlined on many occasions. It is also a shared intent with ourselves, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. It is therefore with that approach, and with that shared will, that we look to the negotiations ahead, getting the common travel area secured and seeing that frictionless border that is equally important to the politics and life of Northern Ireland.

Carol Monaghan: Will the common travel area be the UK’s only area of free travel with the EU or will it be free trade and free travel?

James Brokenshire: As I have said, the priority, as set out in the 12 points that the Prime Minister made in her speech, was securing the common travel area. That has served us over so many years, dating back to the 1920s. We believe that it is really important that we seek to attain that, as well as getting frictionless trade in goods, which is also a key priority.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the Government’s determination to maintain the common travel area across our islands. Does the Secretary of State agree that the friendly relations it symbolises could only be strengthened by the Republic joining the Commonwealth as an associate member, as suggested by Senator Frank Feighan during his visit to the House yesterday?

James Brokenshire: Obviously that is a matter for the Irish Government, but the point that my hon. Friend makes about strong, friendly relationships between ourselves and the Irish Government is well made. It was with that intent, and with that theme, that the Prime Minister met the Taoiseach earlier this week and underlined the importance of continuing to work together to get the best outcome for Northern Ireland and for the island of Ireland.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while this Government are committed to the free movement of people and goods across the whole of Ireland, it is also important that the European Union should do its bit to see Ireland right as well?

James Brokenshire: The European Union and member states recognise the significance of Northern Ireland, and the significance of the politics on the island of Ireland. Indeed, we have seen investment and political engagement from within the European Union. We will continue to underline that in the negotiations ahead,
and that is why I remain positive that we can secure a good deal for Northern Ireland within the UK but outside the EU.

11. [908423] John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Given Ireland’s immigration criteria, and how different they are from the UK’s, I do not quite understand how anyone can stop European Union citizens from travelling through Ireland and on to the UK. Can the right hon. Gentleman spell it out for us?

James Brokenshire: There is broad alignment of policy in relation to the Republic of Ireland and the UK. That has been part of the bedrock of the common travel area and its existence over many years. Indeed, it is an aspect of how we have sought to create new visa issues in relation to China that have allowed travel to Ireland and also to the United Kingdom, and how co-operation between ourselves and the Irish Government is very good.

15. [908427] Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Post-Brexit, common travel area, no hard border: a Polish family moves to Ireland. Will they have free movement into Northern Ireland? If not, how does that square with Ireland being a member of the European Union?

James Brokenshire: As I have indicated to the House this morning, we are committed to securing the common travel area and, yes, we are also committed to dealing with issues of immigration, which were at the forefront of the campaign. The Home Office is working on the detail of a new immigration policy that I am sure will be a matter of debate in the House in future.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Government have rightly sought to identify the issues that affect different regions and sectors of the economy and to build those into their negotiating position. Regardless of the common travel area, can the Secretary of State assure us that all parts of the United Kingdom will leave the EU on an equal basis and that no special arrangements different conditions or special circumstances will be afforded to Northern Ireland that would weaken our position within the United Kingdom and treat us differently from other parts of it?

James Brokenshire: As a Government, we are very clear about the strengths of the Union and how that matters to us all. The approach that we take is based on getting the best possible deal for all parts of the United Kingdom. Yes, there will be some specific factors in Northern Ireland of which the hon. Gentleman is well aware—we have talked about the border and there are other issues as well—but our approach is with that intent and focus. Therefore concepts of special status are the wrong approach. It is rather about looking at special factors and special circumstances and dealing with them effectively.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): May I agree with the Secretary of State in that we are very impressed with the strength of the Union, too—that is, the European Union? Beyond the common travel area, there appears to be a significant gap between the wishful thinking and the reality of movement of goods. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the effect of exiting the customs union on the movement of goods and services between Northern Ireland and the Republic?

James Brokenshire: As the hon. Gentleman will have seen, the Prime Minister’s speech underlined the clear desire of the Government in the negotiations ahead to get the best possible trading arrangements with the European Union and therefore we are reflecting on how we do that, whether that is some form of membership of a customs union or a bespoke customs agreement. He should be intent on our desire to get that deal and to see a frictionless border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I welcome the comments of the Secretary of State on having an election that produces parties that want to work together, because that is exactly what we want. When it comes to the common travel area, have we looked at the legal implications, not just within other Departments but in how it is respected by Europe itself? Does it really exist there? Do they see it as a law that stands in place?

James Brokenshire: The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the ability for the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom to make arrangements in relation to the common travel area has been recognised in previous EU agreements. It is therefore that approach that we take in securing the future of the common travel area and underlining its importance to our European partners. I am positive that we can do that.

Inward Investment

2. Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the political situation on inward investment into Northern Ireland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Kris Hopkins): The economy in Northern Ireland continues to grow. Since 2010, there are 54,000 more people in work and, over the year, the employment rate has increased and the claimant count has now fallen for the ninth consecutive month. The Government are committed to working with the Northern Ireland parties to bring about political stability. This is key to bringing further growth and investment to Northern Ireland.

Kris Hopkins: The specifics of the mechanism are for the negotiation, but what we should understand is that Northern Ireland produces high-quality goods, has a high-skilled employment base and it will be successful. We will facilitate that.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): Does the Minister agree that news from Northern Ireland is seen, read and heard across the world? Is it not important,
therefore, that the institutions get up and running again straight after the forthcoming elections to give confidence to potential investors right across the world that Northern Ireland is, indeed, a great place to invest?

Kris Hopkins: My hon. Friend, who is very wise on Northern Ireland issues and makes a massive contribution, is right. We can do much from Westminster, but it is the parties in Northern Ireland that need to take responsibility, come together and guide the economic growth that is so needed in Northern Ireland.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): As the Secretary of State noted, there is an Assembly election that will be followed by negotiations on ministerial responsibilities, all in uncertain times. Can the Minister offer any assurances that austerity will not be the rock upon which peace founders? Will the funding for legacy issues be guaranteed in the new Assembly, and will funding for other policy imperatives be eased? Will he ensure that the Assembly can function properly in financial terms?

Kris Hopkins: The Government are committed to developing an economy that works for everybody in the United Kingdom. We are implementing an industrial strategy, which has a massive part to play in Northern Ireland. I welcome the consultation that has been launched, which includes Northern Ireland. The economy in Northern Ireland is strong. There is a desire between the UK Government and the Republic of Ireland to ensure that we have a constructive and positive relationship in the future.

7. [908419] Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): My hon. Friend will be aware that the main parties in Northern Ireland have endorsed the devolution of corporation tax powers to the Assembly, which would have a transformative effect on the economy of Northern Ireland. Does he agree that it would be a tragedy if the chance to do so were lost due to the lack of a functioning Executive and Assembly?

Kris Hopkins: The Government believe that reducing the rate of corporation tax to 12.5% in Northern Ireland could bring significant benefits for jobs, investment and growth. I hope that we can return to the wider progress we have proposed on this issue following the Assembly election and the formation of a new Executive.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Does the Minister accept that, with unemployment in Northern Ireland at its lowest level since 2008 and Northern Ireland posting the highest increase in exports of any region of the United Kingdom last year, the Executive were making substantial progress in improving the economy of Northern Ireland over the previous two years?

Kris Hopkins: I recognise all those statistics. It is important that we constantly reiterate the positive position that Northern Ireland is in. Like me, Members of this House and the people of Northern Ireland want the Assembly to come back together and offer guidance and leadership to make sure that we grow the economy.

Mr Dodds: Those of us on the Democratic Unionist Benches certainly share that aspiration. We want to see devolution up and running, and we want to see jobs and investment. The Minister will understand our frustration and the frustration—and, indeed, anger—of the people of Northern Ireland that the good progress we were making has been put in peril, as have jobs and investment, as a result of Sinn Féin’s decision to collapse the Executive and cause an unnecessary election. Will he commit to work, over the coming weeks and months, with those of us who are in this House to improve the situation for people's jobs and investment into Northern Ireland?

Kris Hopkins: I am not going to get involved in the politics of Northern Ireland and why the Executive fell down. What is important is that the people of Northern Ireland want leadership from their politicians in Northern Ireland. What I can promise the right hon. Gentleman is that the Secretary of State and I will do everything to make sure that we have a strong Assembly that offers leadership in Northern Ireland.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): May I start by asking the House to accept the Labour leader’s heartfelt apologies for his mistaken statement last week, when he said that a member of the Police Service of Northern Ireland had been killed? I am sure the House will agree that we all want to see the officer make good progress. We wish him and his family well.

There is no doubt that political instability worries businesses, but a much bigger day-to-day threat is the burden placed on business by the crushing cost of energy in Northern Ireland. Electricity generators are charging customers 58% more than the EU average, while pulling in gross profits of £900 million a year. Will the Secretary of State meet the energy regulator urgently to impress on it the need to rein in these fat cat profiteers?

Kris Hopkins: We will do everything we can to ensure that there is a good economic link between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The common economic connector is an important part of that and we will work together to resolve that issue.

Article 50: Northern Ireland Assembly

4. Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): What steps he is taking to ensure that the Northern Ireland Assembly will be consulted before the triggering of article 50.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire): We are determined that Northern Ireland’s voice will be heard. All the devolved Administrations will be fully engaged in the process of preparing to leave the European Union. We will continue to consult the devolved Administrations, including through the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations).

Stephen Gethins: Membership of the single market is obviously critical to Northern Ireland. Given the commitment to the common travel area, will the Minister tell us what blockages, apart from political ones, remain to Scotland and Northern Ireland remaining part of the single market?

James Brokenshire: The Prime Minister was robust in her stance on wanting the freest and best possible trading arrangements with the European Union to allow UK companies to operate with and trade in the EU. I hope that the hon. Gentleman supports that.
12. [908424] Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): From his broad discussions with businesses, does my right hon. Friend agree that Northern Ireland remains a great place to do business and that we must all do all we can to ensure that that continues after we leave the EU?

James Brokenshire: I agree that Northern Ireland is a great place to do business. There are some amazing companies, entrepreneurs and businesses there. That is why we want to see Northern Ireland continue to grow and flourish and have an Executive in place at the earliest opportunity.

14. [908426] Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): In his statement on 17 January, the Secretary of State said:

“I will continue to have engagements across the community, with business, with the voluntary and community sector and more broadly, to ensure that we continue to listen to and reflect upon the views of people in Northern Ireland.”—[Official Report, 17 January 2017, Vol. 619, c. 782.]

What meetings has he had with communities in Northern Ireland since then and what meetings does he plan between now and the Assembly election?

James Brokenshire: We continue to have meetings with our community sector roundtable, and only last week I met representatives of the business community through my business advisory group. I am very clear about continuing to listen intently to views across Northern Ireland to help inform our approach as we look to the negotiations ahead with the EU.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Sinn Féin’s decision unilaterally to collapse the Northern Ireland Executive means that they have excluded themselves from any discussions on article 50. Will the Secretary of State, along with the Brexit Secretary, continue to work closely with members of the Northern Ireland parties that attend this House, to ensure that our voice is heard deeply and fully in that important matter?

James Brokenshire: The Joint Ministerial Committee met earlier this week in plenary session, and I was pleased to see representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive. We want that to continue. Obviously, in the House, I will continue to listen to the views of right hon. and hon. Members to ensure that we carefully reflect Northern Ireland’s voice.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Although the foul, mephitic fug of Brexit has cast the land into shadow, life must go on. Further to the Secretary of State’s comments, he will accept that the JMC is currently the main body for consultation with the devolved institutions. Yet this body has no authority, no Standing Orders and no fixed rules. Will the Secretary of State commit to formalising the role of the JMC, the crucial body during the negotiations in these dark days?

James Brokenshire: The Joint Ministerial Committee operates between each of the different nations of the UK and regulates those arrangements. We see it playing an important role, not only now, but in the future, with European negotiations being part of that, in seeking to ensure that the voice of the devolved Administrations is heard loud and clear and to get the best arrangements for all parts of the UK.
James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend will wish to know that we have a severe level of threat in Northern Ireland from terrorism. The appalling attack we saw on a young, brave police officer just in the past fortnight underlines the nature of that threat and the fact that there are those in Northern Ireland who would wish to commit acts of violence against the police, members of our armed forces and prison officers. We must be vigilant against that threat.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP) rose—

Mr Speaker: Does the hon. Member for South Down wish to contribute on this question?

Ms Ritchie: No, the next one.

Mr Speaker: Well, we might not get there. We will see.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): May I join in the condemnation of the deplorable attack on the police officer? May I also use this occasion to pay a quick tribute to my constituent and opponent, and now fellow former Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, for the calibre and tenure of his service in our democratic institutions? I wish him well in his personal battle.

Does the Secretary of State recognise that, in meeting Executive Ministers, he would be meeting Ministers who have taken a pledge to uphold the rule of law, based as it is on the fundamental principles of fairness, impartiality and democratic accountability, including support for policing and the courts? Will he meet that same benchmark and remove the comments he has previously made—

Mr Speaker: Order. Enough! We have got the gist.

James Brokenshire: I am very clear on upholding the rule of law and seeing that we support our agencies, which have that independence to pursue evidence where they see it. Indeed, there is a very live ongoing investigation to get to the bottom of that appalling act and hold those responsible to account—it was an appalling act against a brave PSNI officer who was doing his duty, upholding the law and protecting the community.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Is not the job faced by the police in Northern Ireland to keep people safe made harder by the tendencies of the Northern Ireland courts to let terrorists out on bail, sometimes only weeks after an original arrest?

James Brokenshire: There are important issues that need to be examined and addressed in relation to the criminal justice system. Bail is one part of that, as are sentencing and the time it takes for cases to proceed. We will continue to work with the Executive to see that progress can be made.

Lady Hermon: Thank you; that is very kind of you, Mr Speaker. I am very grateful indeed.

In dealing with the security situation in Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State will recognise how important it is that the Northern Ireland Office sends a very clear message that the rule of law prevails in Northern Ireland, so will he kindly take this opportunity to put on the record his full confidence in the independence and integrity of the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Declan Morgan, and indeed the Director of Public Prosecutions?

James Brokenshire: I am very happy to do so in very clear and unequivocal terms: it is essential that we uphold the rule of law without fear or favour, and I absolutely support the work of the police and all those who are responsible for taking that forward and seeing that those who are committing the acts that we are discussing this morning are held to account and brought to justice.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): On Monday, I met a woman whose mother was killed 46 years ago and who asked me to ask the Secretary of State whether he understood that there can be no real peace unless we deal with the past. To that end and as a start, will the right hon. Gentleman commit to raise with the Irish Government the need to ensure the fullest possible public access to the papers relating to the Kingsmill murders and to deliver an effective route by which the families of those who lost loved ones at Ballymurphy can reach some form of closure?

James Brokenshire: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and his message about the raw pain and emotion that continue to be felt by so many of those who were affected by the troubles is one that I equally recognise. It is important that we can make progress in relation to the Stormont House legacy bodies. We will continue to make representations to the Irish Government on a range of issues, and I note the specific point that he raises with me this morning.

Prime Minister

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [908498] Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 1 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure that the whole House will join me in offering our condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives and were injured in the gun attack in Quebec City on Sunday, and in paying tribute to our former colleague Tam Dalyell, who died last Friday. He was an outstanding parliamentarian, and I am sure that all our thoughts are with his friends and family.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Peter Heaton-Jones: I associate myself with the remarks made by the Prime Minister and the tribute paid to the victims in Canada and to the family of Tam Dalyell.
North Devon is quite rightly concerned that the current review of health services across the county may result in the loss of some acute services at our hospital in Barnstaple. For some residents, the nearest alternative could be three hours away. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that she will listen carefully to those concerns, because I want to be able to say to North Devon that we are the party of the NHS?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I can reassure him that this Government are absolutely committed to ensuring the best possible healthcare for patients right across the country. I recognise that concerns have been expressed locally about the North Devon district hospital. I understand that there are no specific proposals at the moment, but I know that the input of local communities will remain crucial throughout the process, and I can assure him that of course it is this party in government that is putting the extra funding into the NHS and showing how we value it.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in offering condolences to all those who died in the horrific attack, fuelled by hate, in Quebec, and we should send our solidarity to everyone in Canada on this sad occasion.

May I also associate myself with the Prime Minister’s tribute to the former Member for West Lothian, and later Linlithgow, Tam Dalyell? A Labour MP and former Father of the House, he doggedly fought to expose official wrongdoing and cover-ups, from the miners strike to Iraq. I am sure the Prime Minister would agree that Tam’s scrutiny and contributions made this House a better place, and may I recommend to all Members his autobiography “The Importance of Being Awkward”? [Interruption.] And I am quite happy to offer my copy to the Secretary of State for Brexit to have a good read of it. I am sure that he has probably already read it.

At last week’s Prime Minister Question Time, the Prime Minister told the House:


What happened?

The Prime Minister: First, let me say that I was not aware of Tam Dalyell’s book “The Importance of Being Awkward”, but given the number of resignations that the right hon. Gentleman has had from his Front Bench, I suspect that some of his colleagues have indeed read it.

I am pleased to say to the right hon. Gentleman that when I visited the United States, I was able to build on the relationship that we have with our most important ally and get some very significant commitments from President Trump. Crucial among those was a 100% commitment to NATO—NATO which keeps us safe and keeps Europe safe too.

Jeremy Corbyn: Downing Street has not denied that the Prime Minister was told by the White House that the Executive order on travel to the US was imminent, so let us be clear: was the Prime Minister told about the ban during her visit, and did she try to persuade President Trump otherwise?

The Prime Minister: On the policy that President Trump has introduced, this Government are clear that it is wrong. We would not do it. In six years as Home Secretary, I never introduced such a policy. We believe it is divisive and wrong. If the right hon. Gentleman is asking me whether I had advance notice of the ban on refugees, the answer is no. If he is asking me if I had advance notice that the Executive order could affect British citizens, the answer is no. If he is asking if I had advance notice of the travel restrictions, the answer is, we all did, because President Trump said in his election campaign that he was going to do this. The question is how to respond. The job of Government is not to chase the headlines; the job of Government is not to take to the streets in protest; the job of Government is to protect the interests of British citizens, and that is exactly what we did.

Jeremy Corbyn: On the day after the Executive order was made to ban refugees and visitors from seven predominantly Muslim countries, why did the Prime Minister three times refuse to condemn the ban?

The Prime Minister: I have made it very clear that we believe that this policy is divisive and wrong, and that it is not a policy that we would introduce. I have also made it very clear when asked about this that this Government have a very different approach to these issues. On refugees, this Government have a proud record of the support that we have given to them, and long may it continue.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister said:

“The United States is responsible for the United States’ policy on refugees.”

But surely it is the responsibility of all of us to defend the 1951 refugee convention, which commits this country, the United States and 142 other states to accept refugees without regard to their “race, religion or country of origin.”

President Trump has breached that convention. Why did she not speak out?

The Prime Minister: First, I have made absolutely clear what the Government’s view on this policy is. Secondly, as I have just said, this Government and this country have a proud record on how we welcome refugees. In recent years, we have introduced a very particular scheme to ensure that particularly vulnerable refugees in Syria can be brought to this country, and something like 10,000 Syrian refugees have come to this country since the conflict began. We are also the second biggest bilateral donor, helping and supporting refugees in the region. That is what we are doing. I have said that the US policy is wrong. We will take a different view, and we will continue to welcome refugees to this country.

Jeremy Corbyn: I also wrote to the Prime Minister on this issue and received her reply this morning. I hold in my hand her piece of paper. She makes no mention of the refugee convention and does not condemn US action in that respect.

Last week, I asked the Prime Minister to assure the House that she would not offer up our national health service as a “bargaining chip” in any US trade deal. She gave no answer. She also refused to rule it out when
asked in the US, so let me ask her a third time: will she rule out opening up our national health service to private US healthcare companies—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I could give a detailed answer to the right hon. Gentleman’s question, but a simple and straightforward reply is what is required: the NHS is not for sale and it never will be.

Jeremy Corbyn: I hope that that includes not having US healthcare companies coming in to run any part of our national health service.

President Trump has torn up international agreements on refugees. He has threatened to dump international agreements on climate change. He has praised the use of torture. He has incited hatred against Muslims. He has tortured. He has incited hatred against Muslims. He has threatened to dump international agreements on refugees. He has threatened to dump international agreements on refugees.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman’s foreign policy is to object to and insult the democratically elected Head of State of our most important ally. Let us see what he would have achieved in the last week. Would he have been able to protect British citizens from the impact of the Executive order? No. Would he have been able to lay the foundations of a trade deal? No. Would he have got a 100% commitment to NATO? No. That is what Labour has to offer this country—less protection for British citizens, less prosperity, less safety.

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Mr Speaker: Order. We should not have to allow for the reaction from the SNP Benches to every answer before we proceed to the next question.

Mrs Maria Miller: “Oh!” Yes. We are very clear that we want to see a frictionless border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but I am also clear that one of the objectives of our negotiation is to see as frictionless a border as possible between the UK and the rest of the European Union. Of course, if he is so worried about having a frictionless border between Scotland and countries in the EU, he should not want to take Scotland out of the EU by wanting to see it independent.

Mr Speaker: Order. We should not have to allow for the reaction from the SNP Benches to every answer before we proceed to the next question.

Q4. Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): EU nationals provide a vital and expert service in my local hospital in Basingstoke and, along with thousands of others, they face an uncertain future. I know that this is something that the Prime Minister wants to give priority to and to sort out. Will we be hearing more about it in the forthcoming White Paper?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes an important point about EU nationals. I would like to confirm my intention and expectation that we will be
able to offer that reassurance to EU nationals living in the UK, but I also want to see reassurance offered to UK nationals living in the EU. I hope and will be working to try to ensure that this is an issue we can deal with at a very early stage in the negotiations. It was one of the objectives I set out in the plan. It will be referenced in the White Paper and I can inform my right hon. Friend and the House that that White Paper will be published tomorrow.

Q3. [908500] Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Prime Minister, your responses today have been deeply unsatisfactory. The President of the United States has advocated torture, misogyny, racial discrimination, sexual assault and isolationism. The leaders of Canada and Germany were able to respond robustly, but your response was to jump on a plane as soon as possible to hold his hand. Does this country not deserve a leader who is willing to stand up for British values?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have issued no response and the hon. Gentleman not only should not breach parliamentary protocol but should not tempt me.

The Prime Minister: I will tell you what standing up for British values is. I and this Government introduced the first Modern Slavery Act in this country. I have ensured that stop and search has reduced, because I do not believe that anyone on the streets of this country should be stopped and searched because of the colour of their skin, and I ensured justice for the families of Hillsborough.

Q5. [908502] Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): In light of the fact that most of the countries covered by the Trump ban have a total bar on the admission of Israeli citizens, should the protesters not be calling for that ban to be lifted as well?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for pointing that out. It is absolutely right that the House should be aware of the discrimination around the world and of the ban, particularly for those who are Israeli citizens. We are consistent: we do not agree with that and we do not support it.

Q6. [908503] Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent Dianah Kendall suffered a bleed on the brain in 2012 and has struggled to work since, but was due to retire in September. Government changes to her state pension retirement age mean that she will now not retire until 2022. This injustice has short-changed 2.6 million WASPI women and brings shame on this Government. Will the Prime Minister think again and support Dianah and the millions of women who deserve fairness in retirement?

The Prime Minister: On the issue of those who are known as the WASPI campaign, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the fact that, as I am sure he knows, we committed more than £1 billion to lessen the impact on those worst affected, so no one will see their pension age change by more than 18 months. There is a wider point: we need to be realistic when considering pension ages about the fact that people are living longer. If we want to carry on having an affordable and sustainable pension system, we need to equalise the state pension age for men and women faster and to bring forward the rise.

Q10. [908507] Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I welcome the £450 million announced in the autumn statement to fund a trial of the digital railway. Given the new fleet of trains on order and the economic growth opportunity for our region, does the Prime Minister agree that the great eastern main line has the most compelling case for that pilot?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of transport links for economic growth. I understand that digital signalling could increase capacity on commuter trains by up to 40%, hence the investment of £450 million for trials over the coming years to which he rightly refers. I know that the Department for Transport is considering where those trials should take place, but we certainly recognise that the great eastern main line is one area that could benefit from those improvements.

Q7. [908504] John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): A few moments ago, the Prime Minister tried to claim credit for passing Stonewall’s Turing Bill. She did not: the Turing Bill pardons all gay men found guilty of crimes no longer on the statute book. When will the Prime Minister follow the Scottish Government and automatically pardon the living as well as the dead?

The Prime Minister: It was during my time as Home Secretary that the legislation was introduced that gives those who are alive the opportunity to apply to the Home Office to have those offences that are no longer on the statute book expunged from their record—

John Nicolson: They are not doing it.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman says that they are not doing it. In this Chamber today my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) and I have both encouraged people to come forward and make that application, and that is a message that we should all put out.

Q11. [908508] James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): At the White House, my right hon. Friend gained some assurances from President Trump about his commitment to NATO, an achievement that was welcomed by the Governments of the Czech Republic, Latvia and Lithuania. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the way to engage with President Trump and to win such agreements is not by insulting our close ally but by bringing him close, rather than doing as the Leader of the Opposition demands? If we reject our closest ally, would that not leave Britain and our European partners less safe and less secure?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We should never forget that America is our most important ally. Our relationship is long standing and American men and women served and died alongside UK men and women in two world wars to protect our security and the security of Europe. If we were not able
to have that relationship and to see that commitment to NATO, in particular, we would leave this country and Europe less safe.

Q8. [908505] Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Many were surprised that immediately after those cosy images with Donald Trump were taken the Prime Minister chose to meet the Turkish President, who has been running an increasingly repressive regime since the failed coup last summer. Will she confirm whether she raised any human rights concerns with President Erdogan, or, as we turn our face from Europe, will it be the policy of post-Brexit Britain to put arms deals before human rights abuses?

The Prime Minister: First, the hon. Lady should recognise that Turkey is an important country in relation both to our security and the issue of migration into Turkey and potentially into Europe. She will also recognise that Turkey has, and continues to host, 3 million refugees from Syria, and I commended the Turkish Government on the welcome they have given them. I suggest that she should just have looked at the press conference I gave after my discussions with President Erdogan and Prime Minister Yildirim, in which I made it clear that we had condemned the coup but expected the Turkish Government to support their democratic institutions, international human rights and the rule of law.

Q12. [908599] Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I wholeheartedly congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing 100% for NATO from the new US Administration. Will she outline what she is doing to persuade our other NATO allies of the importance of achieving what was agreed at the NATO Wales summit on their obligations?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank my hon. Friend for the work that he does on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. I know he is fully engaged with that. He is right that commitments were made at the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, when all our NATO allies committed to spending 2% of their GDP on defence within a decade. We have seen progress, but I agree with President Trump that many allies need to go further. I can assure my hon. Friend that I and other Ministers across Government raise the issue regularly with our allies and partners and will continue to do so.

Q9. [908506] Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Last week, air pollution in London was worse than in Beijing. Will the Prime Minister therefore assure me and my constituents in Osterley, Brentford and Chiswick that the hugely expensive proposal to double the capacity of the M4 as it arrives in London will be shelved forthwith?

The Prime Minister: I can assure the hon. Lady that this Government take the issue of air quality very seriously. A lot of work has been done. Since 2011 more than £2 billion has been committed to enable, for example, bus operators to upgrade their fleets, and to ensure that changes are made to reduce pollution from vehicles such as refuse trucks and fire engines. We do recognise, however, that more needs to be done. We have seen a reduction in nitrous oxide from some 17% in recent years, but we will bring forward proposals to ensure that we can maintain the air quality that we all want to see.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend show her support for “Brighter Berkshire”, the campaign as part of the 2017 year of mental health? Will she give her continued commitment to ensuring that we have parity between mental health and physical health in this country?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to endorse the campaign to which my hon. Friend refers. It is important that we continue to raise awareness of the issues around mental health. The fact the Government have committed to the parity of esteem between mental and physical health is important. There is more for us to do on mental health, and I have already set out some steps that we want to take. I commend all those, however, who are working to raise the issue of mental health and provide support to those with mental health problems.

Q13. [908510] Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has said that £4.6 billion has been cut from social care budgets since 2010. Does the Prime Minister take any responsibility for the pain and the distress that the Tories have inflicted on poor, vulnerable old people being denied their rightful care? Yes or no?

The Prime Minister: The Government have taken a number of steps to increase the funding available for local authorities to provide for social care. It is also important that we ensure that best practice is developed and put into place across the country. In some parts of the country the record on social care and the interaction with hospitals is better than in others, but the longer-term issue is for us to ensure that we have a sustainable system for delivering social care for people in this country. The Labour party ducked that issue for 13 years. We are addressing it.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Morley Academy on its recently awarded World Class Schools quality mark and say how such awards drive pupil excellence?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the whole team at Morley Academy on receiving the award, which I think shows the work that the GORSE Academies Trust is doing to drive up excellence and improve outcomes for pupils. We are determined to drive up standards in schools to ensure that more children have good school places—a good school place for every child—so that they can all reach the sort of level we see at Morley Academy.

Q14. [908512] Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): How will the thousands of people who lost their jobs at British Home Stores feel about the fact that it may take years before the case of Philip Green, the totally discredited and disgraced businessperson, results in his knighthood being taken away or otherwise? Is it not remarkable? People lose their jobs and suffer all the consequences, but this man keeps his billions and his knighthood.
The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. Many Members of this House have expressed concern about what happened at BHS and the attitude and approach taken by Philip Green. Whether a knighthood should be taken away from someone is a matter for the relevant committee—I have forgotten the name—which will be examining the case; I understand that it is waiting for the investigations to be completed. This is a matter for an independent committee and it is up to the committee how it looks into it.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Tonight, there will be an historic vote in this place, a vote that I thought I would not see in my political lifetime: the British Parliament voting to withdraw from the European Union under the excellent leadership of the Prime Minister. Is my right hon. Friend surprised that Opposition Members who demand time to discuss the matter and debate it—namely, the Liberal Democrats—did not even bother to turn up last night? The Government Benches were packed, the Scottish National party Benches were here, and there were some Labour Members. Is that not surprising?

The Prime Minister: Throughout my political career I have fought Liberal Democrats, and nothing that they do ever surprises me, but I join my hon. Friend in commending and thanking not only all those who have had a terrible year?

Mr Speaker: Well, the right hon. Gentleman is here now, so let us hear the fellow—Tim Farron.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Who would have guessed it, Mr Speaker? We are here now, asking the questions—[Interruption]—asking the questions about the future of our country and Brexit that a strong Leader of the Opposition should be asking—

Hon. Members: Where were you?

Mr Speaker: Order. [Interruption.] Mr Knight, I am very worried about you. You recently suffered from a bad leg. With all that shouting, you will be suffering from a bad head. Calm yourself man!

Tim Farron: The Prime Minister will return at some point with a deal with Europe that our people will have to live with for decades to come, especially our young people, 73% of whom voted to remain. Nobody knows what that deal will look like, but someone will get to agree it. Should it be her Government, should it be this Parliament, or should it be—as I believe it should—the British people?

The Prime Minister: I have already said that there will be a vote on the deal in this Parliament. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Mr Shelbrooke, calm yourself. You are in a state of excessive excitement, even by your standards.

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): It is quite difficult to follow that, Mr Speaker, but back in the real world—[Laughter.]

In December 2015, my constituency suffered terrible flooding, especially in the town of Tadcaster. The damage became worse when the bridge collapsed, separating the town. Thankfully, the bridge will be reopened, hopefully this week. Will the Prime Minister join me in thanking all those who were involved in the restoration of the bridge and, most importantly, the residents of Tadcaster, who have had a terrible year?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in commending and thanking not only all those who worked so hard to restore the bridge at Tadcaster, but the people of Tadcaster, who have had to put up with disruption and inconvenience for such a long time. I am sure that those people will all welcome the return of the bridge, and we commend all those who have ensured that that has happened.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The news revealed yesterday that Toshiba is reviewing its investment in the Moorside nuclear power plant, which puts a huge question mark over not only 21,000 jobs in Cumbria but the future of our nation’s energy security. What will the Prime Minister do personally to ensure that the deal stays on track?

The Prime Minister: I assure the hon. Gentleman that both the Business Secretary and I have involvement in a number of deals and possible deals around the nuclear industry. We are keen to ensure that those jobs are brought to the United Kingdom and that such deals are kept on track. I assure him of the Government’s commitment.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): This week the Danish drug firm Novo Nordisk invested £115 million in the UK to further research into type 2 diabetes. Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming that investment as well as the academics and scientists involved, many of whom are from the EU and around the world and will appreciate the assurance she gave earlier? Will she also work with me to ensure that any innovations and new treatments get to patients as quickly as possible?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will probably understand, I recognise this issue particularly personally, although I am a type 1 diabetic rather than type 2. Any investment in diabetes research is to be welcomed, and when new solutions and support for diabetics are found, it is important that they get to people as quickly as possible. A significant number of people in this country suffer from type 2 diabetes, and the figures show that there is a great risk that the number will increase significantly in the coming years. We need to do all that we can not only to prevent people from becoming type 2 diabetics in the first place, but to support those who have that condition so that people suffer from fewer complications and are able to manage their lives.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Today is World Hijab Day. Will the Prime Minister join me in recognising the right of Muslim women to wear the hijab if they wish, without fear, and indeed the right of all women everywhere to wear what they want,
when they want? Will she also commit to standing up for the right to refuge for men, women and children wherever they may be, regardless of their religion?

The Prime Minister: On the hon. Lady’s second point, it is absolutely the case that this country welcomes refugees to the United Kingdom, and we do so regardless of their religion—there is no question of discriminating on religion.

I am absolutely in line with the hon. Lady on her point about wearing the hijab. I believe that what a woman wears is a woman’s choice.

Sir Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Russian armed forces regularly carry out large-scale exercises, including with nuclear-capable equipment, on the borders of eastern Europe. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the American commitment to NATO is absolutely pivotal to protect the countries of eastern Europe from going the same way as eastern Ukraine?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The 100% commitment to NATO that President Trump has given is crucial to ensuring that we can provide for the security of this country and others in Europe, especially those in eastern Europe on the border with Russia. I noted that my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) referred to the fact that the Governments of the Czech Republic, Latvia and Lithuania had welcomed that 100% commitment. I am pleased to say that we are playing our part, as about 800 troops will be going to Poland and Estonia this year as a sign of NATO’s strength and our belief in keeping those countries free and democratic.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): In 2015, my constituent Samia Shahid was lured to her death in Pakistan, where she was brutally raped and murdered. Will the Prime Minister join me in reiterating the commitment of this House and this country that we will not tolerate violence against women, and encourage the Pakistani Government to continue in their efforts to get justice for our British girl, Samia Shahid?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises a very tragic case, and our deepest sympathies are with Samia’s husband following her tragic death last year. We do not interfere in the legal processes of another country, but I understand from the Foreign Office that the Pakistani police have arrested two people and charged them with murder. The Foreign Office has provided assistance to Samia’s husband and will continue to do so. I am sure it will keep the hon. Lady informed, and I understand that the Home Secretary will meet the hon. Lady soon to discuss this issue.
Vehicle Fuel (Publication of Tax Information)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No.23)

12.43 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a bill to require the inclusion on vehicle fuel receipts of the amounts of each tax paid; to require all retail fuel pumps to display the amounts of taxes paid when dispensing fuel; and for connected purposes.

This Bill calls for all taxes to be clearly shown on fuel receipts. Its principle is very simple: taxes should be clear to the people who pay them. At the moment, they are not. The Bill provides motorists with far better clarity on what they are paying—a simple breakdown of fuel duty, VAT and VAT on duty. There is no reason why these measures should be unnecessarily burdensome or expensive to businesses.

I understand that the Treasury is advising motorists who contact it in support of the Bill that it would be impractical to introduce it. My response would be that VAT—one of the taxes in question—is already shown on receipts, and that all that is required for fuel duty also to be shown is a simple arithmetic calculation multiplying the number of litres by the duty per litre. The software cost is minimal. With prices at the pumps rising to their highest for over two years and total taxation of fuel bills hovering between 65% and 70%, it is important that Government are open and transparent. Surely it is right that the nation’s 37 million drivers should see the magnitude of the tax they pay every time they fill up their tanks.

The Government must be commended for freezing fuel duty since 2011. However, the UK remains one of the costliest nations in which to fill up with diesel and petrol. This is solely due to the high tax component in pump pricing. The amount of tax remains a huge issue for drivers. This is a tax on a resource that over 70% of people have no choice but to buy to go about their everyday lives. Total fuel duty revenue is approximately £27 billion per annum, with an additional 20% VAT on the duty itself bringing in an extra £5.24 billion. Once drivers find out about VAT on fuel duty—a tax on a tax—it really rankles and perplexes them.

The Bill aims to give motorists what my right hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer) has secured for taxpayers in general as a result of his Statements of Taxation Bill, which he presented on 25 January 2012 and which was subsequently included in the 2012 Budget and introduced in 2014. As a result of his initiative, taxpayers now see how their money is spent, broken down area by area of Government spending.

Council tax payers have the same right. The bills that they will receive this spring itemise what each authority will receive and invariably this bill comes with a letter from council leaders explaining what they will be doing with our money. It is only right that hard-pressed motorists are put on the same level playing field, rather than being continually exploited as a cash cow.

The initiative of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich was an important step along the road to full tax transparency. It is now important to complete this journey, so that motorists are able to hold Government to account. It must always be remembered that it is their money, not the state’s.

I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who presented a very similar Bill to this on 16 October 2012. He has been a real champion of motorists and it is important that we build on the great work he did in helping to secure successive freezes of fuel duty.

It is also appropriate to pay tribute to the tremendous campaigning work of FairFuelUK, and its founders Quentin Willson and Howard Cox, for standing up for the motorist at every turn in the road. I am grateful for the support that I have been provided by the all-party group on fair fuel for motorists and hauliers chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke). It is appropriate to highlight the pump watch app that FairFuelUK is launching, which shows how much UK drivers would pay for the same number of litres that they have just bought if they had bought them in 23 other countries. I am afraid that the UK does not occupy a good position in this league table.

I will set out four reasons why I believe there is a compelling case for introducing this Bill. First, there is the need for transparency—to be open, up front and honest with motorists, who as taxpayers have been taken for granted for too long. The magnitude of the tax paid every time drivers fill up at the pumps has been hidden from them for decades. UK drivers continue to pay the highest fuel duty in the world for diesel and the fifth highest for petrol. There is a need for transparency, so that the country’s 37 million drivers can see how much they contribute to public services and our economy.

The traditional VAT-only fuel receipts that are given to us at petrol stations, which we invariably file in the glove compartment, must end now and be replaced by open and complete tax information. Every time a driver fills up their vehicle, they will be able to see where their hard-earned cash is going in the Treasury, and in what form—VAT, fuel duty and VAT on duty. When prices at the pumps fell to around £1 per litre in 2016, the tax that the Government took from drivers reached 75%. What other huge tax contribution is kept hidden from those who pay it? I believe that there is an obligation on the Government to be open with UK drivers regarding the taxes they pay. If drivers feel that they are being taken for granted, we are driving down a very dangerous road. There is a need to be completely up front and to show motorists what they are paying.

It is also important to highlight the regressive nature of fuel duty. In particular, it hits hard-working families and those who are just about managing—the JAMs whose challenges have been highlighted recently. We know that 90% of all journeys are by road, and 70% of drivers have no choice but to use their vehicles to get to work, to drive their children to school, to take their elderly parents to hospital or to go out for the day with their families. I see the problem for myself in my Waveney constituency, where wages are below the national average and many people have no choice but to use their cars to get to work, often travelling long distances to places such as Norwich, Ipswich and Felixstowe. There is also a limited number of petrol stations from which to buy fuel. Waveney motorists, like so many in similar areas around the country, are hit hard by this triple whammy.
It is important to highlight the impact that fuel duty has on the economy. Since 2011, the Treasury has listened to the carefully researched and evidence-based FairFuelUK campaign to freeze fuel duty, which has objectively proved that the level of fuel duty directly impacts on the success of the economy, the creation of new jobs, the level of inflation, investment by small and medium-sized businesses and consumer spending.

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is important to highlight the enormous groundswell of support for the measures in the Bill across the country and around the Chamber. The Bill is targeted at the nation’s 37 million drivers and at all our constituents, so that they can see how much they are contributing to the public purse, to our public services and to promoting economic growth. The clandestine fuel tax receipt must end, and it must be replaced by straightforward and complete tax information for all drivers to see every time they fill up their vehicles.

This is a straightforward Bill that will provide straightforward transparency on fuel duty, on what people pay and on where their money goes. It will make the taxation system more honest. It will spark a debate on whether the motorist should continue to be used as the taxation system more honest. It will spark a debate on whether the motorist should continue to be used as the nation’s tax cow and on how their money is spent. Mr Speaker, I have strained your patience, but I hope the nation’s tax cow and on how their money is spent. It will spark a debate on whether the motorist should continue to be used as the nation’s tax cow and on how their money is spent. Mr Speaker, I have strained your patience, but I hope that the whole House will support the Bill.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has never strained my patience. It is always a pleasure to listen to his mellifluous tones. I noted that, as he made his case, he single-handedly relegated me to the status of Deputy Speaker, for which of course I am extremely grateful.

Peter Aldous: I apologise for that, Mr Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Peter Aldous, Mr Alistair Carmichael, Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil, Martin Vickers, Danny Kinahan, Charlie Elphicke, Ms Margaret Ritchie, Maria Caulfield, Drew Hendry, Rishi Sunak, Jim Fitzpatrick and James Cartlidge present the Bill.

Peter Aldous accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February, and to be printed (Bill 133).
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Like my right hon. Friend, I accept the result in the country and in my constituency. Does he agree, however, that no one, whether they voted to remain or to leave, voted to become poorer, and that the test for the Government now is to produce a prosperous, post-Brexit Britain and a deal that is in the country’s best interests?

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend makes his point very well, and I shall come on to that in a moment.

Our responsibilities do not end here tonight or with the passing of this Bill. It is deeply problematic that the Government are embarking upon this process without any objective economic analysis of its implications, without clarity on key issues such as the customs union and without any sense of what transitional arrangements might look like, on the basis of what I believe is the fanciful proposition that all the future arrangements can be tied up within 18 months.

On day one of the debate, a number of speakers powerfully made the point that, given the paucity of information we have been given before article 50 is to be triggered, it is even more important that there should be proper parliamentary scrutiny, including a meaningful vote in this House, before the end of the process. The Prime Minister’s apparent wish that our choice will be to accept her deal or face a hard Brexit on World Trade Organisation terms is quite wrong. Such a take-it-or-leave-it option would fly in the face of the central proposition that won the referendum—namely, that we want to take back control and restore parliamentary sovereignty. So I hope that Members—particularly Conservative Members—however they voted in the referendum, will support the amendments that seek to ensure proper parliamentary sovereignty throughout the process. I believe that parliamentary scrutiny will help the Government. It will improve any deal, it will strengthen their hand with the European Union and it will make it more likely that the Prime Minister will end up with a deal that has the support it needs in the country.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, without the safeguards he seeks, there may be a crock of something at the end of the rainbow but it might not be gold?

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend puts it very well. This is deeply uncertain, and the truth is that the Government have not really levelled with the country about the trade-offs. At the moment, they are saying that they can have everything, and I fear that pretty soon in the negotiations we will discover that that is not the case.

I want to focus not on the economic questions, which were well worn yesterday, but on an equally important issue that has received less attention in this debate but is absolutely crucial: our place in the world and our ability to have an effect on the big issues that matter to the rule of law and human rights; a belief in the importance of multilateral institutions—all of these have been bound up in our relationship with the European Union, and we should not be under any illusion about the real risk that, following our departure, our influence in the world will be weaker, not stronger.

I negotiated on climate change for the last Labour Government, and our strength, our power, our standing on that issue came from our membership of the European Union because we accounted for 10% of global emissions, not just 1%. The House should therefore recognise that the question of what strategic relationships come after Brexit is fundamental to the issue of real sovereignty and our ability to have an effect on the big issues that will affect us.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman raises the important issue of the future not only of ourselves but of the European Union. Is he not concerned that the European External Action Service—now has 139 overseas posts and is increasingly asserting the authority of the European Union over the member states? That process will continue and we will not be part of it. We will be reasserting the sovereignty of these islands.

Edward Miliband: I will not get extra time, so I am not going to indulge in that argument because we are leaving the European Union—the hon. Gentleman and I agree on that. The question is: what comes next? We all need to address ourselves to that question.

Once of the terrible irony is that, with the election of President Trump, our European co-operation is so clearly needed more than ever. I believe in the special relationship with the United States, but it must be based on values. The Foreign Secretary said after President Trump’s election, and I slightly scratched my head at this, that

“he is a guy who believes firmly in values that I believe in too—freedom and democracy.”

I do not agree and I hope that on reflection, after a few days of the Trump presidency, the Foreign Secretary does not agree, either.

My central point is this: I can go along with the Prime Minister that Brexit means Brexit, but I cannot go along with the idea that Brexit means Trump. I do not believe that that is inevitable, nor do I believe that it is what the British people want. The danger is that the Prime Minister feels it is an inevitable consequence of the decision to leave the EU that we are driven into the arms of President Trump.

So what should be done? This is the fundamental point. The Lancaster House speech was no doubt an improvement in tone on what had gone before, but not one of the Prime Minister’s 12 principles concerned foreign policy, defence or climate co-operation. To put that right in the course of the negotiations I sincerely hope that the Government come up with an architecture for foreign and strategic policy co-operation with the European Union, not just ad hoc arrangements. I want to be clear—this relates to the question asked by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth)—that that co-operation would be intergovernmental, but there are many issues, from Russia to refugees, climate and defence, where we will be stronger, not weaker, if we have institutions that continue to mean co-operation between ourselves and the European Union.
We not only need the right institutions, but institutions founded on a strategic orientation that continues to value our role in Europe. We must be willing, even as we leave the EU, to join our European allies, whose values we share, in speaking up for the rule of law and human rights. I ask this of all European countries: where has been the co-ordinated response to the Trump Muslim ban? Why have the Government not been pushing for that response?

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: I will not give way because I want to get to the end.

As I understand it, the dual citizenship exemption won by the UK will be extended only to New Zealand, Canada and Australia. Of course it is good that we have that exemption, but we should be standing in solidarity with our European allies in calling for the ban to end.

There are other questions for the Government, too. In the wake of President Trump’s election, Foreign Ministers sought to agree a joint statement on the continuing need for a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinian people, but they were blocked by a few countries, including—shamefully—the United Kingdom. It is no wonder that Europe fears that we are throwing in our lot with President Trump and turning our back on it. No good will come of that. These are the tests of who we are as a nation, of our values and of how we intend to apply them in the years ahead. It matters to whether our world is governed by the rules of international order—rules that we helped to design and promote—or, alternatively, by something far, far worse.

Incidentally, surely there must be no more talk, particularly in the current context when human rights seem so at risk, of our leaving the European convention on human rights. I truly hope that the Government will be prompted by President Trump’s first few days in office to think again about their approach.

I end on this point. History will judge us not just on the decisions we make on this Bill tonight, but on the decisions beyond. The Government have a heavy responsibility, and we expect them to exercise it on our behalf of the whole nation, not just the 52%. For that we will hold them to account in the months and years ahead.

1.6 pm

Mr George Osborne (Tattoo) (Con): The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) speaks, as he always does, with passion for an international Britain and for European solutions to the many problems we face.

Democracy is easy to defend when we agree with the majority. In many other political systems, such as dictatorships, people can get their way, but democracy has the added advantage of legitimacy and popular consent. Democracy is much more difficult when we disagree with the majority. As people know, I argued passionately in the referendum that leaving the European Union would weaken Britain’s trade and commercial links, would diminish Britain on the world stage, would make international approaches to things such as climate change and atomic research more difficult and would weaken a multilateral institution—the European Union—that has been vital to our collective security for many decades.

I made those arguments, and it saddens me that Britain and Brexit are bracketed in the same group as other isolationist and nativist movements across the world. We should strive to be, as the Prime Minister says, a more global Britain. But I lost the case. I made it with passion, and I sacrificed my position in government for it.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Osborne: I will make some progress before taking interventions.

We have to accept that, in a democracy, the majority has spoken. Although I am a passionate believer in an open, internationalist, free-trading Britain, I am also a passionate believer in Britain as a democracy. It is unfashionable in schools these days to teach what I believe to be a true tale of our nation’s history, which stretches from Magna Carta to the Glorious Revolution, the founding fathers of the American constitution, the Great Reform Act, female emancipation and the like, but we have given the modern world a version of democracy that has spread far beyond our shores.

Therefore, to vote against the majority verdict of the largest democratic exercise in British history would risk putting Parliament against people, provoking a deep constitutional crisis in our country and alienating people who already feel alienated. I am not prepared to do that, so I will be voting for the Bill tonight.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Osborne: I wish to make some progress, and I want others to have a chance to speak, so I will not take interventions.

There is a mandate to leave the European Union, but that was the only question asked of the British people in the referendum. We cannot assume that the British public gave a set of answers to the questions we now face as a Parliament. Indeed, those questions are now entrusted to us as we approach the negotiations.

I call them negotiations but I do not think they are going to resemble the negotiations that we currently read about in the media. The truth is that although Britain is seeking the maximum possible access to the single market for goods and for services, and we hope that the fact we have a trade deficit and a very important financial centre will count in our favour, the Government have chosen—and I respect this decision—not to make the economy the priority in this negotiation. They have prioritised immigration control, which was a clear message from the referendum campaign, and removing European Court of Justice jurisdiction from the UK and, in that sense, asserting parliamentary sovereignty, although I would point out that Parliament can choose to leave the EU, as indeed we are choosing to do in the coming days.

So we are not prioritising the economy, although we hope for the best possible arrangement, and the European Union is not prioritising it either in these negotiations. Having spent the past couple of weeks in Berlin and in Paris talking to some French and German political
leaders, it is clear to me that although they understand that Britain is a very important market for their businesses, their priority is to maintain the integrity of the remaining 27 members of the European Union; they are not interested in a long and complex hybrid agreement with the UK. Therefore, both sides are heading for a clean break from the EU for the UK.

The only thing I think the negotiation will come down to in the end is how that break is achieved. The Prime Minister, in her speech of a couple of weeks ago, made it clear that Britain is seeking a transition agreement, and that is obvious because it is simply not possible for this Parliament to introduce all the domestic legislation that is going to be required to replicate the arrangements we currently have with the EU, even with the great repeal Act. We will also need to have some kind of bridge to the free trade agreement that we seek with the EU. At the same time, the EU needs from us financial commitments that it believes we entered into to pay for European projects that were undertaken while we were a member. In practice, that means the negotiation will be a trade-off, as all divorces are, between access and money. We will try to scale down our payments to the EU, while scaling down our commitment to EU rules and access, until we reach that free trade agreement which we hope to negotiate.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr Osborne: I will just finish my speech and then others can speak.

That is what the negotiation is going to be like. I suspect it will be rather bitter. I spent four years negotiating with Michel Barnier, and I advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union to be well briefed, as he always is, and to pack a packet of Pro Plus, because there will be many long nights ahead.

It is very important that in the bitterness of that discussion we do not forget that there are some fundamental reasons why Britain wanted to be part of a European Common Market in the first place; nor should we allow the Europeans to forget that there was a fundamental reason why they created a European Community, which was to bring the nations of Europe together. We must convince the Europeans to forget that there was a fundamental reason why Britain wanted to be part of a European Union, while scaling down our commitment to EU rules and access, until we reach that free trade agreement which we hope to negotiate.

I want to talk about the politics, the economics and the procedure, and about Scotland. My hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) asked me yesterday whether I could remember, in the last 30 years in this place, a time when the House was gripped by collective madness. Obviously, that time was Iraq, when this House was mesmerised by a strong Prime Minister into the blood and disaster of the Iraqi war, but it is certainly not mesmerising rhetoric that is responsible for mad MP disease in this case. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) yesterday made a comparison with “Alice in Wonderland”, but Alice only took herself into the hole; this Prime Minister is taking virtually all the Tory party, half the Labour party and the entire country into the hole. What is being done is politically crazy.

In 1962, Dean Acheson said: “Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role.” After listening to the speeches of some Tory Back Benchers yesterday, I am not so sure that they are reconciled to the empire bit. Successive Governments and Prime Ministers found a solution by pursuing a role as a leading country in Europe, and balancing that with a special relationship with the United States of America. A German Chancellor once said that the relationship was special because only one side knew about it, and that is certainly true, but none the less, it was a rational policy. Some Prime Ministers took that far too far, into the desert of Iraq, but none the less it was a rational, logical policy.

We cannot, having pursued that policy of having influence in Europe and the good things that come from it, as the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) reminded us, cut that off and then pursue the special relationship with the USA. That leaves us caught in the headlights, as the Prime Minister was earlier this week. When asked to condemn the obvious thing that any human being would have condemned, she refused to do so three times, in case she offended her new bestie in the White House—and incidentally, if she had said it, she would have offended
her new best friend in the White House. So she goes headlong into the arms of a United States President who is, at best, unpredictable. This is going to get worse and more embarrassing because of the imbalance in the relationship.

Then we must consider the economic damage—

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) mentioned climate change and the American President, who said he will tear up the agreements on that subject. Where will Britain stand then? What support will it get?

Alex Salmon: That is an excellent example of the embarrassments to come. As for the economic damage, there was nothing wrong with the Treasury medium-term forecasts on coming out of the single marketplace; even if there is a bespoke deal, it will result in a 6% loss in GDP.

Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (Ind): Will my right hon. Friend confirm my understanding that it was the Tories who wanted to safeguard British interests in the single market? Am I correct in recalling that in their manifesto?

Alex Salmon: The Tory 2015 manifesto is not my bedtime reading, but as I recall, page 72 said: “We say: yes to the Single Market”.

The Tories were right to say yes. It was funny that yesterday all the Conservative speakers remembered the commitment to a referendum, but not one of them remembered their commitment to the single marketplace. Of course it was not the case that a withdrawal from the European Community meant a withdrawal from the single marketplace. During the campaign, I had the pleasure of debating with Daniel Hannan MEP, who said: “Absolutely nobody is talking about threatening our place in the Single Market”.

Of course it is possible to honour the result of the referendum and stay in the single marketplace, and even if people think there will be an exit from the single marketplace, it is madness, in diplomatic negotiating terms, to abandon that position now. The UK should keep its place in the single marketplace and allow the other European countries to negotiate it out of it, not give it away before the first word is spoken in the negotiations.

I come next to the procedures of this House. I have here the list of amendments tabled to the Bill, stretching to 103 pages; we are told that they are to be debated in three days. Eighteen months ago, the Scotland Bill, which was not the greatest constitutional change in history, got six days of debate. I say to Labour Members such as the right hon. Member for Doncaster North, who listed all the things wrong with the Government’s approach, that if they believe that now, they should vote against the Government; if they cannot do that, they should at least vote against a programme motion that will make it impossible to debate the sensible changes that the right hon. Gentleman outlined.

As was well pointed out yesterday, the process is procedurally deficient, not only in terms of the time given, but in terms of the question that will eventually be put to the House. The final vote will be on the deal that comes back from a Prime Minister who said that “no deal...is better than a bad deal”, so the choice the House will likely get is a bad deal or no deal. It is therefore crucial that when the House debates it and comes to a decision, there is a meaningful vote—a vote that can make a difference—as opposed to Hobson’s choice, made with a metaphorical gun to the House’s head.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): If we end up in a situation in which the only deal on the table is a bad deal, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the responsibility for that will lie with the Prime Minister? It is not as if she can deny responsibility for that being a problem.

Alex Salmon: Yes, I would agree, but of course if we are all in the soup, finding out that it was the Prime Minister’s responsibility will avail this country very little. It is far better to try to ensure by our votes that we get a realistic choice that can actually make a difference.

Finally, I come to the situation in Scotland. Scotland has a 1,000-year history as a European nation. There is a plague to Sir William Wallace in great Westminster Hall, the site of his unjust trial—for which, presumably, he will get a pardon at some point soon. After his greatest victory in the battle of Stirling bridge, which was akin to Leicester City winning the premier league last season, in terms of upset and surprise, his first act was not to hold a călidh, but to write to the Hanseatic League in Lübeck and elsewhere to secure Scotland’s trading concessions throughout Europe. The importance of Scotland’s European connections stretches back a millennium, and we are not going to allow this non-vision—this act of madness from this House—to take Scotland out of those connections.

The Scottish Government have put forward the proposition, “Scotland’s Place in Europe”, which offers the Prime Minister a way for Scotland to stay in the single marketplace, regardless of what she wants to do to this country. She said today that a frictionless border in Ireland was quite possible under the circumstances, without realising that if it is possible in Ireland, it is of course possible in Scotland. I see the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) nodding; in the early hours of this morning, I think I saw him, or perhaps it was one of his hon. Friends, say much the same thing on the BBC’s “HARDtalk”—a sad case, watching “HARDtalk” at 1 o’clock in the morning—and it was an important admission. Actually, it was the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab). It is important to understand that there are examples in Europe at present.

The Prime Minister has it within her power and capacity to accept the Scottish Government’s compromise proposals and allow Scotland as a nation to retain its trading place in the European context. If that is not to happen; if the House says, “We will go ahead with a hard, Tory Brexit,” or a full English Brexit, as we are now calling it in Scotland, and says, “We’re going to sweep aside concerns from across the House about the economic and political damage, and we will not accept the proposals from Scotland to follow the votes of the people in the nation of Scotland and retain their European connection. We are not interested in preserving Scottish jobs and investment”; if those are the criteria and that is the attitude of the Government; if that is what the Prime Minister wants to do with Scotland, and she is
determined to throw down that gauntlet, she can be absolutely sure that Nicola Sturgeon, as First Minister, will pick it up.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I call Dr Caroline Johnson for her maiden speech. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”]

1.24 pm

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Sleaford and North Hykeham is not only the constituency that I am proud to represent; it is my home, and I feel a personal responsibility to nurture it. It is a thriving, predominantly agricultural area, with pockets of industry and a strong military tradition.

The town of North Hykeham is built directly on top of the old Roman road, the Fosse Way. To the south is Sleaford, where one is welcomed by the Handleby monument, a large, ornate stone structure, within which is a statue of Henry Handleby, who was the MP for South Lincolnshire from 1832 to 1841. He was such a popular MP that the townspeople created the memorial in his honour. It is not clear now whether he was so popular for his innovative ideas regarding science, technology and farming, or because of his strong opposition to the taxation of malt. Nevertheless, it is clear that I have a lot to live up to.

My predecessor was Stephen Phillips, who, like his predecessor, Douglas Hogg, is a silk. They brought great intellect and legal acumen to the House, and Stephen is particularly to be commended for his work on the Public Accounts Committee. Probably his greatest virtue, though, is his sense of timing: he resigned at exactly the right time for me to be able to stand for the seat. I thank Stephen for the personal encouragement he has given to me in this endeavour. I also thank the many Members of this House who have given me wonderful support, especially my hon. Friends the Members for Newark (Robert Jenrick), for Sherwood (Mark Spencer), and for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), to whom I am very grateful. In these challenging times, Mr Speaker, I promise to uphold the fine traditions of the House and serve my constituents to the best of my ability, ensuring that their voices are heard.

As a new MP, it is right for me to explain briefly who I am. I am a mother of three, a farmer’s wife and the product of a loving family. I am a consultant paediatrician and therefore have particular interests in the health, education and general wellbeing of children. I am a committed Brexiteer, and I am also interested in farming, infrastructure and defence. I am not a silk, or even a lawyer, but I have firm principles based on what I believe to be morally right, and on the ideal of democracy under the rule of law.

I have spent all my working life as a doctor in the NHS, and care passionately about it. The NHS is not perfect; in fact, I doubt any organisation as large and so dependent on human judgment ever could be. However, although there are areas that could be improved, I feel many are too quick to decry the faults in the NHS without adequately recognising the brilliant work done, day in and day out, in helping more people than ever before. I look forward to contributing my knowledge and experience to help to ensure that the NHS goes from strength to strength.

Improving the wellbeing of children remains a topic close to my heart, and I am delighted with the Government’s commitment to young people’s mental health. We must ensure that young people with mental health issues have access to the right treatment; however, as with physical health, we must also focus on prevention. That should include improvements in children’s social care and helping to foster resilience. Resilience is very important. I feel we let down children with the “all must have prizes” culture. Young people should understand their strengths and weaknesses by being allowed to compete and take controlled risks; to win, but also to lose; and to learn from that experience, which better prepares them for the challenges they face in life ahead.

It is truly a privilege to give my maiden speech today in this historic debate. As someone new to the world of Westminster, the greatest surprise to me was that so many seemed surprised by the result of the EU referendum. I was brought up to believe that a good democracy is ruled by the majority, with protection for minorities. As I talk to my constituents, however, I increasingly understand that they perceive that we have rule by a vocal minority elite who are disregarding the views of the majority, and they are angry. Why is that important? Well, because so many people seem to have been surprised by the Brexit vote, having failed to understand the genuine concerns of the majority. This disconnect with the electorate has not been seen just here, but in the results of the US presidential election, and in the rise of far-right parties throughout Europe. There can be no democracy without an understanding of the views of the majority, and those views must be respected, heard and responded to by Members of this House.

There has been much debate recently over whether the referendum was mandatory or advisory, and over the relative authorities of the Government, the legislature and the judiciary. As I said earlier, I am not a lawyer, but I fail to understand how one can ask the electorate a question and then even consider disregarding the result. The referendum is not advice, but an instruction to us. We asked the people, and the people said “Out”, so out we must go.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. More than 80 right hon. and hon. Members still wish to contribute to the debate over the ensuing five hours, in consequence of which it is necessary, with immediate effect, to impose a time limit on Back-Bench speeches of four minutes. I am trying to ensure that everybody has a chance, on top of those who have already had their opportunity. It would be helpful if those who have already spoken were to refrain from intervening, because such self-restraint might increase opportunities for others. I am sure that all colleagues are concerned about others. I call Yvette Cooper.

1.31 pm

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): May I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) on an excellent maiden speech? She will do her constituents proud if her speech is anything to go by.
We have now a challenge for this whole House—what we do over the next two years and whether what we do strengthens or weakens our democracy. Over the past 40 years, Britain has worked with the EU to achieve some amazing things, but we have done so by sharing sovereignty. We were able to do so, because, when we went into the Common Market in the 1970s, we had popular consent expressed through a referendum. Last summer, we lost that consent, which should be a lesson to all of us who wanted to keep it. Surprisingly, I agreed with some of the things that the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) said, but disagreed with him over whether we should have done more. We could not make the referendum simply about the economy, and we took for granted too many of the things that we needed to argue, particularly about the necessity for politics to come together.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): I am a remainer, but I accept the democratic will of the people. Surely now is about securing the best deal for our constituents—the people we are here to represent.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. I, too, will vote for article 50, although I argued against leaving the EU last year. I am worried about the backdrop to all of this, because, across western democracies, democratic values are being undermined. We have seen: attacks on judges as the “enemies of the people”—even though they should be defending the rule of law; attacks on the Human Rights Act and on the protection for minorities against the tyranny of the majority; the steady undermining of democratically elected representatives; the assault on the free press; and the attack on truth itself. The challenge that we face over the next few years in many European countries is how we defend those democratic values. It will be much harder for me to defend that faith in democracy in my constituency if we ignore the results of the ballot box last summer.

Pontefract is the home of the very first secret ballot. We still have the first ballot box, and we see it as a symbol of peaceful democracy—of asking people to be part of that democratic process. That democratic process does not end with the article 50 vote, and that is my concern with the Government’s approach. They are trying to concentrate power in the hands of the Executive, when, in fact, they should be involving all of Parliament and the public in the debate about what kind of country we want to be and about where our future lies. There will be issues on which we will disagree. For example, I feel strongly that we should stay inside the customs union, because that will help our manufacturing in the future. On the rights of EU citizens who already live here, I feel that we should not be leaving them in the lurch while we start the negotiations when we could put them on a sure-footing straight away.

There will be issues about how we balance so many different things, such as how we get our security right, and we will need to debate them here in this House. At the moment, the process that the Government have set out does not give us the secure opportunity to have votes and proper debates and to be sure that we will not be left at the end of this process with what the Prime Minister has described as her way to change the British economic model if we do not get what we like. To the Opposition, that sounds far more like a tax-haven Britain that would undermine people’s rights and the kind of British values that we want to stand up for.

I urge Members from all parts of the House not just to look at the array of amendments and not just to decide how we respect the referendum result last summer and the different and strongly held views of our constituents, but to look at how all of us, from all parts of the House, vote for the kinds of amendments that will ensure that parliamentary sovereignty is strengthened and that Parliament has a say. I urge Government Members to vote for some of those amendments to ensure that we have a real vote on the final outcome and that we can make real choices.

So much of this has been about how we defend democracy by voting for article 50. It should not be about that; it should be about how we strengthen democracy over the next two years. If this was about parliamentary sovereignty for all of us, let us have the strength and the confidence to use it.

1.37 pm

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). I did not agree with everything that she said, but the one thing with which I most certainly did agree was her congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) who made an excellent first speech in this House. It is probably the case that she will never speak in a more important debate in this House no matter that she has, I am sure, a long career ahead of her here.

My first political act was to take part in the referendum campaign in 1975. I put leaflets through doors calling on people to vote yes in that referendum. I did so because I believed in free trade, and because I believed the assurances that were written on those leaflets that the decision taken would not affect the sovereignty of the UK Parliament.

I was working for Margaret Thatcher when she first delivered the Bruges speech, which highlighted the fact that that assurance was being steadily eroded and that the European Community was heading in the wrong direction. As a result, when I entered this House I opposed the Maastricht treaty, the Amsterdam treaty, the Nice treaty and indeed the Lisbon treaty as it was becoming steadily clearer that, although there may or may not have been economic benefits from our membership, this was a political project that was heading in the one direction of ever closer union.

It was a project on which the British people had not been consulted and which they did not support. I had hoped that the Prime Minister, David Cameron, would negotiate an arrangement that allowed us to opt out from the elements that we did not want. He tried valiantly, but what he came back with was insufficient, which left us with no alternative but to leave and then to seek new arrangements allowing us to co-operate in those areas where there was a benefit. The result of the referendum was clear. In my constituency, it was nearly two to one, and people did understand what they were voting for. It does not matter that a majority of younger people may have voted to remain, that a majority of those with degrees may have voted to remain, or even that some parts of the UK may have voted to remain.
This was a nationwide referendum of the British people, and the British people spoke. I agree with the Prime Minister that we have no alternative but to leave the single market, as it is essential that we have control over our borders once more and that we are no longer subject to European Union law.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Whittingdale: I really am sorry, but I do not have time.

We have to leave the customs union if the condition of remaining in it is that we are unable to negotiate our own trade agreements. There are precedents, although I would not necessarily want to follow them completely. The new arrangements, for instance, between the European Union and Canada, and between the European Union and Ukraine, offer no application of European law in those countries and no free movement, but do give them access to the internal market and allow them to negotiate their own trade agreements. Ultimately, the European Union is flexible and an arrangement is perfectly possible.

The negotiations will be complicated. I am concerned, for instance, that we must have recognition of the adequacy of our data protection, so that data can continue to flow across borders. I would like us still to be recognised under the country of origin principle. However, it is vital for European businesses still to have access to our markets, so they will be putting pressure on their Governments to reach a sensible deal. The one thing I have found most astonishing is that when Britain voted to leave the European Union, the reaction of other member states has been more to seek to punish Britain than to ask the question why. The European Union is a flawed—

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Geoffrey Robinson.

1.41 pm

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): I will be brief and to the point, as many other hon. Members want to take part in the debate. We have heard some remarkable contributions, and I will mention two that were made yesterday. The former Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who has just left the Chamber so will not hear my remarks, challenged everyone who will be voting in favour of this Bill tonight, as I will be, to examine our consciences. They particularly challenged those of us—I strongly count myself among this number—who voted, argued and campaigned for a remain vote. I believe that, as we lost the vote, we have to face the consequences, although the former Deputy Prime Minister and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe feel that we should not.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) also said that this is an issue of conscience. I regret to some extent that we will be voting on a three-line Whip, as it is a deeply moral, conscious decision that we all have to take. However, I would have much more difficulty justifying and coming to terms with my conscience if I were to vote against the Bill and, effectively, in favour of delaying and frustrating the beginning of the negotiations and, therefore, the whole process of leaving the European Union. We have only to re-read the referendum question. It was so simple, asking:

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

There were no ifs or buts. It was a simple question understood by everybody who took part in the referendum. It is no good now to say that the referendum was really only advisory and that we should have a second referendum or a confirmatory vote.

I campaigned widely in the west midlands, strongly on the remain ticket. I went out of my way to warn my constituents about the economic consequences, although warnings, particularly from the then Chancellor, may have been overdone throughout the whole campaign, which did not particularly help us. I warned people that the referendum was a one-off, that it was a yes or no question and that there would be no second referendum or further bite at the cherry if we did not like the outcome. Members who are telling us that tonight’s vote is a matter of conscience for those who were on the remain side and who felt strongly about remaining, as I did, believe that we should vote against the Bill. On the contrary, there is not a conceivable material argument for doing so. Indeed, to do so would be to betray the very basis on which we conducted the referendum; that is certainly what I spoke to, and I believe that it is what all Members who actively took part in the referendum spoke to.

We come to the question of how this House can be involved in and influence the negotiations. My experience of negotiations—business and others—tells me that we have to get real about this. The issues and choices will become clearer once we are in negotiations. I agree with the former Chancellor, who brings us great advice from Davos and other centres of learning, that perhaps economics will not be the big issue of the negotiations. However, the outcome on the economic and trading front is the essence of what this is really about for working people. My advice is simply this: soft Brexit and a transition period. Anything else would predict a harsh and uncomfortable future for the working people of this country.

Mr Speaker: As I said yesterday and perhaps I can be forgiven for repeating today, it would be hugely appreciated if colleagues did not keep coming up to the Chair either asking explicitly when they will be called, or doing so implicitly by inquiring whether it is alright if they go for lunch, repair to the loo, consume a cup of tea or eat a biscuit. It is not necessary. All I would say is, please be patient. I want to accommodate everybody—I am on your side—but it does not help if people keep coming up to the Chair all the time. It is incredibly tedious, especially when one is trying to listen to what colleagues actually have to say.

1.45 pm

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Having originally been elected on a slender majority of 582, I certainly understand that we have to accept the outcome of democratic elections, however narrow the margin, but I must admit that I was surprised by the leave result
in the west midlands, given that the region is in substantial trade surplus with the EU. Of course, I am delighted that the automotive industry has achieved so much success that it exports 82% of all its cars, mostly to the other 27 countries of the EU.

The subject of immigration dominated the conversations I had on the matter, even when standing outside the gates of the car factory. No distinction was made between EU and non-EU migration, which each account for 50% of migrants. I worry that our electors expect that taking back control will mean that very few migrants will arrive here. However, our history as an empire means that there are family obligations to non-EU migrants and an absolute obligation, through the Geneva and The Hague conventions, to provide safe haven for the most vulnerable people, many from countries for which we drew the lines on a map.

I heard mixed motives for voting leave. Some second-generation migrants told me they did not want any more coming in. Article 50 will be triggered and we will be in uncharted waters, trying to negotiate the things that are vital for our success. Access to our principal market is key. The car industry is desperately short of engineers, and its success will be choked if it cannot get the skilled labour it needs. If we are honest, migrants are more willing to do some jobs, such as picking fruit and vegetables. A spring onion producer told me he cannot rely on local labour to get the harvest in. We must ensure that horticulture is not destroyed by taking back control without being able to meet the demand for labour. These are not easy things to say in public, but we are about to make a momentous decision, and, as the Prime Minister says, we have to make a success of it. That will only be achieved if we are honest about some of the problems we face.

I am no starry-eyed Europhile. The political leadership in Europe failed to inspire its citizens about the benefits of working together. Other countries are seeing the rise of extreme right parties that promise to solve their problems. This goes beyond Europe. The leadership of the rich nations around the world are struggling to find answers to the impact of globalisation for the low waged. In America, Obama tried to extend healthcare to the poorest, and here we have the introduction of the living wage, but maybe we need to look to places such as Scandinavia for better models of wage equality and fairness in society. Those are the big questions we face.

I expect that the EU will change after we have left, because it must collectively try to find answers to the big questions of globalisation, mass migration and robotics. By contrast with the US, we have decided to turn outward, not inward, partly because we have to and because our heritage is one of trade and exploration. I hope the electorate will be patient, but they will judge our efforts on their experience, not on our rhetoric. I hope that all that is great about Britain is not sacrificed in pursuit of an unrealistic ambition to go back to some mythical time when we were in control of all we surveyed.

1.49 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): She is not in her place now, but I want to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) for her excellent maiden speech.

Liberal Democrats have always been proud internationalists. It was the Liberals who backed Winston Churchill’s European vision in the 1950s, even when his own party did not do so. Since our foundation, we have been champions of Britain’s role in the European Union and fought for co-operation and openness with our neighbours and with our allies. We have always believed that the challenges that Britain faces in the 21st century—climate change, terrorism and economic instability—are best tackled working together as a member of the European Union.

Being proud Europeans is part of our identity as a party, and it is part of my personal identity too. Personally, I was utterly gutted by the result. Some on the centre left are squeamish about patriotism; I am not. I am very proud of my identity as a northerner, as an Englishman, as a Brit, and as a European—all those things are consistent. My identity did not change on 24 June, and neither did my values, my beliefs, or what I believe is right for this country and for future generations. I respect the outcome of the referendum. The vote was close—close, but clear—and I accept it.

But voting for departure is not the same as voting for a destination. Yes, a narrow majority voted to leave the EU, but the leave campaign had no plans, no instructions, no prospectus and no vision. No one in this Government, no one in this House and no one in this country has any idea of what the deal the Prime Minister will negotiate with Europe will be—it is completely unknown. How, then, can anyone pretend that this undiscussed, unwritten, un-negotiated deal in any way has the backing of the British people? The deal must be put to the British people for them to have their say. That is the only way to hold the Government to account for the monumental decisions they will have to take over the next two years.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman not think that his party is partly responsible for the outcome of the referendum, because immigration became a proxy for issues like the pressure on the NHS and the inability to see a doctor, and the inability to get the right class sizes, owing to policies that his party supported which squeezed public services and meant that people looked for someone else to blame?

Tim Farron: I am staggered by the hon. Gentleman speaking the language of Nigel Farage—what a terrible disgrace.

The deal must be put to the British people for them to have their say. That is the only way to hold the Government to account for the monumental decision they will have to take over the next two years to ensure that the course they choose serves the interests of all the people, however they voted.

Several hon. Members rose.

Tim Farron: I will not take any more interventions because other people need to get in.

Here is the likelihood: 48% of the people will not like the outcome of the deal, and half of the 52% will feel that they were betrayed by the outcome of the deal. The only way to achieve democracy and closure is for there to be a vote at the end.
The fact is that the Prime Minister is the one making the strongest case for giving people a vote on the deal. She had the choice to pursue a form of Brexit that united our country, reflected the closeness of the vote, and sought to heal the divisions between leave and remain. Instead she chose to pursue the hardest, most divisive form of Brexit, which tears us out of the single market and leaves us isolated against the might of world superpowers. Never mind that six months ago she herself argued the case for remaining in the EU. Never mind that numerous leave campaigners championed the Norway and Swiss models and spent the referendum campaign assuring voters that we would not leave the single market. Never mind that 48% of people—16 million British people—wanted to stay in the EU. Never mind that Britain’s young people, who have more of a stake in our country than most of us here, voted three to one to remain.

The Prime Minister has made her choice—fine; she has chosen hard Brexit—but if she is so confident that what she is planning is what people voted for, she must give them a vote on the final deal. What started with democracy must not end with a Government stitch-up. When all is said and done, the decision on whether the deal the Prime Minister negotiates is good enough will be decided by someone; someone will make that decision. Should it be the Prime Minister, should it be those privileged to be here, or should it be the British people who have to live with that decision? I say that it should be put to the people in a referendum. That is why the Liberal Democrats are fighting for the British people to have the final vote on the deal that this Government negotiates. Democracy means accepting the will of the people, at the beginning of the process and the end of the process. Democracy means respecting the majority, and democracy means not giving up your beliefs when the going gets tough.

1.54 pm

**Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con):** It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), who always speaks with passion. However, let me put it squarely on the table that I will never vote for another referendum while I am in this House, given what we experienced last year.

I agree with those who have said that this is a conscience vote; forget the three-line Whips. We asked the people, “What do you want to do?”, they said, “Leave”, and as far as I am concerned that settled the matter. I will of course be voting for the Bill this evening.

I want to make three very quick points. First, I believe that the Prime Minister deserves personal credit for her leadership on Brexit since she emerged last July. Casting our minds back to the extraordinary events of last summer, we were shell-shocked, not knowing where the public vote would take us. “Brexit means Brexit”, she said,

“and we’re going to make a success of it.”

That phrase, much mocked in some quarters, gave a sufficient sense of direction to steady the ship. It became apparent by January that we then needed a more detailed plan, and at just the right time, the Prime Minister gave her Lancaster House speech, which set out a clear, coherent and credible plan for the way forward. It was one of the most significant speeches I have heard in my 25 years in this House, and it was a game changer for me and for many people.

The plan is ambitious and not without risk. In particular, we will be leaving the single market and turning our backs on free movement, but seeking to negotiate a free trade agreement. That is a high-risk strategy, but I recognise that to remain in the single market would not properly reflect the desire of the majority who voted leave to control immigration. It is, however, vital that putting in place a bespoke free trade agreement is successfully completed as part of the overall deal. The one fear that companies in my constituency have is not so much tariffs, bad though they might be, but non-tariff barriers, which can play havoc with sensible trading arrangements and must be avoided if possible.

One part of the Lancaster House speech has received insufficient attention—the reference to transitional arrangements. I know that there are some, and some in this Chamber think that all this can be done in the blink of an eye, but it cannot. It is complex, it will take years, and we have to exercise patience. Once we start detailed negotiations—once we start to consider which parts of the acquis we want to ditch and which to keep—we are probably looking at a 10-year project. We might well leave the EU in 2019, but we should prepare ourselves for substantial transitional arrangements, and thereafter, I hope, a positive working relationship.

Secondly, we must now be brutally honest with the British people about the likely short-term impact of Brexit, not in an alarmist way, but simply making the point that because of uncertainty—because we have now made it clear that we will not be in the single market—there is likely to be an impact on Government spending for the next few years. We know that tax receipts have fallen against forecast since June, and that trend may well continue. There may well be long-term gains from Brexit—I certainly hope so, and we must strive for that end—but there will most likely be short-term pain, especially now that the phoney war is drawing to an end. International companies will weigh the certain knowledge that we will be leaving the single market against the hope of an equivalent free trade agreement, and some of them who crunch that calculation will decide to invest or expand elsewhere. Some financial institutions are already getting itchy feet, so there might not be as much money available for the NHS and social care and schools as we would like over the next two to five years, and we should prepare the British people for that fact.

Finally, living in these very turbulent times when all kinds of things are going on in our world, I encourage those on the Front Bench—those who are negotiating—thus: we have a clear plan, but let us not be slavish about it; let us be flexible and wise.

1.58 pm

**Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in this debate on this historic day for Parliament and for this country. None of us who believed in withdrawal from the European Union believed that we would ever see an Order Paper displaying the words, “European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill: Second Reading”. It is a very historic, landmark occasion.
The Bill implements a decision that this Parliament decided to hand to the people. It would be utterly wrong, therefore, to reject what the people of the United Kingdom decided in a fair or engaging with Ministers. They have spoken who campaigned hard, enthusiastically and vigorously to remain but are saying that, as Parliament handed the decision to the people, we must respect the will of the people. I have little time for those who argue that we should now engage in procedurals games to thwart the will of the people. That is dishonest and undemocratic. I agree with the Liberal Democrats about believing in democracy and listening to the will of the people, so let us get on and implement what the people have said, not engage in efforts to thwart it. This was a national vote across the United Kingdom and everybody’s vote was equal.

I want to address the issues that affect Northern Ireland in particular. It has been said that, because Northern Ireland voted to remain by 56% to 44%, it should not be part of the withdrawal or it should be given a special status. I can think of nothing that would be more calculated to undermine the Union between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom than for Northern Ireland to be able to thwart the will of the people of the United Kingdom as a whole. That would be a deeply anti-Unionist position to take.

It is right and proper that we respect the special needs of Northern Ireland, and we are arguing them vigorously with the Government. We are engaged with this House and with Ministers back home, and that is why I deplore the fact that at this crucial juncture our locally devolved Assembly and Executive have been brought down needlessly. The people who brought it down are the very people who are now making speeches saying, “Brexit undermines the Good Friday agreement.” Thankfully, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has completely demolished that argument and made it clear that nothing in the Good Friday, St Andrews or any other agreement is in any way impaired or imperilled by the decision to leave the European Union. Those who are now complaining the hardest about Northern Ireland have denied themselves a voice by not taking their seats and arguing their case in this House or engaging with Ministers. They have now brought down the elected Government in Northern Ireland, so they do not have any input there, either.

The reality is that of course this presents challenges for Northern Ireland. However, when we kept sterling and the Irish Republic joined the euro along with other European partner nations and states, we were told that it was a massively detrimental act and that it would cause all sorts of major problems on the island of Ireland and lead to all sorts of disruption, both economic and political. None of that happened—people adapted. They were told that we would have to change our currency at the border. Northern Ireland has a different currency from that of the Irish Republic, but trade continues—it is flourishing—and the economy has done extremely well. None of the dire predictions of terrible consequences came to pass.

I am confident that we will see a better future for the United Kingdom and for Northern Ireland. I welcome the Prime Minister’s commitment to maintaining the common travel area. I reject the idea of a special status for Northern Ireland, and I am glad that the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic rejects it too, because it is code for separating Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom and undermining our—

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Sir Gerald Howarth.

2.2 pm

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): This is indeed an historic moment in our nation’s history. This is the moment that we begin to take back control of our laws, our borders and our money. Once again we become a sovereign nation state in command of our own destiny, and I am absolutely delighted about that.

I was brought up in post-war Germany. I campaigned to leave in the 1975 referendum and, along with 43 others, I voted against the Single European Act in 1986, so I have form. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and I are the last remaining members of that band. Although Margaret Thatcher pushed for that Act, I have no doubt that, if she were with us today, her response to this Bill would be, “Rejoice!”

I pay tribute to all those, on both sides of the House, who have campaigned over the years for this outcome. I also salute David Cameron for honouring his commitment to give the British people a referendum on membership of the EU. Many said that he would renege on that, but he kept his word.

The referendum was not advisory. It was an instruction to withdraw from the European Union. The Bill simply authorises the giving of notice to leave, without which negotiations cannot begin. It is touching to hear the new-found respect for parliamentary democracy from the Bill’s opponents—the same people who for four decades have been complicit in the relentless campaign to transfer power from this Parliament to Brussels.

Mr Charles Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that, having asked the people to give us their voice, we now need to respect that voice and get on with it?

Sir Gerald Howarth: Absolutely, and I think that the overwhelming view, not only in this House but across the country, is in favour of that proposition.

A number of speeches during this debate, principally yesterday, have sought to rerun the referendum arguments, but it is no good complaining that the people did not know what they were voting for. The Government spent £9 million of our money on a brochure riddled with inaccuracies, and they mounted an extraordinary and utterly counterproductive “Project Fear” campaign warning of dire consequences if we voted to leave, none of which have come to pass. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), the former Chancellor, who is sitting in front of me, predicted an “immediate and profound economic shock across the country” and a DIY recession, but none of that happened. Instead, the economy grew by 0.6% in the third quarter of 2016, compared with 0.3% in the first quarter, before the referendum. Major companies such as SoftBank, Google, Novo Nordisk and Nissan have announced significant investment in the United Kingdom.

Some have argued that the public were not told that a leave vote would require us to leave the single market, but recovering control of our borders and restoring to our Parliament the responsibility for the laws of these islands—in other words, a return of sovereignty—was at the heart of the debate. Membership of the single market is completely incompatible with those objectives.
As my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) said yesterday, the people knew what they were voting for and it is patronising to suggest otherwise.

Some suggest that the validity of a referendum in which more than 33 million voted is in doubt, yet no such question troubled them in 1997 when Tony Blair secured a majority of 179 with just 13.5 million votes. By contrast, 17.4 million voted to leave the European Union. We are leaving and there will be no second referendum. We undoubtedly face challenges ahead, but let us not kid ourselves: there would have been major challenges if the United Kingdom had voted to remain.

There are 70 billion reasons why our EU partners will want to reach a mutually beneficial trade deal with us, because they have a £70 billion trade surplus with us. I hope that those countries that in large part owe their liberation from the Soviet yoke to the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher will respect our decision and help us forge a new, constructive relationship. I hope that the same will apply to those countries that we helped rebuild after the second world war.

Free from the EU customs union, we will be able to embrace the world and negotiate trade deals with our Commonwealth friends, encouraging fair trade deals, and the tiger economies of the world. However, it will be hard graft; the US may be our closest ally, but let us not kid ourselves: there would have been no second referendum. We undoubtedly face challenges ahead.

If that is what taking back control is about, let us talk about that democratic process. We have been able to debate this Bill yesterday and today only because the public took the Government to court to express the democratic process. I believe that the referendum that forms the basis of the Bill was right and that I never wanted to happen, ahead of a vote that I will be able to walk down the streets of Edinburgh South, look my constituents in the eye and say to them that I have done everything I possibly can to protect their jobs, their livelihoods and the future of their families.

When the Bill goes through Third Reading and the Lords, as we know it will, I will work enthusiastically to get amendments to it and hold the Government to account. Brexit might mean Brexit, but to my constituents and to many people across the country Brexit does not mean Tory Brexit. The rhetoric we have been hearing from the Government is wrong. I do not know why they are fighting the people to stop Parliament having a say, and I do not know why they are not reaching out across the Chamber to try to get a common sound and a common voice, to make sure that Britain can get the best possible deal from our European partners. I will vote no this evening, against triggering article 50, but rest assured that I will spend the rest of the time in this Chamber fighting for my constituents’ lives.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ian Murray: I will not give way, if my hon. Friend does not mind, because of the timescale and the fact that other people wish to speak.

At the end of the EU referendum campaign, 78% of my constituents voted to remain. Many Members from across the Chamber in the last day or so have talked about not respecting the democratic will of the people, but, as far as I am concerned and according to “Erskine May”, we are representatives of our constituents. None of these decisions in the House is taken easily; in fact, it is with a heavy heart that I will vote against triggering article 50 this evening, but I will do so in the knowledge that I will be able to walk down the streets of Edinburgh South, look my constituents in the eye and say to them that I have done everything I possibly can to protect their jobs, their livelihoods and the future of their families.

When the Bill goes through Third Reading and the Lords, as we know it will, I will work enthusiastically to get amendments to it and hold the Government to account. Brexit might mean Brexit, but to my constituents and to many people across the country Brexit does not mean Tory Brexit. The rhetoric we have been hearing from the Government is wrong. I do not know why they are fighting the people to stop Parliament having a say, and I do not know why they are not reaching out across the Chamber to try to get a common sound and a common voice, to make sure that Britain can get the best possible deal from our European partners. I will vote no this evening, against triggering article 50, but rest assured that I will spend the rest of the time in this Chamber fighting for my constituents’ lives.
on which I argued to remain, I made the bargain with the
good people of North East Bedfordshire that we
would honour the result of the referendum; if we voted
to remain, I would support the decision, and if we voted to
leave, I would support the decision if I was required as an MP
to vote on the matter. We have, and I will.

I am not giving up fighting. I want the very best for my
constituents out of the new arrangements. That is
why I stood to be a member of the Exiting the European
Union Committee, and it is why I will work with others in
Parliament and beyond to assist the Government
who have been landed with this in making the best of it.
The Bill does not provide much opportunity for the
addition of detail governing future negotiation. The
Government need a pretty open hand, although one or
two amendments might help them to retain parliamentary
support.

I will fight for a negotiated settlement, watching
carefully for any sign that “no deal” is moving up the
agenda. I want the Government to be as open as possible
to as many options as possible. The degree of detail to
be covered is staggering, both for us and for our partners,
and new consequences are being uncovered every day.
This is way more complicated than some of our colleagues
ever wanted to believe, and not all the consequences will
be beneficial.

There is one fight that I want to see an end of, and on
which I am calling time. I do not believe there is any
realistic prospect of the UK remaining in or rejoining
the EU, certainly not in my lifetime in the House. I
think it is time for me to place my support for the EU
and Europe on a different footing—one that recognises
the reality of what we have done. I will work for the
future prosperity of the EU, for our partnership relationship
with it and for all the things we must continue to do
together from that new position. I will defend the EU
against those who still wish it further harm—from
those misguided enough to believe that the further
disintegration of the EU is of some benefit—whether
that is those in some quarters in the UK with a viewpoint
of malevolence, those with a viewpoint of ignorance in
the United States.

I have decided that I will not, at present, fight for the
UK somehow to find a quick way back to the EU. Let
me be clear: I believe sincerely that the decision of those
who voted out was wrong, as was the view of those who
led them. I am reconciled to Brexit, but I am not yet
persuaded of the wisdom of the decision. However,
spending the next few years trying to reverse 48:52 and
make it 52:48 does not seem to me to be in the UK’s
interest. I do not want an already divided country to
become more so. Honest patriotism has merged seamlessly
into jingoistic nationalism, and the national debate has
become sad and dispiriting. As a confirmed remainier
and supporter of the EU, I do not want the next
generation of Conservative MPs to have the blight of this
argument dogging them, their associations, their
members and their voters in the way it has dogged us. It
has soured friendships, deepened bitterness and damaged
relationships—I swore at a mate in the Tea Room, and I
am sorry.

Instead, I want to work towards a new partnership
with the EU that will start to command ever-increasing
support. We should aim higher than a minimum of
support and look towards the vast majority of those in
the UK supporting such a partnership. It is possible to
be pro-European and not define oneself solely in terms
of membership of the EU. It is time to be proud to be
British without hating the EU. I hope it will help if
some of us who lost the opportunity to create
something better out of what has happened. Although I
will vote for the Bill with a heavy heart, that is the
relationship I am looking for.

2.15 pm

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I
have listened to yesterday’s and today’s debate, a lot of
which has focused on process and procedure. I want to
focus on people. I made a very simple promise to the
people of Bermondsey and Old Southwark in May 2015
that I would never support anything that would damage
them, their lives or their children’s lives. I made that
promise precisely because my predecessor was a Liberal
Democrat who backed Tory measures—the bedroom
tax, cuts to legal aid and tripling tuition fees—that
damaged my community. I made that promise, and I
stand by it.

I hear from people, day in, day out, about the damage
that has been done since the referendum. The universities
in my constituency—the London School of Economics,
King’s College London, South Bank University and the
University of the Arts London—are worried about
research funding from the European Union, the Erasmus
programme and a drop in international student numbers,
which could mean higher fees for British students. That
was not in the referendum last year.

I hear from medical professionals who are worried
about recruitment. The NHS is not getting £350 million
extra a week, and it is struggling, even with 54,000 staff
who are non-UK EU nationals. I hear from the financial
sector—my constituency has the third-highest level of
financial sector employment in the country—that 7,000 jobs
have already gone. Nobody voted to lose their job. I
hear from food importers, such as Brindisa today and
Mamuska! last week, that have seen costs rise since the
referendum by 15%. Those costs are being passed on to
consumers and customers. People did not vote to pay
more for a dinner out.

I hear from hotels. Although tourism has gone up
since the referendum, there are many non-UK EU
nationals working in our hotels, and there are simply
not enough unemployed, unskilled Londoners to fill
those jobs if we leave. I also hear from exporters in my
constituency, who worry about future tariffs and the
cost of things such as having to print a different label
for beer bottles that will go into the EU market. I hear
from people who are very worried about their economic
prospects—young professionals who supported the
Conservative party at the last election, but who are now
politically homeless.

The former Prime Minister John Major referred to
the likes of the former Secretary of State for Work and
Pensions, the right hon. Member for Chingford and
Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), as “bastards”.
The former Prime Minister could not have known that
his party would become a whole Government full of
bastards, who are absolutely causing economic damage
to my constituents and the whole country. At the risk of
offending my own Front Benchers as well as Government
Front Benchers, I say that my members campaigned
vigorously to remain in the European Union, and they
deserve a Front-Bench position that is not us signing up to the Government’s position, the Government’s timetable and the Government’s curtailing of debate. It is a disgrace.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but there is no need for a point of order. I say to the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) that he should not have used the word he used. He tried to wrap it up in a quote, but it was very unseemly, rather undignified and quite unnecessary. He should not have done it, and he should apologise.

Neil Coyle: Although I share the former Prime Minister’s sentiments, I apologise if it was unparliamentary language.

Mr Speaker: It was unparliamentary language, and the hon. Gentleman should not do it again. Has he finished his contribution?

Neil Coyle indicated assent.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful to him.

2.19 pm

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak in this historic debate. Although he is not in his place on the Government Benches, I want to pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), my constituency neighbour, for his wonderful speech. Boy, does he show us how it is all done.

This is a short Bill with huge ramifications for all of us for years to come. Like other Conservative Members, I campaigned for remain, but I accept the democratic vote, and I think we should allow the article 50 notice to be triggered. I agree with those who have said that if we do not do so, the crisis in our democracy that this Bill’s existence sets out is the beginning of the end, but may be the end of the beginning of the Brexit process.

2.22 pm

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) for trailing my speech in his remarks. I did not intend to speak yesterday or today, but as I listened to the speeches yesterday, it occurred to me that the House of Commons has quite clearly taken leave of its senses. That happens at times, but the difficulty and danger is that the public trust the House of Commons at moments such as this. They trusted the House of Commons on Iraq, when it had taken leave of its senses, and on the poll tax, when it had taken leave of its senses. On the poll tax, that was quickly corrected, but Iraq still lies in ruins. It is at times when the Opposition unite with the Government that the House particularly takes leave of its senses. If ever there was a time to beware, it is now.

I listened carefully to the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), who is not in his place. He gambled with his scare stories on the EU and on Scotland. On Scotland, he won; on the EU, he lost. This time, are we feeling lucky? A deal is in the gift not of the UK Government alone, but of 38 assemblies and regional parliaments across Europe, 27 sovereign nation Parliaments and one EU Parliament. We are but one in 67 voices, and we have to get that into our heads.

The Prime Minister has said that no deal is better than a bad deal, but no deal would mean, for farmers that meat had 22% tariffs, dairy had 36% tariffs and fish—this particularly affects my constituency—had 12% tariffs. People assume that the House of Commons knows what it is doing, but it does not. It is crossing its fingers and hoping for the best.

We are told time after time in the Chamber that people know what they voted for. Perhaps they knew what they were voting for—to leave the EU—but they...
certainly did not know the destination, and neither does this House. The International Trade Committee, of which I am Chair, does not know the destination, nor does the Department for International Trade. The Prime Minister does not know the destination. The pretence that because the people voted to leave the EU, they knew the destination is beyond facile. People who have appeared before my Committee from BASF, Manchester Airports Group, the CBI, the National Farmers Union, Dairy UK, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, Tech City UK and the Law Society do not know the destination for the UK. The UK is on a precipice.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is speaking as though that is a great perception. Has he ever come across a negotiation between two parties in which it was possible to predict the outcome in advance?

Mr MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman makes precisely my point, and I am grateful to him for doing so. He may be able to tell me how many member states of the United Nations are not in a regional trade agreement.

Anybody? [Interruption] / The hon. Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) knows: he was at my Committee session today. There are only six member states of the United Nations that are not in a regional trade agreement.

Kevin Brennan: Name them.

Mr MacNeil: I will. They are Mauritania, Palau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan and East Timor, and soon to join this illustrious group is the United Kingdom. This is playing fast and loose; it is “Cross your fingers and hope it works out for the best.” The UK will find itself, for the first time since 1960, not in a free trade agreement. It joined the European Free Trade Association, the original free trade agreement, in 1960, and that is how it has been since then. I have been told by the Library that every member of the OECD is in a regional trade agreement, and even North Korea signed up to one in 1988. The UK is boldly going where even North Korea fails to go.

If that does not give Members pause for thought, what will? As they head over the edge of the cliff, they will take their constituents and the poorest people of society with them. Let us remember who paid for the bankers: the poorest in society. Who will pay for this society with them. Let us remember who paid for the bankers: the poorest in society. Who will pay for this society with them. Let us remember who paid for the bankers: the poorest in society.

2.27 pm

Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): I am very much looking forward to voting tonight and to the debates on universities, education, immigration and the economy that will take place in the Chamber during the next two years. I truly feel that, as a result of this referendum, we as MPs and Parliament as an entity are closer to the people now than we have ever been. I believe that they will watch those debates and follow what we are talking about. We will be responding to a mandate that has been given to us by the people. I, for one, am looking forward to the vote tonight.

I cannot speak in this debate without responding to the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), because he called for a second referendum. Does anybody remember the hon. Gentleman calling for a referendum in 2010? His party leaflets and posters said:

“It’s time for a real referendum”.

They also called for a referendum on the alternative vote in 2011. They lost that referendum, and they lost the most recent referendum. They had the best of three, and it is time for them to stop calling for referendums.

The hon. Gentleman spoke with passion, in the same way that he spoke with passion about tuition fees. I must just say that, as we are speaking in the Chamber, the news is breaking that some Liberal Democrat Members are going to abstain, some are going to vote for and some are going to vote against. He has divided his party of only nine MPs in a far more efficient manner than the Labour party. Well done—what an achievement with nine MPs.

That brings me to the Labour party. I have a better example than the one used by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth). In 2005, 9.5 million people voted for Mr Blair to lead a Labour Government, but 17.2 million voted against. More people voted for Brexit than voted for the Labour party to be in government in 2005. The point is this: some Opposition Members who served as Ministers in that Government and voted for the referendum are going to vote against the result and the mandate given to them by the people. That is slightly rich coming from Members who served as Ministers in a Government that achieved only 9 million votes. Did anybody call for a second referendum then? No. Did anybody refer to the rule of law then? No, of course not, because the people of this country respect a democratic vote.

I apologise for my tone, Mr Speaker, but it was with some dismay that I woke this morning to the news that a former Prime Minister had tried to skew and influence the outcome of the referendum by attempting to have the editor of the Daily Mail removed from his post. I say this with a degree of shame: a leader of my party allegedly attempted to manipulate and distort the freedom of the press—not the editor of The Guardian, the editor of the Daily Mirror or a paper that subscribed to his world view, but the editor of the Daily Mail. I find that so distressing, because it brings into relief the way that those who could did wield their power to try to achieve the result they wanted: from The Guardian’s and the
IMF’s fantasy doom-and-gloom projections, to Mr Carney’s inaccurate forecasts and Obama’s back-of-the-queue threat.

I caution those thinking of voting against the Bill tonight to be careful what they wish for and to be careful of wishing for second referendums. I think the people—advocates of free speech, a free press and a powerful democracy—would view their wishes dimly.

2.31 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): George Orwell said:

“In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

I would like to try to tell some truths in the brief time I have.

Every Prime Minister in my political lifetime has fostered the elitism that bit back in the referendum. Those leaders held that the European project was far too precious to share with our people. They failed to build a British vision for a reformed EU, and they failed to build a credible immigration policy with the public. They fed the beast that roared last June and we all bear some responsibility for that.

Fear of the hard right in the Conservative party has led two Prime Ministers to gamble recklessly with the future of our country. One called a referendum he never thought he would lose; the other has been pushed into triggering exit before even thinking through how it will actually happen. Weakness and incompetence then, weakness and incompetence now. One lesson we should all learn is that never again should a complex economic and international issue be reduced to an “X Factor”-style plebiscite.

Last week, embarrassingly, the British Government were caught acting unconstitutionally by the Supreme Court when trying to use a Trumpian style Executive order to bypass Parliament on exit. The Government’s fear of Parliament, even one whose agenda it controls, led to wasted months fighting a legal action when every MP could have been put to work helping to craft the best exit deal for the UK; time the Prime Minister could have used to tour the capitals of Europe to work out a position and build the goodwill we will need to get us a good deal. The Government are doing the bare minimum they think they can get away with, without being in contempt of court. They do this by bringing this derisory and undernourished Bill before Parliament. No apology. No White Paper. No plan for leaving the EU. Today, we are meant to meekly aid and abet this incompetence, and buckle to the dog whistle threat that if MPs dare to do their job and believe in parliamentary sovereignty the wrath of the social media mob and the Conservative press will be unleashed against us. I ask my colleagues to show some strength today. This day will not be repeated. This is the moment that, in 10 years’ time, they will think about what they chose to do.

We are not voting on in or out. That is history. That has been decided. We are voting on whether we believe that the Government are ready to trigger article 50, when clearly they are not. The emperor has no White Paper. Let us take heart from the judges who stood firm in doing their duty despite the “enemies of the people”

media headlines. Let us take heart from Gina Miller and individual citizens who have held the Government to account, acting where this supine Parliament feared to even seek legal clarification of its own rights before the courts.

Yes, we should vote for a Bill authorising exit from the European Union, but we should do that when we have done our duty on due diligence: when we and our constituents know what the Government have planned, which of the thousands of exit permutations they are going for, and how they want to meaningfully involve Parliament. The Bill is not about ignoring the referendum result, it is about realising it and ensuring that our whole democracy works to secure the best deal possible: unifying our nation, not glorifying in its division into winners and losers.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When my hon. Friend spoke about a White Paper and a date of publication, the Minister said, from a sedentary position on the Government Front Bench, that the White Paper would be published tomorrow. Is that news for the House?

Mr Speaker: It is not news for the House in the sense, if memory serves me correctly, that the Prime Minister indicated as much in the course of Prime Minister’s questions.

Chris Bryant I can’t have been listening.

Mr Speaker: If there is one thing I know about the hon. Gentleman, it is that he is invariably listening to his own wisdom. We are grateful to him for that.

2.36 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Parliament, since its beginning, has been the place where elected Britons debate and make the decisions that affect our country’s future, so it is only right that tonight this House will vote to trigger article 50. I was one of the 544 who voted for the referendum to give our people a choice on our future, so it would be entirely inconsistent to reject the verdict of that referendum, even if it is at odds with my own view. I voted and campaigned for the UK to remain in the EU, and I was disappointed by the result. Some 71% of my constituents voted to remain. In the past week, I have received literally hundreds of letters telling me that I should represent them tonight and vote against the Government. As much as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), I too am a defender of democracy. I voted knowing full well that if leave won the debate then that is what would happen. Tonight, therefore, I will be in the Lobby voting to trigger article 50.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Since September, the Exiting the European Union Committee has been established, there have been 26 debates and seven statements relating to the EU and our exit from it. Does my hon. Friend agree that those statistics highlight the many hours of debate available to all Members, contrary to what some might suggest, and that it is time we respect the majority of the public and support the British people tonight?
Stephen Hammond: I do not know if my hon. Friend heard me, but I said that I would certainly be respecting the result of the referendum. We have had those debates in Parliament, but what is crucial is where we go from here. What the people did not say to us in the referendum was how, or on what terms, we would leave. I believe that the best way to decide those issues, and to mitigate the impact of uncertainty, is for the Government to keep Parliament updated as much as possible throughout the negotiations and allow this House to have a meaningful input on those negotiations. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), I absolutely welcome the publication of the White Paper tomorrow. I hope the Bill will build on the Prime Minister’s speech and create some certainty.

I believe it is also in the Government’s best interests to have the fullest possible involvement of Parliament. I believe that that will help our negotiating position. Our negotiations will carry much greater weight with the EU 27 if it is clear that our negotiating stance has the backing of this House. Among all the talk of sovereignty and the hope of trade deals, we must not forget the effect of this process on individuals—our constituents. Many of the people who live in Wimbledon are EU citizens. I hope that the Government will find a very early resolution to guarantee the rights of those people who may not be British citizens. Many of them are my constituents.

I have said several times, in the debates to which the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) referred, that uncertainty is a key concern for industry and financial services. The financial services sector is vital for London’s success. It employs 2 million people and is our biggest tax generating sector—I do not need to go on. We should therefore strive for a deal that has financial services at its heart, including equivalence and mutual recognition. Equally, as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) said, the negotiations will be complex, so we need to guarantee certainty through a proper transitional process where everybody can adjust to the new rules without sudden shock. That can be achieved, and I hope the Front-Bench team will clarify that it is at the heart of their ambitions.

The Bill gives the UK the ability to trigger article 50, and almost everybody in the Chamber will vote for it tonight. I am pleased that the Prime Minister has promised Parliament a vote on the final deal, but it needs to be clarified at what stage in the process that vote will take place and that all information will be given to Parliament. It also needs to be clear that Parliament will be able to vote if the Government seek to withdraw from the EU without a deal. I hope that the Secretary of State will commit, if the Government believe that no deal is achievable, to coming back to Parliament with all the options placed before us. If the vote is after the agreement of the treaty but prior to ratification, as is the current legal position, it will probably be too late and therefore meaningless.

In my view, therefore, the vote must occur before the Government conclude the agreement. If anyone has read article 50, they will know that that is what will happen in the European Parliament. Are we suggesting that the European Parliament should be more sovereign than this Parliament? I think not. If the deed needs the consent of the European Parliament, it should need the consent of this Parliament as well. As Churchill said of the Battle of Britain, the Bill is the end of the beginning, but it also gives the House the chance to show our constituents that we can come together, heal divisions and find the best deal for this country.

2.41 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): As Members, we make difficult decisions every day. Some of them are of local significance and others take on national significance. The only reason we have the ability to make these decisions in the House is that our local constituents gave us their consent and voted for us at the general election. The point has been made to me that we are not delegates, but when all my neighbours, local business people, local pharmacists, local health professionals and local political allies and, indeed, opponents are telling me to take a stand, I cannot help but feel that this is the right course of action. I did not want to resign from my Front-Bench role. I know it was not a great office of state, but it was an important role that allowed me to hold the Government to account over their aspirations for social mobility.

Today, we are debating whether to trigger article 50 and give the Prime Minister permission to exit the EU. I feel that I would be abandoning my duty to my constituents, who have overwhelmingly and unwaveringly made the point that they do not want to leave the EU—75% voted to remain—if I voted for the Bill. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) made the point powerfully from the Dispatch Box yesterday that this decision has not been easy. It has been in a haze of conflicting emotions that the Labour party has sought to decide what to do, but for me there are two main reasons for voting against the Bill.

The first concerns the future of the 17,000 EU nationals living in my constituency. Some people have accused me of taking this stand only to ensure my re-election at the next election, but those EU nationals cannot vote for me anyway. I am taking this stand because in Hampstead and Kilburn we do not wince when we hear people speaking a different language on public transport; we do not scapegoat others for the pressures on our health system, criminal justice system and housing just because they do not look like us or sound like us; and we do not indulge in baseless theories that our country is at breaking point. Rather, we celebrate these EU nationals—they have as much right to be here as the generations before them.

The second reason I will be voting against the Bill concerns the lack of access to the single market, which will affect three main groups in my constituency. The first are the self-employed, who have argued that they need tariff-free trade with the EU. The second are those in the scientific and technical industries. In the last 10 years, the scientific funding from EU sources has increased by 73%, and at this point their projects are in jeopardy. The third group are those in the financial services and insurance sectors, who have no clarity over the future of their passporting rights.

These are the reasons why in good conscience I cannot vote for the Bill. To quote my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), this is not
Tulip Siddiq] how we do things in the House. We need clarity. We need to see the economic impact of this decision. In good conscience and for the sake of my constituents, whether they can vote for me or not, I will not be voting for the Bill today.

2.45 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), who expressed herself with clarity and passion, and though I will not be in the Lobby with her this evening, I very much share many of the sentiments she has expressed.

In 1519, Hernán Cortés arrived in the new world, and the first thing he did was to burn the ships that had brought him there. Pointing up the beach, he told his astonished crew that since retreat to Europe was no longer an option, the only way forward was up the beach, to the opportunities he saw in the new world. Britain now stands on the brink of its Cortés moment. When article 50 is triggered, there will be no way back. Brexit Britain must of course broker the best possible deal it can with the EU, but our future long term will depend just as much on our ability to operate freely and globally.

Meanwhile in Europe, Mr Tusk this week told us that “assertive and spectacular steps” were needed to “revive the aspiration to raise European integration to the next level”.

Whose aspirations? They are plainly not those of the British public. Mr Tusk, however, has done moderates like me—people who admit the risks as well as the benefits from Brexit—a real service. His remarkable candour and his false prescription have explained more eloquently than I ever could why it was that the British public voted to leave on 23 June.

We have had some truly excellent contributions today and yesterday, and I pay tribute to hon. Members who supported remain in the referendum campaign, and I did so because I believed it was in the interests of the country and the constituency I represent. I thought that the economic arguments advanced by the remain campaign would, in the end, succeed, but that was not the case. In the end, I did not ask the people for their views in order not to listen to what they said.

I accept that a vote for this Bill only opens the exit door, but ultimately it is likely to mean that, as a result, we leave the EU. In the end, I will listen to my constituents and their views, because my constituency voted overwhelmingly to leave. The reason my constituents gave me on the doorstep was that many of them felt left behind by economic progress over a number of decades; they felt they were not in control of their lives; they felt they were with South Korea, Mexico and South Africa. Britain pooled its ability to do deals with the EU in the mistaken belief that Brussels would undertake the task on its behalf. Clearly, it was asleep on watch. Now is the time for Britain to rediscover its historical engagement with global markets, and I hope that in the years ahead Ministers will do just that. We have seen the bizarre spectacle of Germany making more money from exporting coffee than the developing countries that grow coffee—

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Mr Betts.

2.49 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the shadow Brexit Secretary, said at the beginning of the debate, this is very difficult for many of us on the Opposition side of the Chamber. I strongly supported remain in the referendum campaign, and I do so because I believed it was in the interests of the country and the constituency I represent. I thought that the economic arguments advanced by the remain campaign would, in the end, succeed, but that was not the case. In the end, I did not ask the people for their views in order not to listen to what they said.

I accept that a vote for this Bill only opens the exit door, but ultimately it is likely to mean that, as a result, we leave the EU. In the end, I will listen to my constituents and their views, because my constituency voted overwhelmingly to leave. The reason my constituents gave me on the doorstep was that many of them felt left behind by economic progress over a number of decades; they felt they were not in control of their lives; they felt that we, the political class as their representatives, were not listening to them. One of the fundamental issues of concern related to unrestricted immigration from the EU. That is the honest information that they gave to me, which I am relaying to the House.

People who are not racists still have genuine concerns about the impact on their public services and their jobs, pay and conditions from that unrestricted immigration. Those concerns were expressed to me by people from different ethnic backgrounds—people from the Pakistani, Kashmiri, Bangladeshi and Somali communities, as well white British residents. I feel that if we now fail to listen to those genuinely held concerns, the disillusionment with politicians and politics will simply grow, and we risk driving those people into the arms of the racists, who actually do want to put forward a completely different agenda.

At the same time I recognise that although I will vote for the Bill, it is still important for Sheffield’s industry to have free access to EU markets. My constituents do not want to pay tariffs on imports from the EU; they want assurances that the food they eat in the future will be safe, as it is now; they want to see co-operation on environmental matters, on defence, on security and on science and research; and they want to keep the same employment rights and protections as they now enjoy. They do not want to see a race to the bottom to reduce taxation on corporate matters so that we can compete with offshore tax havens elsewhere.

In the end, if we are to keep those issues on the agenda, it is important that Parliament is regularly updated on progress on the discussions, and this Parliament...
must have a vote on the final outcome, just as the European Parliament will. I still have concerns about voting for the Bill—concerns that I felt when I argued strongly for remain in the referendum. In the end, though, I am more concerned about the damage to democracy if I do not vote for the Bill.

2.53 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): I am not one to brag, but I humbly suggest that I know something about how to negotiate in Europe. My personal best was what the civil service calls “a three-shirter”—three days and two nights of continuous negotiation. I wish my right hon. and hon. Friends well as they enter this process, and I ask them to ignore all those who suggest that they might like to share with us and the world every single red line and every single negotiating nuance, because nothing would be likely to secure a worse deal for this House and this country.

I have to break it gently to some Members and some of the people deluging our in-boxes that most people out there are not absolutely fascinated by the politics of Brexit, but are rooted in the realities of it. This is about the small family farming business in the Berkshire downs concerned about what Brexit means for them; the life sciences company in Newbury that wants to sell its world-beating products to health services in Europe; and companies that will be part of consortia or supply chains, some of which will be in, some of which will be outside, the European Union, and how it will work for them. It is about people who want to study abroad and people who are concerned about the future of our environment.

The experience of the referendum campaign was, for me, a miserable one. It was a new low in the political discourse of the nation, and I put the blame for that on both sides. As the dust settles, I, like many in the House, have a choice—whether to play the role of some sort of parliamentary insurgent, finding devious mechanisms with which to do down the views taken by the public in an open and fair referendum; or whether to represent the views of our constituents, the vast majority of them, who want us to act in their best interests and who understand that the Government face a heavy burden as they seek to achieve an orderly exit.

One notable voice is absent from our debates in these historic proceedings—that of my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles). He wrote an article, difficult though it must have been for him in the middle of his treatment for cancer, that I felt when I argued strongly for remain in the referendum. In the end, though, I am more concerned about the damage to democracy if I do not vote for the Bill.

2.56 pm

Jim Dowd (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I shall be as brief as I can. It is slightly depressing when, because of collusion between the Front Benchers, the result is, as everybody knows, a foregone conclusion. Eric Forth, whom many of us will remember, always used to say that when the Front Benchers agree with each other, it is time for the House to be at its most active in examining precisely what that alliance means.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) mentioned the fact that yesterday my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) said this is a very difficult issue for the Labour party—and indeed it is. I think it is a very difficult issue for every Member, presenting us with a paradox in knowing what is the right thing to do. Some say the result of the referendum means that supporting the Bill is the right thing to do, while others disagree, saying that their duty to their constituents transcends even party loyalties.

Let me make my position perfectly clear. I am in a very fortunate position. As I told the Prime Minister during her statement on the Monday after the referendum, on 27 June, my constituents voted by about 2:1 to remain in the European Union. As I said then, I always regard my prime responsibility to be towards my constituents.

My constituents have written to me in unprecedented numbers—I am sure that most Members will have had more contact with, and information from, constituents over this issue than just about any other; it certainly applies to me in my 25 years in this place urging me to support the constituency’s vote. I will support their objection to leaving the European Union, and I will vote against Second Reading tonight. I will vote for the SNP amendment and against the programme motion—and I will continue to do so. I say to my Front-Bench team that I will be active next week, when the Bill is in Committee. I will seek to amend it, but I will vote against Third Reading as well. I will not be complicit in something that I know and feel to be wrong, and to be against the best interests not just of my constituents or this city, of which my constituency is a small part, but of the whole country and all its people. Anything else—whatever negotiations take place, whatever agreements are made will be sub-optimal. Reform of the European Union, staying in the European Union and leading the campaign of reform was in the best interests of the British people, and I will do nothing now to undermine their position.

People have mentioned the status of European Union citizens in this country. I am sure that the Prime Minister is in earnest, and is being genuine, when she says that she wants to secure early agreement on reciprocal arrangements in Europe for British nationals living in EU countries. I say, as do others, that the answer is in her own hands. She can reassure EU nationals living...
in this country now by saying that their future, and that of their families, is secure. She can then go, quite rightly, to the chambers and the councils of Europe, and say, “We demand the same from you.” [HON. MEMBERS: “What if they say no?”] There is only one reason why I would ever turn my back on the European Union and agree that we should leave. I would only do that if members of the EU denied British citizens the right that we can give to EU nationals.

**Kevin Brennan:** Conservative Members shouted “What if they say no?” Surely that is the point. Is the Prime Minister seriously suggesting that if the other countries said no, she would ask the European Union citizens who are currently resident in this country to leave?

**Jim Dowd:** That is indeed precisely the point. We can do that, and we can do it now.

The reason UKIP has so little traction in London, for example, is that most Londoners, within a generation or two, are immigrants themselves—not necessarily from overseas, but from other parts of the United Kingdom: from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the north or the south-west. The idea of “the other” is nothing new to Londoners. I agree with what Members have said about the pace of social change. People need to feel that they are in control of it, that there is a role for them, and that they understand the nature of the change that is being effected.

I will vote as I have indicated because I believe it to be right. That might, in the fullness of time, prove to be a mistake on my part, but I nevertheless believe it to be right. What worries and depresses me about today’s proceedings is that I fear that many Members will vote tonight for something that they know is not right, because it is expedient for them to do so. I shall not join those ranks. I shall do whatever I can to ensure that the deal that will inevitably follow is the best it can possibly be, but I will not be complicit in undermining the position of the British people.

3.2 pm

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): For centuries Dover has had an important role as the gateway and guardian of the kingdom. During the referendum campaign, I was concerned about the potential impact on border security and cross-border cooperation and the potential impact on trade, because Dover is, in a very real sense, on the front line. I set out those concerns to my constituents, as well as my concerns about the medium-term risks to the economy that the former Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), alluded to earlier.

The referendum followed a long and thorough debate. Whatever Members may think of its quality, there was a proper debate. People knew what they were voting for, and they made a clear decision. I, for one, will vote to respect the result.

The leader of the Liberal Democrats seems to think that it is all like “Hotel California”: you can check out, but you can never leave. I do not think that that is the right approach. Members of the Scottish National party think that there should be multiple referendums until one of them possibly produces the right result, but given their track record—losing the referendum on the alternative vote, losing the independence referendum and losing the European Union referendum—they are not doing too well. They might start to think that perhaps they ought to accept and respect a referendum result. I shall respect this result.

We need to be very clear about the red lines that we were given by the British people. My constituents have made very clear that, No. 1, there must be an end to unchecked EU migration, and, No. 2, there must be no more billions for bloated Brussels bureaucrats. That plainly indicates that we must leave the single market, and that if we want to do unfettered trade deals with the rest of the world, we must leave the customs union.

I make no bones about the fact that there will be a real impact on Dover, which is why I am working hard to make this a success. I have put together proposals on how we can restore border controls at Dover effectively, and I have convened a group to discuss how we can manage customs duties if we leave the European Union in two years, and how we can be ready on day one.

It is the job of the House, and the job of each and every one of its Members, not just to respect the result but to make it work for the good of the British people. We cannot be here hoping for doom, hoping for things to go wrong. We need to recognise that if things do go wrong, that will have an impact on the people whom we serve and represent. They will lose their jobs; they will lose their homes; they will be less well off. That is why I am making every effort to make this work, and why I implore everyone in the House to make it work and make a success of it. We must respect that we shall have to leave the single market, recognise that we shall have to leave the customs union, and recognise that we shall have to be ready on day one.

We also need to recognise that there may not be a deal. We should work tirelessly, in good faith, for a deal, but it may be that no deal is immediately forthcoming—again, for the reason set out by my right hon. Friend for Tatton: that the mindset of our European colleagues is not currently conducive to a deal. That is why we must be ready on day one, and we must be ready for the fact that the EU may not wish to do a deal at that time. We should also bear it in mind that, as any deal-maker or negotiator will tell you, the best way to land a deal is to be prepared for no deal to take place. That is why we need to be ready for border controls, ready for customs duties, and ready for trade with the whole wide world, as well as being ready to do a positive deal and have positive engagement with the European Union in the years to come.

I implore the House to think and act constructively, to respect the result, and to look to the future of this nation believing that the best days are yet to come.

3.6 pm

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I arrived in the House with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Jim Dowd) 25 years ago. I am delighted to be sitting on the Bench with him today, and I am delighted to say that I agree with every word he said—which gives me four minutes in which to talk about other things.
President Donald made a very important statement yesterday—President Donald Tusk, that is. Donald Tusk pointed to the threats that face Europe: the threats from Russia, the threats posed by climate change, and the threats from across the Atlantic, from the other Donald. I suspect that if this situation had arisen before the referendum, we might have seen a different result. More and more people in this country are realising that we need our European partnership, and that this is not the time to be leaving the co-operation of European foreign and security policy, not the time to be leaving the European Defence Agency, and not the time to be leaving that co-operation with our European partners.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and he is arguing with passion, but neither is it the time to replay the arguments of the referendum. The British public have spoken, and now it is down to us to act on their views and vote with the Government this evening.

Mike Gapes: I am not replaying the arguments. I am dealing with realities. It is interesting to note that, at the last general election in 2015, the hon. Gentleman may have stood on a manifesto in which his party said yes to the single market. It also said that it would hold a referendum: it had a mandate to do that. But as the former Europe Minister, the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), said in June 2015:

“The referendum is advisory, as was the case for both the 1975 referendum on Europe and the Scottish independence vote last year.”—[Official Report, 16 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 231.]

This Parliament must decide how, when and if the referendum should be implemented. The problem with the position that is being taken by both Front Benches is that triggering article 50 early will place us on an escalator travelling in one direction, with no ability to get off. A legal process is taking place in the Irish courts at this moment about whether—about the possibilities, the implications—article 50 is reversible. We do not know the judgment yet. Why on earth are we triggering before we know the legal position on article 50? Why have our Government decided to go for the hardest possible leaving of the EU—no customs union, no Euratom, problems for Gibraltar, and problems for the Northern Ireland peace process and the Good Friday agreement? All those things have been done before we know whether we could decide in a year’s time, or perhaps in two years’ time, before this process is complete.

We need not be on this escalator. We need a means to stop this process, and that is why we need clarity before we start triggering it. We did not need to trigger it in March this year; we could have waited. This did not need to be done before the French election and the German election.

The reality is that the ratification process requires decisions in 27 national Parliaments, in the regional Parliaments of Wallonia and elsewhere in Belgium, and in the European Parliament. If we have that process, we will have a narrow window of opportunity—perhaps just about a year from the autumn of this year to the autumn of 2018—and then there will have to be a ratification process. We will not get a good agreement. We could be in the disastrous position of going off the cliff with no agreement at all—with the terrible economic consequences of World Trade Organisation terms only. That would be an unmitigated disaster for my constituents and for the country.

I am doing what the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) talked about yesterday: I am voting as Members of Parliament should—I am following my own judgment and I am listening to my constituents and to the country.

Kevin Brennan: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mike Gapes: No, I have to conclude.

I will not be voting to trigger article 50 at any stage.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I cast my personal vote for remain in the referendum. I had, and have, concerns about the security implications of leaving the EU. I have always been opposed to an EU army, and I wonder whether one may come about without us there to veto it. Many of the concerns I had about security issues across Europe have still not even been addressed or answered. I also had concerns about the inflationary effects of leaving, and some of those are kicking in, but I note that inflation has not reached the 2% level that the Bank of England aims for.

I surprised many of my colleagues, and especially those I sat with on the European Scrutiny Committee, by voting to remain, because they recognised that I never had any truck with the federalisation of Europe—the political side of Europe. I felt that was wrong and that it impinged too far on the work of this Parliament. Indeed, many people in my constituency said to me, “We joined a common market. We didn’t join an EU.”

Even though my personal vote was for remain, there was one thing I always passionately felt and fully supported. I do not class myself particularly as one of the hard right wingers of the Conservative party—one of those whom Opposition Members and those who are against this policy have painted as the only reason why the former Prime Minister was forced into a referendum. I passionately believed that there had to be a referendum, because people were never given their say on the European Union. They were given their say on the common market, and they said they wanted to be in it, but they were never given their say on the European Union.

What has been clear since the result of the referendum is that the EU has not taken seriously any of the lessons, in terms of why people in this country moved against it. I have to say that I would tomorrow vote to leave. We had an opportunity to negotiate with the European Union and work on some of the issues that were a problem for people in this country, but the European Union ignored our former Prime Minister, David Cameron; it did not think our country would vote to leave. I see the same issues now in the comments of the Maltese Prime Minister and of Donald Tusk, and there are real warnings on the horizon for such people in some of the elections taking place across Europe. This is an organisation that needs to reform; if it does not, I fear for where it will go.

Above all, the referendum was an exercise in democracy. It would be folly in the extreme for the other place, where politicians may be dominated by parties that have been diminished in the elected House, to try to go
against the will of this House. It would be a suicide bid by the other place if it tried to amend or disrupt the will of this House. That is a warning that I give. I am on the record as wanting Lords reform. We cannot get Lords reform if the public are not behind us, but believe me, they will be right behind us if the Lords try to stop the will of this House over the next few weeks. I send that as a friendly warning that the Lords must take note of what this House says, because what this referendum has been about, above all else, is democracy: people saying they did not want to be controlled by unelected bodies in Europe.

People had their choice, and they expect us to action that choice. The result may not have been the one I voted for, but I am a democrat. Above all, I respect the ballot box and the outcome of the ballot box, and this House must respect the outcome of the ballot box, too.

3.15 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): We as a Parliament and a democracy have not done that well by the people who elected us. We took the country into a referendum that had nothing to do with the best interests of Britain and everything to do with attempting to heal deep divisions in the Conservative party. Labour Members did not oppose the referendum, because we did not wish to appear not to trust the voters, and I have to admit that we had some divisions of our own. However, all of us failed to set the rules for the referendum. We did not impose a super-majority, and we did not have a requirement for a road map showing the implications of a leave or a remain vote and the cost implications of the two alternatives. Then came the shockingly irresponsible referendum campaign, which was full of lies, misinformation, dog-whistle politics, fear and xenophobia.

When the people of Bridgend voted by a majority to leave the EU, they did so for a variety of reasons. They wanted the money back that the battle bus told them was going to Europe while, apparently, nothing came back to the UK, and they wanted it spent on the NHS. They are not going to get it. They wanted control of immigration and spending. They wanted an end to austerity, and they wanted to wipe the smug look off the faces of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor—well, they achieved that one.

On the doorstep, people did not tell me they would be happy to lose their workers’ rights, to lose their jobs, to have lower standards of living or goods, or to have reduced opportunities for their children and grandchildren. Nor did they talk about wanting to leave the single market or the customs union, or to pursue a bold and ambitious free trade agreement. Somehow, we as politicians were to square the circle: stop immigration, get our money back and become more affluent. I cannot keep on voting for a process that gives the people of Bridgend no assurance of a secure future for them and their children. I will not be voting to trigger article 50.

Kevin Brennan: I have taken the unusual step of listening to the debate, rather than contributing to it. Having listened for many hours over the last two days, I will join my hon. Friend in voting against Second Reading this evening.

Mrs Moon: I welcome that information, because my hon. Friend is someone whose integrity and contributions in debates I always take note of, and I am deeply pleased that he will be joining me in the Lobby.

We are voting today, with the White Paper promised for tomorrow: it was not in place before this debate. We have no risk assessment, no financial assessment and a total lack of clarity on the Government’s policy. We have nothing bar the thin promise of the sunlit uplands—this is not in the Prime Minister’s gift anyway—of a passporting and tariff-free agreement that means that costs will not rise for financial services, or for my Ford engines plant and for Tata Steel next door in Aberavon, both of which send over two thirds of their output into Europe.

I intend to keep voting no until I see a position that is the best we can obtain for this country. I am ashamed at the way we have abandoned EU citizens and their families, who give their lives, their love and their settled future to the UK. I have a wonderful German daughter-in-law and an extended German family. I have many friends who are MPs across Europe and members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and who are deeply saddened by the words and threats emanating from the UK Government.

I accept the outcome of the referendum. We are leaving the European Union, but that does not mean that I am willing to vote for the Conservative party to lead this country into a treacherous, uncertain future. There is a Gramsci quote that, depending on the translation, says that the old order is dying, the new one is struggling to be born, and in the interregnum monsters are abroad. They most certainly are. We are voting before we know the outcome of three European elections that will influence the deal we finally face. And then there is Trump’s America. Can we trust any part of our economic security to an America that has just had Trump’s inauguration speech: support for torture, a ban on Muslims entering the US, anti-climate-change rhetoric, the clear statement of “America first”, and the commitment to end trade agreements that are not in America’s best interests?

I am voting as I am particularly because I do not trust this Government taking me to the right place. I trust the British people; I do not trust this Government.

3.20 pm

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I am in an easy position: I have an easy decision to make—in fact I have no decision to make. I campaigned and voted for Brexit, as did my constituency and the United Kingdom, so I am not torn on what to do this evening. However I will not demand that hon. Members vote a certain way, or even suggest how they should vote, because each one of us has a unique combination of local constituency pressures, and I cannot look into the heart of other Members of this House to see where those pressures sit. So I will not call on anyone to vote one way or another. Instead, I will reflect on the implications of the Brexit vote for all of us, irrespective of our political position and how we choose to vote in the Divisions this evening and in Committee next week.

Brexit provides us with an opportunity, but it also exerts upon us an external discipline; discipline guides our actions and decisions, and also encourages us to do what is difficult but right. The discipline that Brexit...
imposes on us is to listen very carefully to people in Britain who clearly feel that they have not been listened to up until this point. It is very easy for us to project our own prejudices on to why people voted the way they did, and we all do it. We have seen those who voted for Brexit projecting base motivations on to those who will vote in alignment with their constituents, but we would be wrong to do that. However, we also have to understand why some communities in Britain are concerned about their standard of living, migration and globalisation, and we have to respond to those concerns. Also, we Government Members have to understand that at some point we will need to explain why we are, perhaps, prioritising certain markets and business sectors in our negotiations above others. We will need to explain the value that international migration brings to the British economy, and perhaps why immigration will not suddenly stop overnight, the day after we leave the EU.

David Rutley: I thank my hon. Friend for the speech he is making, and his important points on the next steps. Does he agree that the modern industrial strategy that is now being set out will be vital in paving the way for our economy in a post-Brexit world?

James Cleverly: It is incredibly important that the Government lay out a pathway for moving forwards that explains to many people in Britain how a global economy can work for not just the greater good, but their individual good.

Ultimately, when Members of this House state that the British people need to have a say, they are absolutely right, but they should remember that Brexit is the start of an ongoing existence, not a discrete process, and that the deal that the Prime Minister and Ministers negotiate will be the deal that is put to the British people at the 2020 general election. Members from other parties might feel that they have a better version of a relationship with Europe. They might prefer a version that prioritises market access over border control. That is not necessarily a position that I would agree with, but it is none the less a legitimate position. If they wish to prioritise membership of the customs union over our ability to strike independent free trade deals, that, again, would not be a position that I would agree with, but it is none the less a legitimate position.

Parliamentary sovereignty means that those alternative versions of Brexit—a Scottish National party Brexit, a Liberal Democrat Brexit or a Labour Brexit—can be put before the British people in the lead-up to the 2020 general election, and those hypotheses can be tested in the ultimate crucible of the British democratic system. If their versions of Brexit are seen to be more palatable than the Government’s version, we will know, because Members will be returned here in proportion to how palatable or otherwise those various versions of Brexit are. That is how British democracy should work, and how it has been prevented from working up until now, which is why I will not just vote to trigger article 50 this evening and in future Divisions, but will do so passionately and happily—because it means that for the first time in 40 years, the way British parliamentary democracy is meant to work will be the way it is able to work. But I will not ask or force others to vote with me.

3.26 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): My constituency voted to remain. My country voted to leave. My conscience continues to believe that the country’s interests are best served within the EU. I believe that my job is to act in accordance with my conscience, in the interests of my constituents, within the parliamentary democracy I am proud to uphold. I believe that my constituents’ trust and belief in parliamentary democracy is the greatest security our country has against the rise of fascistic leaders and the destruction of our national value system. So it would be wrong to reject the result of the referendum. Newcastle is part of a nation, and that which unites us is greater than that which divides us. For that reason, I will vote for the Second Reading of this Bill.

But there is a “but”, and there was always going to be. This Government are attempting a constitutional land grab. The referendum was about the will of the people, not the will of a Prime Minister who is not even elected. Some 52% voted to leave the European Union but they did not vote to leave the single market, and they did not vote to leave the customs union.

The north-east is the only region in the country to export more than it imports, and more than half of that goes to the European Union. It is estimated that 160,000 jobs are directly linked to our membership of the single market, while our great universities received £155 million in EU funds in the current funding cycle alone.

When I talk to businesses, they are incandescent that Tories are rejecting the greatest free trade alliance on the planet. I can also tell the House that, having negotiated joint ventures, regulatory undertakings and multi-million pound contracts across three continents, I have never come across a negotiating position as inept as the one being adopted by this Government: “Give us what we want or we’ll stuff up your economy.” I have zero confidence in their negotiating trade deals, in which Parliament will have no say. They will sell our socioeconomic birthright for a mess of right-wing pottage. When the Chancellor talks of changing our economic model, he means turning the UK into a low-wage, low-skilled tax haven with little or no welfare support.

More than a third of children in Newcastle live in poverty, and one in five of my constituents claim benefits. North-east workers are, on average, almost £4,000 a year worse off than they were 10 years ago. Am I going to vote for a Trumpian, dystopian, “alt-right” free market future for them? Absolutely not. Already, constituents are asking me questions I never expected to hear. They are asking whether they could be deported to the European Union. They want to know just how racist an insult has to be before they should complain. And they are asking whether there will be a nuclear war, and which side we would be on. The Government need to accept amendments to the Bill that will ensure that our values, our socioeconomic model and our membership of the single market are safeguarded; otherwise, democracy for my constituents, and my conscience will

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but in a bid to accommodate all would-be contributors, I shall have to reduce the time limit on Back-Bench speeches to three minutes with immediate effect.

3.30 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): It is a privilege to take part in the debate on this historic Bill, which is
designed simply to start a process. A number of hon. and right hon. Members have signed amendments to the Bill, and I say to them that there will be plenty of time over the next two years to debate aspects of European Union legislation when we introduce the great repeal Bill. To those who feel that now is the time to begin discussing our terms of membership or to cling to certain aspects of the EU, I would simply say that they are too late. Since joining the EU in 1972, we have been subjected to mission creep and stealth integration with no votes and no say. The great British people were clear with their instruction on 23 June: they said, “Leave. We have had enough.”

I know that voting on this Bill will present a moral dilemma for many in this place, but for me, it is a relatively easy matter because the will of the people in North Cornwall is clear, with 60% in North Cornwall and 55% in Cornwall as a whole voting to leave the EU. They voted with their eyes open, clear in their belief that they wanted to leave. Some have suggested that the vote was advisory, but I am a democrat and I say to those Members across the Chamber that it was an instruction, and I will vote this evening to ensure that it is carried out. To those discussing the question of a hard or soft Brexit I would say that there is no such thing. There is leaving, and there are different levels of remaining in.

We have seen the effects of globalisation and EU integration in Cornwall over the past four decades, including coastal communities being left behind while cities increased in wealth and growth. There has been no trickle-down to our rural communities, and it is little wonder that they felt disconnected, under-represented and powerless as decisions taken inside the EU affected their day-to-day lives. Whether because of restrictive Brussels farming policy, foreign trawlers in our territorial waters or immigration levels, people in North Cornwall and the UK have said that they want to be in charge of their own destiny. The erosion of our sovereignty has stopped us dealing with those and other issues, but that will be no more. I know that people across this great nation voted on 23 June for many different reasons, but we in Cornwall have seen with our own eyes the destruction of the fishing industry by the common fisheries policy. Leaving the EU will be seen as a success in that area if the common fisheries policy and common agricultural policy are replaced by British versions that work much more effectively for the people involved.

The people of Britain have spoken, and the people of North Cornwall have spoken. I stood at the general election to oppose EU membership unless significant reforms were negotiated. That did not happen, and my constituency voted to leave the European Union. That is why I will walk through the Lobby this evening to vote in support of a Bill to trigger article 50, to ensure that the democratic process that started with the referendum is completed in full.

3.33 pm

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** At the very first hustings I attended in 2001, at Treorchy comprehensive school, the first question I was asked was, “Will you always vote with your conscience?” I recently visited Ysgol Cymer, also in my constituency, and asked members of the school council how I should vote today, after setting out the problems involved. Every single one of them said, “With your conscience”, and that is what I intend to do. I am a democrat, and most of those in my constituency voted in a different way from me. I am a democrat, but I believe in a form of democracy that never silences minorities. The 48% in this country and, for that matter, the 46% or 45% in my constituency, or whatever the figure was, have a right to a voice, so today I am voting and speaking on behalf of a minority of my constituents.

All my life I have believed that the best form of patriotism is internationalism. My first political memories are of Franco’s guards in Spain. I was thrown out of Chile in 1986 for attending the funeral of a lad who had been set on fire by Pinochet’s police. I distrust politicians who spuriously use the national security argument to launch campaigns against migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities. I fear the turn this world is taking towards narrow nationalism, protectionism and demagoguery. I believe that Brexit will do untold damage to my constituents, especially the poorest of them.

**Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab):** My hon. Friend is making a very brave and compelling case. I came into the Chamber today not having finally decided which way to vote. Does he agree that, if I believe the Government’s plan is not in the interests of my country and my constituents, I should join him in the Lobby and vote no to the Bill tonight?

**Chris Bryant:** I am going to vote for the reasoned amendment tonight because I believe it is in the interest of my constituents. I know that many of my constituents will disagree with me, and maybe they will take it out on me, just as it was taken out on Burke in Bristol. In the end, there is no point in any of us being a Member of this House if we do not have things that we believe in and that we are prepared to fight for and, if necessary, lay down our job for.

This moment is so dangerous because the Government have stated that it is irreversible. This is it, folks: now or never. In this most uncertain of times, we are being asked to vote for a completely unknown deal. Yes, I know we are going to leave the European Union and that the House will vote for it. My vote cannot change that, but I believe this Bill—this way of Brexiting—will
leave us poorer, weaker and at far, far greater danger in Europe, in the west and in this country, so I say not in my name. Never, never, never.

3.38 pm

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): It is a great honour to speak in this historic debate. On 23 June we saw 52% of the United Kingdom, and 57% of Derby, vote for the UK to leave the European Union. In Derby, voter turnout was 70%, almost double that for our local elections, with 18,000 more people voting to leave than to remain.

I deliberated for a long time over my decision, and I spent time listening to both sides of the argument. I could see strong reasons to leave and to remain. I started veering towards leave, but I finally decided that remain, in my opinion, would be best for the country. I campaigned hard for us to stay in the EU.

While I was out campaigning, people came to me with clear messages. They said that they wanted to clamp down on immigration and how this was an opportunity to stand on our own and make our own decisions. On the other side, there was uncertainty about the country’s future outside the EU and about the long-term implications and potential consequences. The decision will shape this country for generations, and it is one that we must respect. We must ensure that it becomes a reality, and we must look forward so that future generations benefit from this opportunity. It is now the time to look for the opportunities Brexit can bring to our country. Of course that will be challenging, but the Government are already working hard to create new avenues of trade and investment with new friends and partners, inside and outside Europe. Since the referendum, I have been talking to a wide range of people and businesses in my constituency, and they tell me they are now looking forward to the opportunity that Brexit brings. There is a feeling of optimism about ensuring that small, medium-sized and large businesses thrive after we leave, while of course there is an acknowledgement of the complexity of the negotiations.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) spoke about eyes being wide open and looking to the sunny uplands. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway) agree with the many constituents who have written to me to say that they knew what they were doing, they saw both sides of the argument and we should now be looking forward, just as my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall said?

Amanda Solloway: Absolutely. As my hon. Friend said, people did know what they were doing, and it is clear that in my constituency people are looking for opportunities and the way forward. I am excited by the prospect that lies before us, as I believe we have a genuine opportunity to forge new trade deals and new relationships, and make this great country even greater, taking us forward proudly and successfully. The great repeal Bill will be the starting point for us to look at legislation. I am confident that this Government will, as they must, safeguard and indeed enhance employee and human rights, holding dear the British values that we all share. We should of course be mindful that we are not leaving Europe; we are leaving the EU.

As I mentioned, 57% of those who voted in Derby voted to leave, and we now have a responsibility to negotiate the very best deal, not only for the people of Derby but for the people of this country as a whole. Democracy is about listening to the people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) said in her excellent maiden speech, this was not a request—it was an instruction. This should therefore be a time for us to come together and not be divided on this decision. Our duty is to the public we represent, which is why I shall be supporting the Bill.

3.41 pm

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): I welcome this debate, which has in general been a good one, both today and yesterday, with people speaking from the heart and honestly giving the facts as they see them. This is a historic decision that we are taking in Parliament, but let us not forget that the decision has already been delivered by the people of the United Kingdom. We gave them the opportunity to have their say and they have had it; it was not, as was said earlier, an act of madness of this House. I deplore that suggestion, as this decision was delivered by the people and we must respect it, although people can have their views in here, and I respect those, too.

My constituency is right out in the west of the UK and is bordered by four counties in the Republic of Ireland. We therefore need to have flexibility, but let us move on and get that. Let us have that common travel area and an open border—one that is as open as possible—so that we can have good friendships with the EU when we leave it. We are not leaving Europe; we in Northern Ireland are just as good Europeans as anybody. Our ancestors went to fight for Europe, just as our colleagues from Scotland, England, Wales and many other Commonwealth countries did. We went to help those Europeans, and we still want that common relationship. The people have delivered a decision for us, and it is more important now that we look to how we make the best of that decision. We need to get the best for all of our constituents—for the people of the United Kingdom—and the only way to do that is by working in harmony, as far as is reasonably possible.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a key part of maintaining that harmony is by ensuring that we have unfettered access to travel across these islands, that a border between Northern Ireland and southern Ireland would be unacceptable, and that any border controls between Northern Ireland and the mainland UK would be unforgivable?

Tom Elliott: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, and we in Northern Ireland totally support that position. We want that for the whole United Kingdom, because there is great trade between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and we want to see that flourish.

We must move on, because it is the indecision that is putting our economy in a difficult position. It will progress into a more difficult position if we do not continue to take decisions. The best thing we can do is move on with this decision. Hopefully, we will have negotiators who will do their best for the United Kingdom. I have heard the arguments today: some people are
saying that we do not know what the agreement is or what we are getting out of the deal. That is absolutely right, but it is what the people voted for. We need the best negotiators, and we need to have faith in them. It is up to Parliament to make sure that we keep up the pressure on those negotiators to get the best deal possible. We in the Ulster Unionist party will certainly be scrutinising all the amendments. Hopefully, there will be some that could make the Bill better that we will look at positively.

3.45 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): One of the benefits of making a later contribution to a debate is the opportunity to reflect on earlier speeches. The standout one for me came late yesterday evening, when my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), who supported remain in the referendum but represents a constituency that voted to leave, set out very clearly why it is important to recognise the referendum result and why we should vote to deliver the wishes of our constituents and the country as a whole. That is also my position.

Last week, I met some children in my constituency when I visited their school. I was asked some pretty serious questions. They asked me why I voted remain, and I explained why I felt that remaining would have been better for our businesses and given us a sense of certainty. They asked why so many people voted to leave, and I explained that I believe that people were attracted by the proposition of taking control, particularly of immigration. They then came up with the tough one: what happens next? This debate is all about that—the process of triggering article 50 and the negotiations that will take place over the next two years.

We have before us a clear, simple Bill that represents the result of the June referendum. I supported the Government’s decision to give the people a say. It was in the Conservative party manifesto, and in 2015 my constituents gave me a significantly larger majority and Parliament voted six to one in favour of it. It therefore follows that support for the referendum requires respect for its outcome. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) argued, I do not see how anyone can suggest otherwise. No decision had been made for more than 40 years and the body of which we were a member had changed, so it is entirely right that we voted for a referendum. As with the United States election, though, if we ask the public a question, we should not be too surprised if the electorate come back with an unexpected answer. It is now our job to implement their decision.

The decision to leave the EU presents us with opportunities, as was underlined to me in a discussion with a small business owner in my constituency. He was an ardent remainder who had joined me to hand out leaflets to commuters at the station. Nevertheless, he described the referendum as being like a business owner pitching to retain an account and the custom for his business. The decision had gone against his company—the customer decided not to renew and was not going to change his mind. A businessman in that position has to start to look for other deals elsewhere.

That is precisely the approach the Government are taking. They have formed the new Department for International Trade and are making deals with new partners and managing the process of the leaving. I have some misgivings about the route we are about to go down, but we must accept the wishes of the people and proceed with the Bill in support of what the people decided.

3.48 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I campaigned for and voted to remain, but I will respect the result of the referendum and vote in favour of the Bill. However, like many of my colleagues, that does not mean that I am voting to give the Government a free ride to pursue a right-wing hard Brexit. It is our responsibility to show how divisions can be healed. We need to speak not only of process but about what sort of country we want the UK to be and how we can build new relationships with Europe and countries around the world. We must watch and scrutinise. It is not about whether the UK is leaving the EU, but how.

For so many people in my area, the referendum was an emphatic shout of “Enough!” from those who felt left behind by globalisation—people who have had enough of being economically, politically and socially excluded. They feel powerless and excluded, with nobody listening to them on issues such as immigration. The referendum was an opportunity for many of them to take decisive action in the hope of bringing about change. We must now listen to that demand for change and act. The change must begin by ending the characterisation of some leave voters as people who did not know what they were doing. That serves only to deepen the chasm running through the UK today. We need to take time to understand the pain and anger of those people.

What we also must do is hear the legitimate concerns of the 48% of people who voted remain. We should not just brush them off as remoaners who are attempting to frustrate the will of the people. Rhetoric is powerful and can be incredibly divisive. We are one country, and the stark divisions of the referendum must be allowed to heal. That should start with a common narrative from the Government that the Brexit negotiations will strive to get the best deal for everyone, not just for those who voted leave. That is why the amendment process is so crucial—the amendments set out a vision, which we, the Labour party, and many others want to see. The whole process is about looking to the future, not the past, which is why we now have to work to find a way through the process.

After we have left the EU, globalisation will not cease to exist, nor will the refugee crisis, the problems with immigration, the threat of terrorism, the lack of funding for the health service and education, and the pervasive inequality that exists in the UK. Brexit must seek to address those issues in a liberal, open and inclusive way—a way that insists on a plan that supports jobs and the economy, tackles inequality and is based on building a new consensus here in Britain on immigration. It must include the protection of workers’ rights and guarantee legal rights for EU nationals living in Britain. That plan must be progressive and united by our common principles of respect, tolerance and open-mindedness. In that way, hope can overcome despair, and a brighter, fairer future for all will seem possible, even if we are no longer part of the EU.
3.51 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I have listened to this debate for the past couple of days, and I can quite understand why constituents feel that we are voting on coming out of the European Union tonight. We are not. The Bill is a simple and straightforward matter that simply puts us back to what we believe the situation was before the Supreme Court judgment. That is all the Bill does.

I disagree with those who tell me that the referendum was only advisory. In our manifesto, we said explicitly that we would accept the result of the referendum whatever it was. The referendum effectively ceased to be advisory at that point. No one has ever said how voting against giving the Prime Minister permission to start article 50 negotiations complies with that, or indeed how we could ever be trusted again to take democratic decisions in the interests of the people.

Those like me who voted to remain need to accept that we lost the argument and the vote—but I am not throwing in the towel. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), I am doing all that I can to work on the aspects that are needed to take us forward. That includes, for example, this morning’s meeting of the Justice Committee in which we had yet another session with leading lawyers about what we need to carry forward in the justice system.

Both Houses of Parliament have already spent 60 hours discussing the EU and our leaving of it. That is 60 hours of debate to which the Front-Bench team has listened.

Let me quickly comment on two things. The first is the term “hard Brexit”. It is one of the laziest forms of journalism I have ever heard. It is a great shame that it has been used in this House. How maintaining the common travel area with Ireland and the rights of EU nationals in Britain, and protecting workers’ rights and the best places for science and innovation can possibly be called a hard Brexit, I do not know.

I would like Ministers to give us some confidence on the issue of Euratom. The Joint European Torus project is located at Culham in my constituency. I heard what the Secretary of State said yesterday, but I would like some reassurance, because it was negotiating in good faith and then this suddenly occurred.

3.54 pm

Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (Ind): There has been a lot of Sturm und Drang around this debate over the past couple of days. I will try to reflect how I feel about it. I have a sense of disbelief and despair at the decision that is about to be made, and significant doubt in the abilities of those who seek to give voice to my constituents in going any way towards meeting their needs. Let us be clear: 71% of my constituents in Edinburgh West voted to remain.

The Scottish National party’s reasoned amendment is backed by many of my constituents, the vast majority of whom voted against independence in our independence referendum and many of whom are not SNP supporters. To a man and to a woman, they are writing to me, saying, “If this goes ahead, I am firmly in favour of taking the next steps to protect my business, my child who wants to go through Erasmus, and my ability to travel, work and live freely within Europe.” How strongly we feel about the matter in Scotland—for those in and without the SNP—is fundamental.

This is not just about economics, although stepping away from that matter is, incidentally, a vast collective madness. The philosophy of Europe as a unifier to protect against the sort of madness and rhetoric we hear from Trump—racist, misogynistic and protectionist—is a fundamental for me. So, yes, I feel disbelief. With every breath in my body, I am going to ensure that Scotland can continue to access the single market.

3.57 pm

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I congratulate my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), although she is not currently in her place, on a fantastic maiden speech that bodes well for the future of Lincolnshire. My contribution will be short and to the point.

In the 2015 general election, my Conservative colleagues and I stood on a manifesto pledge that we would let the British people decide whether to stay in or leave the European Union, and that we would honour the referendum result, whatever the outcome. We won the general election and kept our promise on holding the referendum. We must, therefore, keep our promise on honouring the result. It is on that basis that I will vote with the Government tonight to trigger article 50.

3.58 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I am fortunate; my personal long and strongly held views align with those of the three quarters of my constituents who voted to remain. I will therefore be voting against triggering of article 50, by whatever route someone is empowered to do it—royal prerogative, referendum result, prime ministerial diktat or whatever. I am against it and my constituents are against it, and I will not be moved from that.

Let me explain why I feel so strongly. I ask your forgiveness, Mr Speaker, if my contribution is a touch personal. Both sides of my family suffered from the wars of the last century. It was my grandfather on my mother’s side who formed my early views. Joe Mead, an agriculture worker from Shepreth, a village outside Cambridge, was a keen and competitive race-walker. I grew up surrounded by his trophies. When he moved to Chingford in north London, he used to walk home at weekends—50 miles each way—but that was before the first world war. Like many other brave young men, he stood knee deep in water in the trenches for months at Passchendaele. He at least came home, but the gangrene meant that he lost one leg—a race-walker no more.

A few decades later, there was another war. My father, who was born in Austria, was forced to flee Vienna when the Nazis marched in because, as I have recently learned, of his family’s left-wing views. He came to Britain and was made welcome, for which he and our family are eternally grateful.

I recount the story because the reason I am passionate about the European Union and the part it has played in keeping a fractious continent from falling out. Some people say that it was not the EU but NATO, but the EU was born out of a desire to stop war in Europe, and there is no doubt in my mind that having a political
framework to resolve conflicts and differences, to negotiate and to compromise, has made a huge contribution to keeping the peace. My generation is a privileged one—we have not, most of us, had to go to war.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I fully understand the hon. Gentleman’s personal circumstances and his passion, but does he not agree that the European currency—the euro—has done more to divide Europe by impoverishing Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, and that so long as that continues there is likely to be further division in Europe?

Daniel Zeichner: No, I do not agree. I think our continent is much more united than when it was at war. How quickly we have forgotten just how this was achieved. At this of all times, when the world is such an uncertain place, this is not the moment to turn away from our European home, and to take a huge gamble on getting a deal with the most reckless and unreliable American President any of us have known.

There is much more that I would like to say about Cambridge and the threat to our universities and to our research institutes. I associate myself with many of the comments that have been made by my hon. Friends. I am particularly concerned about the 9,000 non-UK EU nationals in and around Cambridge whose future is so uncertain and whose future could have been assured if the Government had moved more swiftly, and the damage that it will do to our country if those people start to leave. The effect that that will have on our university and research sector troubles me a lot.

Last week, out of the blue, as we have heard, the Government announced that they want to pull out of the European nuclear agency, Euratom. This appeared to happen without discussion or consultation with the industry, and without thought to the wider consequences. There are so many other things to say about the threats to our environmental protections, to our rights at work, to our data and privacy rights, and to our world-leading life sciences sector—but I return to my starting point. Three quarters of people in Cambridge voted to remain. I came into Parliament to represent their views. They put their trust in me, and I will not betray that trust. There is a real risk that the Government will lead a retreat to turn Britain into an isolated island. The United States is building a wall. At such a time, we must be brave and go on making the case that retreat, isolation and walls do not a modern world make. The European Union is far from perfect, but we should be working to make it better, not weakening it at a dangerous time.

4.2 pm

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): This is a long Second Reading debate, and yet the Bill is very succinct, and rightly so. I therefore think it is incumbent on me to be concise in my remarks.

In the lead-up to the referendum on our membership of the European Union last June, the Government published—at the cost of a little over £9 million, from memory—a booklet that went to virtually every household in the UK explaining why they believed it was best for us to remain members of the EU. The booklet also said, however, “Whatever decision the British people make, we will implement.” It is therefore, I believe, our duty to ensure that we pass this Bill tonight, without delay or amendments designed to wreck it, so that the Prime Minister has the authority to start the official formal withdrawal process, and so that this Parliament can once again exercise its sovereignty in rightly holding the Government to account to ensure that we get the best possible deal as we leave the European Union and once again broaden our horizons as a global Britain.

4.3 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I rise to speak in this debate as a European. I was born a European. Those who supported the Brexit cause told us that if we left the European Union we would be no less European. I say this to them: I will hold them to their word.

I do not believe that the referendum was our finest democratic moment. I disagree with the Brexiteers about that. Many of my constituents have raised serious concerns about the referendum, but that is not what the debate is about any more; it is about the beginning of the most important question that our country has faced for a generation.

We must rapidly move on from the process and on to substance. To those who proudly say that immigration is not a problem in our country’s metropolitan areas and who disparage those areas that feel strongly about it, I say that they are not taking the right approach. We need to understand that all parts of our country have benefited from immigration and that all British people are tolerant and respectful of others. Those are the best of British values, and the Prime Minister is wrong to design an economic policy entirely based on shutting down immigration.

Economic division in our country was the cause and will be the consequence of Brexit. Our economy is designed for London to charge ahead like Singapore, while the northern regions of England are held back like eastern Europe, and that is why people feel left out. The reason for that economic division is that power is hoarded here in this city. People in the north feel that for too long they have not had enough of a say, and they voted to leave as a result. The answer must be to address that power imbalance, never again to hoard power here and to have a truly federal Britain.

In my maiden speech, I said that Wirral was an internationally minded and cultured place. It was then and it is now. To those in our country who have been shocked, horrified, embarrassed and ashamed by the disgraceful racism and xenophobia that we have seen, I say that those are not our values and that is not my country, and we move on from this point with our values at our heart.

4.6 pm

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The manifesto on which I stood in 2015 not only promised an in/out referendum on Europe, but stated: “We will honour the result of the referendum, whatever the outcome.” During the referendum campaign, I committed to respecting the result, even if it was decided by just one vote. In the
end, the difference was more than 1 million votes. That 72% of the population turned out showed just how seriously the British public took the task of deciding their future. In my constituency, the turnout was more than 80%. By contrast, 58% turned out for the recent US presidential election. That was an election with huge consequences, not only for the USA but for the world, yet nearly 100 million Americans could not be bothered to turn out and vote.

As others have said, the referendum was not a consultation but an instruction. Today, I will do my duty and vote to trigger article 50. Then the work really begins. To use the analogy of a flight, we have boarded the plane and we are leaving Europe. Although we know the general direction, we do not yet know the destination. Some passengers believe that we are heading for some kind of tropical paradise, others an icy wasteland. Luckily we have a pilot who has a clear flight path, and I suspect that after flying around for a while, we will land not on an icy wasteland or in a tropical paradise, but somewhere quite familiar and similar to where we originally began.

I do not wish to belittle the great challenge ahead of us, but the fact is that the British economy is strong, resilient and dynamic. I never for one moment believed that the sky would fall in if we left the EU, but different segments of our economy will inevitably be impacted in different ways by Brexit. Some will obviously benefit and some will obviously struggle, and all are impacted to some degree by uncertainty. We must work hard and quickly to reduce that uncertainty, and we must provide every support and comfort to those sectors of the economy that we know are at most risk from Brexit.

We must listen to people with deep knowledge and expertise in sectors that are perhaps not well represented in this place, yet face particularly complex challenges due to Brexit, including the aviation industry, digital and creative industries, and those sectors for which there is no clear World Trade Organisation alternative. I encourage the Government to continue to engage with industry and with experts, and I look forward to playing my part by providing constructive input and holding the Government to account that they deliver a successful deal that helps Britain and secures my children's future.

4.9 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I intend to vote in favour of activating article 50 tonight out of respect for the result of the referendum, despite its flaws and despite the deceit of the leave campaign, but I will write no blank cheques to anyone, least of all this simultaneously incompetent and ideological Government. I reject the assertion that the result of the referendum is the will of the people. It is not; it is the will of a slim majority. The use of that sinister phrase “the will of the people” to airbrush out of existence the 48% who voted remain is deeply troubling.

All Labour Members recognise the growing individual and geographical inequality in our country, the growing pressure on public services, the growing competition for low-paid jobs and the fear of cultural change from rapid social and economic transformation, but I certainly do not understand how a hard Brexit and the Government’s vision of a low-tax, low-regulation Singapore Britain is the answer to any of those legitimate concerns. That will destroy jobs, employers and our public finances, and make it more difficult to address the social and economic challenges that we now recognise.

We need a vision of a Britain that is closely integrated with our European partners and the European market, to which we are most close. Our manufacturers, our service sectors, our creative industries and our universities are hugely dependent on those markets and on European skills. If we walk away from Europe out of petty malice, we will cut off our nose to spite our face, and we will destroy livelihoods, opportunities and hope throughout the land.

That vision is the antithesis of what those who are driving forward the Government’s agenda want. They threaten to create a low-tax, low-public-service haven on the coast of Europe if we do not get a trade deal with the EU, but that is precisely the kind of UK that they want, free from what they see as the constraints of employment rights and environmental protection. They want a UK with low corporation tax, low income tax for the rich, no protection for people at work and minimal public services. The Government have taken the understandable concern about immigration and the justifiable anger about bad employers using cheap imported labour to drive down nationally agreed pay rates, and have used those concerns to drive through their own vision, which, ironically and tragically, would end up hurting most the people who are most concerned about the current arrangements.

The Government are so desperate for a trade deal with the United States that we go cap in hand to the racist President Trump, because we need his good favour to get such a deal. At the same time, we are alienating all the other countries with which, until recently, we shared the values of decency, tolerance and respect.

Tonight I will respect the result of the referendum, but after that, all bets are off. I will not allow good people who voted to leave for understandable reasons to be hoodwinked by the hard right of the Conservative party, and I will not allow our wonderful, beautiful, decent and tolerant country to be abandoned to a vision of ultra-hard Brexit, shorn of the standards we all come to enjoy and, perhaps, take for granted.

4.12 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Like my Conservative colleagues, I stood in the general election on a manifesto that promised an in/out referendum and promised to respect the result. I campaigned hard before the referendum for this country to stay in the European Union. It pains me that my side lost, but honour and decency bind me to the pledge I made before the referendum, and I will vote to support the Government tonight.

That said, it is also my duty to my constituents and to the country, as it is for all of us, to make sure that we get the best possible outcome thereafter. To my mind, that means the following. First, in my constituency, some 35% of people work in the financial and professional services sector. That is one of the highest percentages anywhere in the country. It is critical that that key economic interest of the United Kingdom be central to our negotiating objectives. In my judgment, it should not be regarded as secondary to anything. If we have to,
we should be prepared to make pragmatic compromises to secure the welfare of that key economic sector.

Secondly, we should not forget the interests of our territory of Gibraltar. It does not have anyone to speak for it here, but I shall take the liberty of doing so. Its economy must be protected and its border flows must be uninterrupted and free. Thirdly, we must make sure that our parliamentary sovereignty is real. We are acting in accordance with the process set down by our highest courts, where the judges acted in accordance with their judicial oaths and constitutional duty. That should be accepted, and they should be commended for having done so. That means that Parliament must now be prepared to have proper control of the process.

I welcome the commitment to publishing the White Paper, and I accept the words and good faith of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, but there are two other things we must do. First, it is very important as we go forward that Parliament has the maximum information available to it. In particular, it would be quite wrong if Parliament at any stage had less information than our European counterparts. Secondly, the pledge of a vote in both Houses on the final deal must be a meaningful one. That means it must be a vote before the deal is put to our European counterparts for ratification, otherwise it will be a Hobson’s choice of little value. I hope that Ministers will reflect very carefully on those key points as the Bill makes progress through the House.

4.15 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Despite my constituency producing two enormous Brexiteers—one Sir Teddy Taylor, who went on to represent Southend, and Tom Harris, who led the Brexit campaign in Scotland—I have the Glasgow constituency with the highest remain vote; it was over 70%. I get why lots of people did not feel that they had a connection with the European Union. It felt as though the EU did not have a relationship with their daily lives, and as though it was something done to them, rather than something inclusive. Sadly, however, this Brexit deal is going in exactly the same direction. The Prime Minister did everything she could to try to prevent this House from having a say or a vote on it. In fact, we are only in the Chamber for this debate today because the Government were taken to court—and the case had to go to appeal at the Supreme Court. The Prime Minister has done everything she can to freeze out Parliament, the public and the devolved Administrations, and that is highly regrettable. This Brexit process has all the hallmarks of a hostile takeover. The vote on 23 June 2016 is being used; all sorts of other issues—the single market, the customs union—are being couped in alongside it, which is just not good enough.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman has expressed concern—indeed, confusion—about the Brexiteers’ position. Will he help to alleviate my confusion about the Scottish position that SNP Members seem to be putting forward, which is that they want a free, independent Scotland, but it has to be ruled from Brussels? Will he explain that conundrum?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I will not explain it. The hon. Gentleman makes such a lazy argument that he must have heard all the points before. I will use my extra minute to make the arguments that I wish to make. The Prime Minister has no consensus on proceeding—

[Interruption.] I suggest that the Deputy Leader of the House takes that back.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: No. The Prime Minister has no consensus on proceeding as she is doing. The failure to get consensus is hers and hers alone. She talks about “a country that works for everyone”, but the Brexit negotiation and the article 50 process have been incubated and kept in Downing Street. That will do nothing for our attempts to fight against the poison of political cynicism that is eating away at liberal democracies around the world, including the liberal democracy that we serve here. Our party’s position is well known. The Britannic isolation that this Government are seeking is something that I cannot and will not back, and I will vote against the Government tonight.

4.18 pm

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): I voted remain in the referendum, not for any nostalgic or ideological love of Europe, but more in the pragmatic belief that it was not the right time for us to leave. However, the point that has sometimes been overlooked in the debate in this Chamber is that this vote on article 50 is different for one reason: it is not our decision. We have a duty as democrats, and a fundamental duty as Members of Parliament, to enact the result of the referendum.

I have not changed my mind, but it is important to remember that the Conservative manifesto—the one on which we Conservative Members were elected—pledged to hold the referendum. I was proud to vote in Parliament to hold the referendum, and I promised my voters that I would honour the result. It was made abundantly clear during the referendum campaign that it would be final, no ifs and buts, and when I make a promise to my voters, I intend to keep it—no ifs, no buts.

To me, this debate is less about triggering article 50, and more about democracy. The mere suggestion that we could consider riding roughshod over democracy, destroying what is left of the British public’s faith in politicians is, quite frankly, absurd. Yes, we can all think of loopholes and justifications to rationalise voting against the referendum result, but we are surely in a sad state if it comes to that. And is it not patronising to claim that people did not really understand what they were voting for?

It is important that we do not distort the meaning of this debate. The vote should not be turned into a pro-immigration or anti-immigration vote. It is simply recognition of how the public voted, in part through a desire to take back control. There has been a lot of talk in this debate about immigration and the end of free movement. Members have spoken about the cultural and economic benefits of immigration, and I echo that message wholeheartedly. However, I seriously question whether that can only be achieved by European immigration.
It disadvantages those from the Commonwealth and the wider world, who should have exactly the same rights and opportunities as those living in Europe. Europe has bound our hands and given us no chance to link our immigration to skills. It deeply saddens me that some Members have distorted this debate.

Let us be clear and not misguide the public today. This vote is about starting the process. Yes, we could spend several weeks speculating about what we might be able to negotiate, and what we can and cannot change, but we have a duty today. Our economy and businesses need certainty. The last thing they need is another referendum, or more speculation. Now is the time to get on with the job, be positive, work together and get the best deal for Britain. We have a duty to honour the result and a promise to keep. We need to show the British public that we can listen, can be in touch, and are the Parliament for the people, not a show. The British public that we can listen, can be in touch, and are the Parliament for the people, not a show.

4.21 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): May I say first that I respect the views of any Member who acts according to their conscience, and that I have nothing but contempt for any Member who acts purely out of self-interest or self-preservation?

The Government can claim a mandate to take the United Kingdom—or what is left of it—out of the European Union, but nobody can claim a mandate to take anyone out of the single market. That, essentially, is a major part of the reasoned amendment tabled by the Scottish National party. We are being asked to hand complete control of the process to a Prime Minister and a Foreign Secretary who between them cannot even handle a dinner invitation without creating an international, political and diplomatic stooshie.

The Government, if anything, have a mandate to keep us in the single market. That is what was in the 2015 Conservative election manifesto. I know that Conservative Members do not like to be reminded about it, but that is the mandate they were given by the people. As recently as 24 October 2016, the Prime Minister told the House:

“I want to get the best possible deal with the maximum possible opportunities for British businesses...to operate within the single market and to trade with it in both goods and services.”—Official Report, 24 October 2016; Vol. 616, c. 36.

The fact that as recently as October the Prime Minister wanted to stay in at the very least should tell us that membership or non-membership of the single market is far too important to be dealt with without a single debate or vote in this House.

Some MPs have been subject to unfair pressure to vote in a particular way. Nobody here has the right to tell anybody that they are being dishonest or anti-democratic by exercising their vote. I have had that as well. I received an email darkly hinting that there are a number of people in my constituency who want to leave and threatening me with deselection if I dare to vote against the Government tonight. Given that the email came from Labour Leave, I have no intention—[Laughter. It did cross my mind that, pension-wise, I could get a much better deal by losing rather than retiring. Maybe when I decide that the time has come to leave, I will stand as a Labour candidate to guarantee my “loser’s pension”. [Laughter.]

4.24 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): I campaigned and voted to leave the EU, in line with the boroughs I represent, Bolton and Wigan, which voted overwhelmingly to leave. It was an incredibly important referendum, and I am a little disappointed sometimes to get the impression that people think we should never have had it. It was vital that we did. When there is a transfer of power, it is for the people to approve, even if retrospectively. It was for the people to approve the vast transfer of power from Westminster to Brussels. Otherwise, it would have been like the SNP taking Scotland out of the UK without a referendum, or the Liberal Democrats changing our voting system without the approval of the people. We had to have the referendum to approve the transfer of powers to the EU.

Disatisfaction with the EU seemed to grow in proportion to the powers handed to it. Whether we wanted to remain or leave, we could all see that the referendum was vital. David Cameron, in his Bloomberg speech, set out a fantastic vision of EU reform, but every visit to Brussels or a European capital whittled away that vision until there was almost nothing left—and that was the proposal put to the British people: either we leave or we have this almost non-existent programme of reform. It now seems that there is a campaign to resurrect the Bloomberg vision through the soft Brexit that people keep talking about, but that was the vision already rejected by the EU.

During the campaign, there were problems and misleading information on both sides, but that £350 million figure for the NHS is overstated. In a general election, we look at the policies and the ideas developed over months and years. We look at the performance of the Government and we listen to the arguments of the Opposition. We have years to make up our minds at the general election, and the British people had 40 years to make up their minds about the EU. It was not about the last few weeks of the referendum campaign; it was about the lived experience in the EU. That is why the people rejected it. It was not because of a few debateable arguments on one side or another. I look forward this evening to voting for the Bill and supporting our leaving the EU.

4.27 pm

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): Since the vote nearly seven months ago, a shadow has been cast across this country. The decision to leave the EU has weighed
heavily on us all. It has divided communities, workplaces, families and political parties. The campaigns were not our finest hour. I campaigned to remain in the EU not because I thought the EU was perfect but because I did not want the UK to close its doors and shut itself off from the rest of the world. I want us to work with our European neighbours to find common solutions to the multitude of problems every developed country faces, from a rapidly aging population and its impact on our healthcare and pensions systems to the co-ordinated action necessary to tackle climate change and terrorism.

My constituents voted 66% in favour of leaving the EU, and I respect that decision. Some voted to leave because of concerns over immigration and fears that this was negatively impacting on the availability of jobs and local services; some voted out because they thought it would mean more money for the NHS; and, for some, the referendum was an opportunity to register their discontent not just with the EU but with the direction the country was travelling in as a whole. While globalisation has brought wealth and economic growth, it has also left many people behind. In Burnley, people have seen manufacturing jobs decline and wages stagnate while bankers pay themselves million-pound bonuses and the rich increasingly find ways to dodge paying tax. They have been told consistently by the Government that the UK is the fastest-growing economy in the G7, and yet they have not seen that growth. They do not see more job opportunities or wage increases; all they find is that they have not seen that growth. They do not see that things are getting harder.

Because I respect my constituents and the democratic process, I will vote to trigger article 50, but I will not vote blindly for a Brexit deal that leaves my constituents poorer or worse off. First, the deal must protect jobs, which means access to the single market. Some 5,000 people in Burnley work in manufacturing and many of our biggest employers are European. It is vital that these jobs be protected. Secondly, workers’ rights must be protected. I am proud that past Labour Governments have championed workers’ rights. Thirdly, Burnley receives £5 million a year from EU funding. This money is vital, and has helped us to expand. The Government must commit, beyond 2020, to replacing that investment.

These circumstances were not of my making, but I believe that we must now seize the moment and all work together to do our very best to achieve a deal that will serve the interests of all our people and, in so doing, begin to heal the divisions in our country.

4.30 pm

David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper). Her words about healing division and working for the will of the people—a phrase we are not allowed to use any more—very much chime with me.

This is clearly an historic moment—the result of decades of campaigning in this House and outside it, and of course the result of a decision by the people of the UK. It is perfectly reasonable and perfectly rational for people to hold the view that we should not go ahead and free ourselves from Brussels, but to try to frustrate the decision by trying to show that the referendum result was in some way illegitimate or incomplete so that others can impose their view of what they think ought to have happened, is really not quite the ticket.

I reckon that no one voted thinking, “I’ll vote leave, because I’m pretty sure that we’ll still remain a member of the single market, so it will all be okay”. No one said, “I’ll vote leave because I’m pretty sure Parliament won’t vote to trigger article 50”. No one said, “I’ll vote leave, because I’m pretty sure that when the final deal is put to Parliament, they will reject it and we will go back”. People voted to leave because they wanted to leave.

The two district councils that make up most of my constituency voted to leave by 13,000 votes, and they voted to leave because they wanted to leave. That means triggering article 50. In its judgment on 24 January, the Supreme Court, in common with the divisional High Court, made it clear that once given, article 50 notice cannot be withdrawn. When this House makes the decision on that final deal and the choice is put, it is only to approve the deal. Our choices thereafter will be to approve the deal, seek a renegotiation or exit the EU with no deal. There will be no option of remaining in the EU. This is a simple choice, and we have a very short Bill before us, although we have an awful lot of long amendments. The Supreme Court agreed in its judgment that Parliament can perfectly well content itself with very brief legislation. As many Members know, length need not equate to quality.

The Prime Minister’s speech at Lancaster House was the exception that proves the rule, splendidly setting out the 12 areas of work that the Government will now seek to address. The next two years, I must say, impose an obligation on every Member not only to heal the divisions, as we heard from the hon. Member for Burnley, but to help shape the negotiations and ensure that our future relationship with the EU emerges in a way that reflects an open, tolerant spirit of exchange and accord—without political control. We should believe in the future, just as the country did on 23 June last year.

4.33 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union finished his speech yesterday by saying:

“For many years, there has been a creeping sense in the country...that politicians say one thing and then do another.”—[Official Report, 31 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 823-4.]

I am not sure which country he was talking about, because the UK is, of course, a Union of more than one country. What I can tell him, however, is that, for the country of Scotland, the sense that politicians sometimes say one thing and do another is more than a creeping sense, it is a well-founded and widespread concern, and it relates in particular to the Conservative party, its Prime Minister and its leader in Scotland.

Tonight we shall vote on an SNP amendment, and I welcome the support from other Members for that amendment. The amendment is, in part, designed to ensure that the Conservative party delivers on promises made by politicians to the people of Scotland during the 2014 independence referendum—promises made by Ruth Davidson, such as the idea that voting to remain in the United Kingdom was a guarantee of our EU citizenship; and promises made that Scotland is an equal partner in the Union.
Listening to yesterday’s debate, one could be forgiven for thinking that Scotland is seen as an unwelcome distraction from the main event. The message seems to be, “Get back in your box, and know your place”. Gone are the lovebombs, which have been replaced with instructions to “Sit down, shut up and put up with it”.

The EU referendum did not take place in a void in Scotland, separated from what has gone before. In 2014, the question of Scotland’s future membership of the European Union was central to the independence referendum. The SNP, and the wider “yes” campaign, warned that a “no” vote would be a threat to Scotland’s ancient trade links, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) spoke so eloquently. We said that voting to remain in the United Kingdom was a threat to our membership of Europe because of Tory Euroscepticism.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that there has been much misreporting of the recent Supreme Court decision? While it established that Scotland need not be consulted legally, there was no requirement that it should not be consulted constitutionally.

Joanna Cherry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Paragraph 151 states:

“The Sewel Convention has an important role in facilitating harmonious relationships between the UK parliament and the devolved legislatures. But the policing of its scope and the manner of its operation does not lie within the constitutional remit of the judiciary”.

So, basically, it is up to the politicians.

When we in the SNP warned that staying in the UK was a threat to our EU membership, the “no” campaign said that we were scaremongering. Ruth Davidson said:

“No means we stay in”,

that is, stay in the EU. The Liberal Democrats and Labour Members who were in the Better Together campaign told us that voting to remain part of the UK guaranteed our EU membership. The question for the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats now is this: what are they going to do to deliver on the promises that they made at the time of the independence referendum? What are they going to do to protect and guarantee that EU citizenship that they told us was guaranteed by our voting to remain in the UK?

The Scottish Government, unlike others, have produced a document—“Scotland’s Place in Europe”—which sets out a detailed plan. It is a plan which, as we heard from the Prime Minister’s own lips today, is possible, because it is possible to have a soft and open border between a country that is in the single market and a country that is not. The question for all Members in the House—Labour, Liberal Democrat and Tory—is this: “What are you going to do to deliver on the promises that you made to the people of Scotland? Or are you just going to sit there and admit that those promises were lies?”

4.37 pm

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): This is a historic debate. I was in the Chamber during the Maastricht debates 25 years ago: it has been a long time. The British people voted by a margin of 1.35 million to leave the European Union, and two thirds of the constituencies in the country voted to leave. I respect all my constituents who voted to remain—and The Cotswolds voted very narrowly to remain: it was 51% to 49%—and I totally reject the Liberal Democrats’ assertion that I cannot represent those constituents.

The British people, through this referendum, have regained the sovereignty of this Parliament. We will no longer be subject to the directives and regulations laid down by Brussels. We will regain control of our borders, and, above all, we will be able to reassure the Europeans who are living in this country that they are welcome here, provided that our European partners give reciprocal rights to us. Shorn of the EU competence for trade, we will be able to regain our old entrepreneurial spirit and go round the world, trading openly with all its nations.

Some people assert that the peace in Europe has been maintained by the European Union. I say that the peace in Europe has been maintained by NATO—and it is absolutely right for our Prime Minister to ensure that all NATO members abide by their obligation to spend 2% of their GDP on defence.

As many speakers have said during this debate, we shall not be leaving Europe. We shall be leaving the European Union, but the Europeans will still be neighbours and friends. I think that, pragmatically, we will do a deal for this country that will be in the interests of all its people. It is a byzantinely complex negotiation on which our colleagues on the Front Bench are about to embark. I say to them that we have an absolute duty to get the best deal that we possibly can for this country. However, I am confident that when our partners look at what we have to offer them and what they have to offer us, it will, pragmatically, be in their interests to make sure we do a deal that suits both of us.

We will reset our relationship with Europe: it will be an easier relationship; it will be a relationship that all parts of this kingdom can relate to—whether that is England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. I simply say to our Scottish nationalist friends, echoing the soothsayer in Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar”: beware of referendums—you cannot be certain what the result will be.

4.40 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Periodically, a nation has to stand tall and say what ideas it is driven by, and what values lead its sense of direction and its destiny. I am proud of all we have achieved as members of the European Union in terms of not only our economy and our security, but the peace between our nations, which, twice in the last century, were at war.

I campaigned hard for remain, but I accept the result. I will not vote against Second Reading, but I will not criticise others for making a different choice. I am sad that tonight this House will take the first step in what I believe is the wrong direction for this country—a country in which I was proud to be born, which has shaped me through its openness and generosity of spirit, and which has shaped my very firm sense of partnership with other nations and of the need for an internationalist politics. The Government’s responsibility has never been greater.

This must not be, or feel like, the end of the debate. It is right that tomorrow the Government will be publishing a White Paper; it is wrong that we did not have it before. It is right that we have a vote; it is wrong that it took the
Supreme Court to make it happen. A vote for article 50 today is not a blank cheque. It must be for this House to be consulted and to meaningfully vote on the final deal. This Bill has been tightly written to limit the ability of MPs to amend it, but it is clear that the views of Members of this House will not be silenced.

I want to make three broad points in my contribution to this debate. First, we should not rule out membership of the single market, but instead make the case for EU-wide reforms of the freedom of movement that can give member states greater control if they wish it.

Secondly, we must engage the public. That is why the Prime Minister should bring forward a national convention that includes MEPs, elected Mayors, nations, devolved Administrations, local government, universities and higher education, civil society, business and others. The public were asked their view about our membership of the European Union, and they should also be properly involved in the debate about our future.

Thirdly, there are the needs of our young people. They are our future, and we have a stake in their success, too. The way we conduct this debate and make decisions, the language we use and the way we design in relationship-building between young people across borders will be a gift we give to the next generation. That is why I am tabling amendments that call on the Government to set priorities for young people in their negotiations, retaining the rights and opportunities for young people to work, study and travel visa-free if they are under 25, so that they do not become worse off than their European counterparts.

The referendum was not a proud moment in our nation’s history, but there is more than one way to Brexit. There are risks, and we must be open about that, but we must also have an evidence-based debate: our prosperity, our security, and our respect and our place in the world depend on it.

4.43 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra). Like her, I campaigned for remain, and I did it passionately. I argued that if we left, we would miss the opportunity to be the largest country in the EU that was not in the euro. That is an amazing position, but it is gone, and I accept that. Like the hon. Lady, I will support the Bill. I would, in the most extraordinary way, be reneging on my vote for the European Union Referendum Act 2015—one of the first pieces of legislation I voted for as a new MP—if I now turned against it just because I campaigned for the remain side.

However, that does not mean that I do not have concerns, and there are two primary areas where I am worried about the future. The first is trade. At all costs, we must avoid a game of protectionist chicken with the EU. That could happen, particularly given what is going on in Washington, where we have an openly protectionist President. This is not “Project Fear”, but hon. Members should be under no illusion: if protectionism breaks out on both sides of the Atlantic, we could have a severe economic crisis, and we know where that finishes.

The other point is on immigration. It is absolutely right that we cannot control immigration from the EU unless we leave, but we cannot reduce the numbers, which is what the country actually wants. Unless we have a native British workforce who are willing and able, and available in sufficient numbers, to step into the breach if the immigration shutters come down. I recently joined the Work and Pensions Committee. We have held evidence sessions on this and heard from employers who are completely dependent on migrant labour and struggle to recruit locally, including in the care sector and construction, which are vital parts of our economy.

We should not pretend to the British people that immigration will be slashed if we leave.

It is particularly important that we discuss one part of this topic, and I might not agree with all my colleagues on it. At the moment, it is not true that there are no restrictions on EU migration. At the moment, legally, people cannot come to this country as an unskilled migrant—which, by the way, includes many skilled people; that is just an immigration term—if they are from outside the EU. They can only legally come in from within the EU, and I think that we should be very cautious about changing that, because the British people might like the idea of going global, but I do not think they would support globalising unskilled migration to this country, which is by far the largest part of it. We need to debate that and be open about it.

Having said all that, I voted for the referendum Act and we must implement the will of the people. As many of my colleagues have said, we are democrats, and we should do this in a way that is open and united, because if the national interest at this moment is best served by maximum unity, a show of strength by Parliament—

Sir Gerald Howarth rose—

James Cartlidge: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and son-in-law for giving way, because I want to endorse what he has just said. We have shown that it is possible on this very divisive and complex issue for members of not only the same party but the same family to hold different views, and yet now to look forward to going ahead united to secure the best possible deal for our country.

James Cartlidge: The local paper did speculate on this matter, and when asked about my wife’s views, I said, “Well, she is my father-in-law’s daughter”—[Interruption.] Not just in biology and spirit, obviously.

On the morning after the referendum, I purchased her a bottle of champagne and congratulated her as she was on the winning side.

Yes, we do have to unite, and we have to show a positive and open spirit in our negotiations with Europe. We have to have a deal that is in its interests too, and that is why this is about openness, free trade and a positive Brexit. We can and should all get behind that, and we do that by voting for this Bill tonight.

4.47 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): When I campaigned as one of a fairly beleaguered minority in the Labour party in the 1970s to join the EU, little did I think that many years hence I would be
standing up today to vote in favour of triggering the negotiations for our exit, but I am. It is against all my historical instincts and my preference for an international way of delivering our business, and it is also against the economic logic that says that a large and uniformly regulated home market is a prerequisite for a fast-growing economy and the benefits that accrue from it.

I am going to vote this way for three reasons. The first is the democratic argument that has been articulated by many. There is a lack of faith in Parliament and our democratic institutions, and for Parliament and politicians to win an election on a promise of a referendum, to hold that referendum, and then not to implement the result of that referendum would have profound implications in terms of faith in our democratic system.

I also believe that, given the complexities and difficulties of the negotiations we are going to be confronted with, the public will expect this Parliament to do its very best to implement the will that they have expressed. I do not want conspiracists to be able to blame the very real problems that will arise from the negotiations on the reluctance of Parliament, rather than the difficult issues that will be confronting us.

I will also vote this way because it is in the interests of business. A decision has been made, and my discussions with businesses run along the lines of, “We’d prefer to remain in, but we recognise we are coming out, and what we want is certainty about our future trading relationships.” That will depend on investment decisions and recruitment decisions, and until we start to negotiate and try to shape the future that our business is going to be confronted with, that uncertainty will continue, and it will severely affect our economy.

I want to make it clear that in voting to trigger article 50, I am not committing myself to accepting the final outcome. I will work with others to ensure that we shape the negotiations in a way that will be beneficial, and I reserve the right to vote against the subsequent outcome if I do not feel that that has been achieved.

4.53 pm

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Benjamin Franklin famously said that if we fail to plan, we plan to fail. That is exactly what this Tory Government have done over Brexit, leaving this supposedly equal family of nations with a very stark choice. If you will indulge me, Mr Speaker, I want to pay tribute to Irvine Welsh, Danny Boyle and Ewan McGregor, because I saw “T2 Trainspotting” recently and it inspired me. Choose Brexit. Choose making up numbers from thin air about the NHS and plastering them on the side of buses. Choose racist and xenophobic sentiments seeping out from some corners of the leave campaign. Choose hate crime rising by more than 40% and LGBT hate crime rising by more than 150% in England and Wales following the Brexit vote. Choose taking the people of our nations to the polls on one of the most important issues in a generation with nothing written down and no plan. Choose ignoring the interests of the people of Scotland and my constituents in Livingston, despite the fact that they voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. Choose leaving the single market, risking 80,000 Scottish jobs within a decade and costing the people of Scotland an average of £2,000 a year in wages. Choose lowering Scotland’s GDP by more than £10 billion and Scotland’s exports by more than £5 billion. Choose vital EU worker status being under threat, with widespread uncertainty to families, businesses and the economy. Choose risking our international standing in the academic, research and innovation communities as we lose access to funding, expertise and people from the EU. Choose walking away from the European Medicines Agency and Euratom without any detail or thought of the impact. Choose the great Brexit power grab, taking back control of straight bananas. Choose returning to the Thatcher era of poverty and austerity. Choose the UK turning its back on Europe.

Those are not the choices that the Scottish people made. Scotland chose differently. Scotland chose to look outward to face the future and to embrace the EU and all the protections and advantages it brings. Scotland chose life in the European Union, not a hard Tory Brexit. This Tory Government must respect that.
Conservative Members quoted Churchill, saying that this could well be the end of the beginning of the Brexit process. If they do not respect the democratic will of the Scottish people to remain in the EU, it will be the beginning of the end of this disunited kingdom.

4.55 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): This evening I will vote to begin the formal process of leaving the European Union because, though I voted remain, the referendum result was clear. In my constituency, and in the country as a whole, the majority voted to leave. Had the result gone the other way, all of us who voted remain would have expected that result to be honoured. Whether voting to remain or voting to leave, British people voted last year in the expectation that the Government would enact the result, so we must see it through.

The referendum has shone a light on the divisions in British society. There is a divide between those for whom life is working out and full of opportunity and those for whom life seems to be going nowhere. If we think that people are angry and divided now, just think what anger there would be if MPs rejected the referendum result, effectively telling so many voters that they got it wrong. The Government's job now is to make a success of Brexit and, in so doing, truly tackle the problems that the referendum laid bare.

As a first step, we must give the Prime Minister the scope to negotiate the best possible Brexit deal. To those who ask for more and more detail at this time, I say—drawing on my experience of negotiating business deals, albeit at a much smaller scale—that giving away more detail does not generally enable people to secure a better deal. We need to be clear, as the Prime Minister has been, that we will walk away if we do not get a good deal.

To those who want a second referendum to choose between a final deal and staying in, I ask: could there be any stronger incentive for the European Union to offer us unattractive exit terms? Proposing a second referendum may be in their political interest, but it is clearly not in the UK's interest.

Now we must get on with it and use this time of change as an opportunity to frame the sort of country that we want to emerge—an open Britain, engaged with Europe and the world, that offers opportunities to all with the confidence and identity that enables people to be tolerant and welcoming. That is the task ahead when we have honoured the referendum result and enacted the Bill.

4.58 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Like many others, I hoped that this debate would never take place. I campaigned to remain in the firm belief that it is the best way to protect jobs and stability for my constituents. However, my constituency voted by a clear margin to leave. I respect the democratic process, and I respect the views of all my colleagues and my constituents.

I will vote for the Bill tonight but, now that we are having this debate, it is my duty to speak up and fight for the people I was elected to serve. For decades the benefits of the EU were not sold to people. The European Parliament was shrouded in mystery, leaving a vacuum for UKIP to sell an alternative narrative of what the EU did and does for us. At times during the referendum campaign it felt like I was trying to share with people in a few months things that we should all have been sharing with them for years.

I campaigned in the referendum against the backdrop of an increasingly dark and globalised world in which things are constantly shifting at an alarming and dramatic pace and in which intolerable cruelty is inflicted on people simply because of their race or religion. People are being displaced and humanitarian crises are happening right across the globe. Disasters, poverty and disadvantage are becoming the norm for so many, and the old answers to our country's and the world's problems are just not coming from our politicians any more. The vacuum left in British politics as MPs and parties struggle with how to respond to this pace and veracity of change has been filled with racist, misogynistic and divisive rhetoric, which is creating an inward, nationalist, isolationist environment.

When experiences like those of my dad are thrown into the mix, we see that it was no surprise that people voted out. My dad, Davey Lewell, is a retired welder. He is a kind, considerate, hard-working man. He used to work in the shipyards with economic migrants from Europe, who came to work alongside him. He hated seeing them being exploited. He wanted them to have rights, and the same terms, conditions and pay that he had, but instead they continued to be exploited, to such a degree that the yard owners could pay them so little that it was no longer a good business model to have people like my Dad employed there. In short, he lost his job. When people see Governments not fighting for them and allowing people to be exploited, they lose faith and they become angry. No Government should ever underestimate what unemployment can do to an individual, to their family and to their community, because these scars last. This referendum was a chance for people like my Dad to vent his hurt. In areas like mine this referendum was lost a very long time ago.

5.1 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): For me, this Bill is about just one thing—process. Like many other hon. Members, I began on a Brexit “road to Damascus” by advocating that Britain remain in the EU. That is not because I am a die-hard Europhile; it is because I am a pragmatist. I believe that, on balance, retaining EU membership was the safer option for Britain, both economically and socially. However, the collective majority of the British people, including the overwhelming majority of my constituents, disagreed with that view, and I accept that we now must leave.

The debate on the nuts and bolts of our exit deal are for another day, because this Bill is not about the substance. It is not about which laws to keep or abolish, or about our future trading relationships. It is not about how we share our security interest. Today, we are dealing with the mechanism that will enable us to begin having those discussions and debates, not only among ourselves here in this House, but, more importantly, with the other 27 member states. It comes down to the
core question that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union posed yesterday in his opening speech:

"do we trust the people or not?"—[Official Report, 31 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 824.]

Although I have been quick to learn that we are often required to take some difficult and unpopular decisions as Members of Parliament, which can be contrary to the views expressed by some constituents, on this issue I choose to trust the people and so will vote accordingly this evening.

5.2 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Let us make no mistake: we are leaving the EU. The referendum seven months ago settled that issue. Today’s vote is not about whether Members have a leave or remain constituency. This Bill is about green-lighting the Prime Minister in her approach to Brexit and to parliamentary scrutiny: a fast-tracked process devoid of any detail for triggering article 50 in March when key European allies will have elections distracting them; and the grudging promise of a White Paper tomorrow for a vote today to replace the blank paper we currently have. Those of us who campaigned for remain know that Brexit is not a done deal.

All of us have to ask ourselves whether we are confident that, as things stand, this Government are going to get the best deal, or even a good deal, for our country. I cannot answer yes to that question. This Bill is our only opportunity to send the Prime Minister back to the drawing board, both on the process and on the purpose of her negotiation.

In the short time available to me, I wish to deal with three points that Walthamstow residents whom I met on Sunday, both leave and remain voters, wanted to make clear. They understand that there are many different ways in which Brexit could happen, but they get the importance of the single market being part of the negotiations. They understand that when 50% of goods cross borders at least twice before they hit the shop floor, we are now talking about more red tape for British businesses. They understand that a Government who abandon the customs union and the common commercial policy for a form of associate membership that does not even exist put thousands of jobs at risk from the beginning. The Secretary of State himself said that businesses would ensure that trade with Britain continues uninterrupted and under similar circumstances. That is clearly not the case, and the British public deserve better.

Walthamstow wants rights for EU citizens to be confirmed, not to be used as bargaining chips or to upset the new company that we keep, in the shape of President Trump. Finally, Walthamstow wants employment rights to be protected. I just attended a statutory instrument Committee in which the Government were already talking about extending the erosion of employment rights, so it is clear that it is not a done deal.

Yesterday, my constituency neighbour, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who sadly is not present, said that he would vote to trigger article 50 simply because of all the mistakes of the past. Well, I cannot green-light article 50 tonight because of all the opportunities for the future that it puts at stake. I am a proud patriot: I am proud of my country and I want the best for my country. We can and should be doing better. We cannot trigger this process now. We must rethink and go back to the drawing board, for the sake of everybody we represent, whether they were for leave or remain.

5.5 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is clear that tonight’s vote is an historic event. I consider it an incredible honour to be in this Parliament at this time, and to be able to cast my vote for the Bill.

People often ask me how long I have been a Eurosceptic, and I often reply, “For as long as I knew what one was.” Growing up in Cornwall, I witnessed the impact of EU bureaucracy and regulation on our communities. I saw how it strangled our fishing communities, and overburdened our agricultural sector with red tape and bureaucracy that meant that businesses could not operate as they felt was best.

I waited for the outcome of the former Prime Minister’s negotiation before I decided how to cast my vote in the referendum. It became clear to me that, despite all the rhetoric, the EU was not willing or prepared to change, and was set on continuing on the course it had been on for some time. That was the final straw that made me decide that casting my vote for leave was the right thing to do. It was a great relief to me when the constituency I represent, St Austell and Newquay, agreed with me, with 62% voting to leave. I am in an easy position: it is not only my personal view but that of the vast majority of my constituents that we should leave the European Union. Since the referendum result, I am even more convinced that it was the right decision and the right thing to do.

I have detected a new confidence in our country: a new, positive, outward-looking approach. Despite all the predicted doom and gloom, business people I have spoken to have said that they are positive about the future. They want the Government to take a clear lead and to set a clear direction, so I welcome the Prime Minister’s approach to doing that, and her setting out where we are taking our country as we negotiate to leave. Clearly, all the “Project Fear” predictions of what would happen if we decided to leave have been proven completely unfounded, but when companies invest in the UK, the media say that they are doing so despite Brexit. Maybe, just maybe, they are investing here because of Brexit, and because they are confident about the future of our country.

Tonight’s historic vote gives us the opportunity to start writing a new chapter for our country, which has a long and great history of standing up positively, and looking at and engaging with the world. I view tonight’s vote as the next step in writing a new chapter for our great nation.

5.8 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The European Union is a bureaucratic, cumbersome and imperfect system, but it is also the longest and most successful peace process the world has ever seen, transforming historical enemies into trading partners, allies and friends. It gave hope to those labouring under the yoke of communism, and it has protected the UK’s workers, consumers and environment, supported the Northern Ireland peace process, and driven Britain’s economy, innovation and prosperity.
[Mary Creagh]

I did not vote to hold the referendum, and I campaigned to remain, but people in Wakefield voted to leave. The Labour Whip says that we should trigger, but my Labour values—solidarity, internationalism, social justice—say something else. The Prime Minister talks about free trade, yet she is walking out on the largest free trade area in the world to chase an imaginary trade deal with Donald Trump. A trade deal with the USA is a distraction. The most important trade deal is the one that we negotiate with the European Union. That deal determines whether Brotherton Esso in Wakefield faces tariffs on the sulphites it exports to wine-makers across the EU, and whether Wakefield farmers face tariffs on the lamb that they export to Belgium.

The Prime Minister has a weak negotiating hand, but she has thrown her cards on the table before the other players have even sat down, rejecting staying in the single market, in which 44% of the UK’s exports are tariff-free. This hard Brexit was not what leave campaigners promised people in the referendum. The UK’s access to the largest free trade area in the world will be worse after 2019, and that puts thousands of British jobs at risk.

An open society without discrimination is the founding pillar of our British and European identity. Since the referendum, hate crime and far-right activity in Yorkshire is up. My father, Tom, died in October. The last vote he cast was to remain in the EU. He came to Britain from Ireland in 1962 to earn his living, met his wife, got his degree, raised his family, and worked and paid his taxes here. After Brexit, someone like him without a degree, raised his family, and worked and paid his taxes here. After Brexit, someone like him without a degree from, say, eastern Europe will face barriers in coming here. After Brexit, someone like him without a degree from, say, eastern Europe will face barriers in coming here. I hope that we are better than that.

To the people of Wakefield I say that I have always sought to act in their best interests. My duty is to use my judgment to make their lives better. They did not elect me to make them poorer, destroy their jobs, and weaken their public services. As someone who has lived in Belgium and Italy, who has worked with entrepreneurs for seven years, and who has been an elected Labour public servant for the past 19 years, I judge that this vote will make people in Wakefield poorer, destroy jobs and businesses, remove social, consumer and environmental rights and reduce the tax base that funds our NHS, schools and services. History has its eyes on us today, so here is my answer: I can no more vote for it than I can vote against my own DNA.

5.11 pm

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): My constituency voted to remain by a large margin, and I voted to remain, so coming to the conclusion that I should support this Bill this evening has been very difficult. In 2015, I stood for election on a manifesto that promised a referendum. Soon after, I voted in favour of a Bill to put that referendum before the British people. In December, I voted for a motion calling on the Government to invoke article 50 by the end of March. I did so because the democratic process had been undertaken, and it would be wrong of me to ignore the result.

I was disappointed by the result of the referendum, but this indecision and uncertainty cannot continue indefinitely. Voting against triggering article 50 would prolong the uncertainty. We will lose the European Union; that much is sure. Delaying that process, which is, in effect, all that the vote will achieve, can only have negative implications for our economy. Any attempt to overturn the decision made would damage this country’s reputation for democracy, which all of us in this place prize so highly. It is time for this House and the nation to come together, not only to mitigate the risks of Brexit, but to exploit the opportunities. The best interests of our constituents must be promoted and protected, whether through trade or an industrial strategy.

Warwick and Leamington is home to a thriving local economy, a superb education system and constituents with an outward-looking and inclusive approach. That will not change as a result of our impending exit from the EU. Now is the time to set out a positive vision for the UK and to turn that vision into reality.

5.14 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): It is an honour to speak in such a historic debate. As a passionate pro-European, a proud Londoner and the MP for a constituency where almost 70% of the electorate voted to remain, and given my background—Britain was a welcoming home to me and my family—it goes without saying that I wish I did not have to vote on this Bill. The decision to trigger article 50 and leave the European Union cannot be stopped once it begins. There is no turning back.

I do not agree with the Prime Minister’s plan to take us out of the single market and the customs union, because the effects will be dangerous and devastating to our economy. That is well understood and well documented where it concerns the City of London and Canary Wharf, which my constituency borders. Some 70,000 to 100,000 jobs—not just financiers at the top end of the institutions, but receptionists, caterers and all the people who serve the City and Canary Wharf—are at risk. The sector contributes more than 2 million jobs to the country and some 12% of taxation revenue for public expenditure, so it is really important that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater, to which the plan to leave the single market will effectively lead.

Our hard-won rights for workers and women, and our protections for human rights, are seen and admired all over the world. We are putting those things and investment in our public services at risk. The decision will cost dearly, and will be deeply problematic and damaging to our economy. Some 44% of our exports are to the EU. The head of the World Trade Organisation even indicated that if we leave and end up on WTO terms, UK consumers will lose some £9 billion.

It is because of the damage that this change and the move away from the single market will do to my constituents, to our country’s economy and to our rights that I cannot support triggering article 50. It is not in our interest as a country that is supposed to be outward-looking and internationalist, nor in the interest of future generations.
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): About 20 years ago, my political career was launched on the back of a failed referendum campaign, when I and many others failed to prevent the Welsh Assembly from being set up. I am reminded very much of those days at the moment because the campaign in Wales was also very divisive. All sorts of promises were made that have never actually been kept. It was a huge constitutional change for us.

There were divisions, threats and alterations in Wales. When John Prescott, who was Deputy Prime Minister at the time, went to Newport town centre, one of his spin doctors ordered a young campaigner off the streets, saying, “I have the Deputy Prime Minister’s authority for doing this.” The resulting fracas made the third story of “News at 10”. I will not reveal the identity of the person involved—[Interruption.] Yes, alright then, it was me.

As we looked upon the wreckage of that campaign, a great discussion took place in Cardiff. We said, “Only one in four people have voted for this Welsh Assembly”—it went through on a much narrower margin than the referendum that we have just had. We asked, “What are we going to do?” Some of us—I was probably one of the diehards—said, “Let’s carry on fighting it in Parliament, get back out there in the media and redo the whole campaign.” I did not think about the courts at the time but, then, we did not have any hedge funders behind us, otherwise I probably would have done.

There were wiser voices, such as those of: Lord Bourne, now the Communities and Local Government Minister; the Brexit Minister himself, my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), who sits on the Front Bench and does such a good job for us; and the Secretary of State for Wales. They have all done very well. Those wiser people said, “We have to accept it. We don’t have to admit that we were wrong, but we have to admit that, on this occasion, the people have said one thing and we have to go along with it.” They were so right. I was wrong to say that we should have carried on fighting it because, as a result, we got involved with the national assembly advisory group, drew up the Standing Orders and put up candidates. We are now the second party in Wales, and we are close to becoming the first party there as a result of what took place. Look how well the Ministers I mentioned have done as a result. Who knows what might happen one day?

That is the reality of what we have before us now. People are talking about divisions. There were divisions all right during the referendum campaign. Those divisions need to end—we all agree on that. However, they will not end when so many people—they were in a minority—although acting for the best reasons and feeling they are doing the right thing continue to try to fight this campaign. They should stop fighting and become part of what is going to take place now, because the people of this country have spoken.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman honestly saying that he would have stopped fighting to come out of the European Union if the vote had gone the other way, and with such a poor majority? Let me tell him, I do not believe he would.

David T. C. Davies: The hon. Lady is a peacemaker, I am sure. She has given me a few tellings-off in her time. I think that if tried to do anything like that, she would have a quiet, or even a not so quiet, word with me and put me in my place. We would have had to accept what the people of this country said, and that is what I am saying now—let us end the division.

I say this to Labour Members: look at what has happened in my political party. We were all over the place a few months ago—some fighting for remain, some wanting leave, some wanting this and that—and we have all got behind our Cabinet members and our leader. That is a lesson for this country. We have a first-rate Prime Minister, and tonight our Prime Minister is going to reflect the will of the British people. Yes, this is about bringing power back from Brussels to the people of this country, but it is also about going through the Lobby and recognising that that is what the people of this country want. I say to anyone who is thinking of not coming through the Lobby with us tonight: think about the will of the British people and be part of what is going to take place—this exciting new chapter in the history of this great country. Come with us tonight—come with the British people.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I will start by putting my cards on the table. I loathe and detest this Tory Brexit. I despair of what this Tory Brexit would do to my beautiful country.

This is, as we know, to be the hardest of hard Brexits, with cuts yet unimaginable and consequences yet unconceived—and for what? If we were doing this for some lofty ideal or grand purpose, like maybe addressing global poverty or some of the huge issues of injustice around the world, that might make it just about palatable, but no—we are doing it because the UK does not like immigration. That is the cold, beating heart of this bad British Brexit, and it underpins absolutely everything concerning our departure from the EU. It takes precedence over everything else, and all other considerations are merely consequential. The fact is that we live in an interconnected, globalised world where the movements of people have never been so profound, sometimes fleeing from persecution, or perhaps exchanging skills and ideas. Yet we are asked to believe the myth that a Brexitised UK will beat back this historic tide like some sort of Farageous Canute. I actually laughed out loud when I heard all the guff about a global UK. A global UK is the last thing the Tories want to create—they are trying to create a drawbridge UK.

Look at the response from the rest of the world: when they are not laughing at us, they are simply taking pity on us. As the Foreign Secretary goes out of his way to insult the very people we have to negotiate with, they are thinking of nothing other than the hardest of conditions to deter anybody else from considering leaving. The negotiating position seems to be to threaten our EU partners by saying that we will indulge in even further economic self-harm if they dare look after their own interests. Apparently we are even considering turning the UK into some sort of offshore deregulated tax haven if the EU actually thinks about looking its own interests. That’ll show them, won’t it?

It is not just the fact of leaving the EU that concerns me, ghastly enough though that is; it is the new ideology—the new world view—that has hastily been designed to accommodate this new splendid isolation. I see a Brexitised Britain as a world of weird, ’50s nostalgia and antipathy.
to foreigners—a reality that will feel very much like the pages of a *Daily Mail* editorial. People of Britain: work as if you live in the early days of a UKIP UK, because that is what is coming.

Scotland, of course, did not want any part of this, yet we have to be driven off the cliff edge with the rest of the United Kingdom. What we have now, though, is options. We have presented a plan to stop Scotland indulging in the worst of this madness. If that is not listened to, we have every right to reconsider our membership of this United Kingdom.

5.24 pm

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): When the results came through on 24 June, I must admit that my emotion was one of great sadness, and it continued for some time. I was sad not just, as the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) has said, because of the economic consequences, potential or not—I believe that in the medium to long term, this country has a stable and prosperous economic future—but because of the divisions created between us and our European partners and allies, as well as the divisions in our own country. It is absolutely vital that we come together and rebuild the social capital that was lost.

We have to do that by building on the decision we will take tonight. Whether we know that a decision is right or wrong, we can ensure that the next decisions we take are the best possible decisions for our country and people. That demands that we involve all the peoples of the United Kingdom, whether they are from Northern Ireland, England, Scotland or Wales. It also demands that we immediately reassure European Union citizens in this country of their rights here, just as we would expect other EU countries to reassure our own citizens. That is a matter of moral decency.

It is important that we fight very hard to retain those institutions that are not, in effect, part of the European Union, which we are leaving, but that are vital, technically and in so many other ways, for our general wellbeing and the health of our economy. I am referring to institutions such as Euratom and the European Medicines Agency.

It is vital that we all work incredibly hard. We—certainly in my party—have put the country in this position; it is our duty to get out there and ensure that we have the best possible arrangements. That does not mean writing newspaper columns saying how wonderful it is; it means getting out there and doing the hard work, treating people with respect and building up those relationships that have been perhaps more than a little bruised over the past few months.

It is also vital that this place—not the Government or the European Parliament alone—have the sovereignty to make a decision about our future relationship with Europe. Finally, I hope that we will conduct the debates with honesty and clarity, not with bombast.

5.27 pm

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): It is an honour to speak in this debate. Last Friday, celebrating my first 100 days as an MP, I spoke to a room of 50 dedicated activists and members at my constituency Labour party meeting. I am proud that we were able to talk frankly and honestly about this vote. Many had spent months knocking on doors and delivering leaflets alongside my predecessor, Jo Cox, advocating that people should vote remain, while others in the room had voted another way.

**Mary Creagh**: I am sure that Jo Cox and her family will be in the thoughts of the whole House when we vote on the outcome of the referendum.

**Tracy Brabin**: Absolutely. I appreciate my hon. Friend’s comments.

I voted to remain. As I spoke and listened to my friends and colleagues, it was difficult and occasionally emotional as I explained that I felt that it was my duty to respect democracy and vote in favour of triggering article 50. Batley and Spen voted 63% to leave. The people have spoken and I must listen. However painful this is now, we are leaving the European Union. It is my duty to listen to everyone, to move on from the labelling of people as leavers and remainers, and to get the best deal for everyone.

Batley and Spen was once a powerhouse of manufacturing. Men and women left school and went to work in the mills, but things move on and now we are celebrated for beds and biscuits. The mills are now shopping centres, offices and flats; in some cases, they have fallen into disrepair. Jobs for life have been replaced by the gig economy, and far too many of my constituents are on low pay and in insecure work. People have not seen a significant improvement in their standard of living for decades. The have been left behind by globalisation, and I have no doubt that financial insecurity and a sense of abandonment contributed to the leave vote. That said, my constituents did not vote to give this Government a blank cheque. They did not vote to lose jobs, to have their rights at work watered down or to lose maternity and paternity pay, human rights or LGBT rights.

There are lessons to be learned from the creative industries, in which I formerly worked, and their voice must be heard in the upcoming negotiations. In evidence given to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee in October 2016, Directors UK told us that the UK is the third largest supplier of films and the second largest producer of television in the world. In the fast-paced area of video games, we are constantly at the cutting edge. The creative economy accounts for one in every 11 jobs. However, it is fair to say that a vote for exiting the EU was not what the industry at large wished for. A survey conducted by the Creative Industries Federation ahead of the referendum found that 96%—

**Alison McGovern**: Does my hon. Friend agree that the point she is making is that the creative industries are not just about here, but about the places that we represent in the north, which are leaders in this area?

**Tracy Brabin**: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. It is absolutely true that the creative industries are among our biggest expanding industries locally, and we must support them at every opportunity. If we lose free movement of labour, we could easily lose a pipeline of highly skilled creatives. If that happens, we must develop a domestic training and education system that fills the skills gap in the creative industries.
Of course, the time to debate such details will come later. First we must vote to move the process on, not with angry denial or blind optimism but on a mission to be vigilant about the rights of those who have the least and those who support people in the greatest need.

5.31 pm
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin). On this Bill, we have both come to a similar decision. In the run-up to the referendum, I believed that the considerable short-term risks of leaving the European Union outweighed the unquantifiable future benefits, but I underestimated the deep mistrust of the European Union. The people have decided to leave. I must respect that decision, and I will support this Bill.

The hard work now begins. For example, how do we access the benefits of free trade and the inspection-free transfer of goods from outside EU structures such as the single market and the customs union? Some believe that nothing is possible, and that the alternative to working for success is to hope that things go badly—even to will it—to be ceaselessly critical and, ultimately, to achieve only an echo of Private Fraser’s lament, “We’re all doomed.” Although none of us has perfect foresight, I am absolutely confident that we will have much greater success in lining up future free trade agreements than some Members have suggested.

The negotiations will begin soon. In my view, we need an agreement in which we are generous to Europeans living here, enthusiastic in our continuation of academic and research co-operation, and resolute in our solidarity with Europe on defence and security. In that agreement, we must be practical about ways of controlling immigration but welcoming to skills, tourists and entrepreneurs; we must be free of the European Court of Justice, but never compromise on standards or the rule of law; and we must be adventurous in pursuing our own trade deals, but never underestimate the importance of free trade and easy customs clearance in all that we do with Europe. That is what I hope the Government’s White Paper will lay out. I hope that it will bring our one nation of diverse parts together. Whatever our concerns about the journey, we should start positively, not cynically.

5.33 pm
Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I start by paying tribute to Gina Miller, a courageous woman who fought for our constitution, our laws and our values. She found herself and her family subject to a hideous campaign from the media and the public, for the crime of simply being a democrat. She prevented an ill-equipped Government from over-reaching themselves and forcing through their own vision of Brexit without the views of parliamentarians being heard. She has acted fearlessly and without reward, and parliamentarians and democrats across the country all owe her a huge

Hon. Members will know that I introduced a Bill to safeguard in primary legislation all the workers’ rights derived from European Union legislation after the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. Unfortunately, it was blocked, and we had over four hours of discussion about favourite radio programmes in relation to a handout Bill, so I hope that the Government tune in this time.

I realise that days next week have been allocated to discuss amendments in groups, but as I understand it, there is no guarantee that mine will be discussed. I therefore want to highlight them now to demonstrate their importance during the negotiations. People in this country deserve to know that their rights at work will not be thrown away.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Does not my hon. Friend’s point show, as does the fact that hon. Members are now restricted to just three minutes per speech, how outrageous it is that the Government are allocating just three days for detailed scrutiny of the most important Bill this country has faced in our lifetimes?

Melanie Onn: The Bill is certainly very difficult and there are lots of complex issues. I am sure that many Members on both sides of the House would appreciate having longer to discuss these issues.

New clause 9 would require the Government to produce a plan to ensure that EU workers’ rights will be maintained in United Kingdom law before withdrawal from the EU. I wonder whether we will see such a plan in tomorrow’s White Paper. New clause 10 would make provision for EU workers’ rights to continue in force in the UK on exit day, subject only to changes made by primary legislation. New schedule 1 would place in primary legislation each EU directive on workers’ rights.

The amendments are front and centre of many working people’s concerns about an increasingly unstable labour market. There are protections against discrimination, and for the rights to rest breaks, paid holiday and leave for working parents. These protections have become the accepted minimums for reasonable employers and have been woven into the fabric of the employment relationship.

On the steps of Downing Street in July, the Prime Minister referred to those who have a job, but do not always have job security. They are the millions of agency workers in the care sector, the retail industry, the security industry and in our factories. They rely on these protections to enjoy the same wages and holiday entitlements as permanent workers, and in turn they get equal access to facilities, vacancies and amenities.

Some have been reassured by the Government that Brexit will not undermine workers’ rights, but the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) demonstrate that that is not the case. If it is the case, however, I look forward to my amendments being added to this Bill, if only to add just a little more detail.

Despite being on the other side of the debate, I accept that the British public voted for Brexit, but I urge the Government to recognise that they did not vote for more insecure contracts, less safe workplaces or anything less than they currently have by way of protection in their jobs.

5.37 pm
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I would like to take this opportunity to send my condolences, and I am sure those of many colleagues, to the family of one of my constituents who has passed away today—a great Yorkshireman, Sir Ken Morrison of Morrison Supermarkets. Our thoughts are with his family.
It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). I absolutely support her call for the protection of workers’ rights, as do many of my Conservative colleagues.

I have listened carefully to many fine speeches during the past two days, and none was finer than that of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who articulated so well the benefits of peace and prosperity that we have secured through our membership of the European Union. I must say, however, that I disagree with his conclusion, because I feel it is incumbent on me to vote to invoke article 50. Quite reasonably, the public believe that we as politicians have not been listening to their fears regarding sovereignty, democratic accountability and, most of all, immigration. I believe it would be disastrous if we did not support the public’s wish to leave the European Union.

In business, people often have to take a certain route, probably against their better judgment. The most important thing that they should always do in such circumstances is not to worry too much about whether they have made the best decision, but make the best of the decision they have made.

I have listened to SNP Members who have spoken about wanting a meaningful vote. By that, I think they mean a veto—as one of my hon. Friends said—over whether we should actually leave the European Union. I think they have made the best decision, but make the best of the decision they have made.

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I have listened to SNP Members who have spoken about wanting a meaningful vote. By that, I think they mean a veto—as one of my hon. Friends said—over whether we should actually leave the European Union at all. If that is what they mean by a meaningful vote, I cannot think of a more effective device for getting us the worst possible deal from these negotiations.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the British public were told there would be no second-guessing or second bites at the cherry? This was not a bargaining position, but a vote on a decision to be made and taken by the Government.

Kevin Hollinrake: Absolutely. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. It is a shameful device to try to keep us in the European Union via the back door. A no vote by Parliament would lead us to remaining and that is in the interests of the negotiators in the European Union. We need to show confidence.

There is still time for the European Union to listen to the fears of other countries. The United Kingdom has made its decision, but other countries have concerns. In France, Netherlands, Germany and Italy, there is great discontent with many of the EU’s rules, regulations and restrictions. It is so important that we get not only the best possible deal for the United Kingdom, but the right deal for the European Union. The EU needs to see the shifting sands and listen to people’s fears while there still is a European Union. I believe that the fragmentation of the EU would be the biggest economic and national security risk we could possibly face. It is time for Brussels to listen to the people and reform before it is too late.

5.41 pm

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am often asked by English Members why it is that I support pulling Scotland out of the UK but keeping it in the European Union. It is a good question, because Scotland is no stranger to the idea of sacrificing a degree of independence for interdependence. Indeed, that is the argument that underpins Unionism. When Scotland surrendered its national Parliament in 1707, it was to join a prototype European Union: the United Kingdom. Two countries which had been at war for centuries pooled sovereignty, allowed the free movement of people and created a common trading area, locking our economies together with the aim of ending conflict. The price was complete Scottish independence.

Across the North sea, there is a very similar country: Denmark. Both countries have populations of about 6 million. They are largely urban, but with significant rural populations. Both have large coastlines. However, when Denmark chose to sacrifice some sovereignty upon joining the EU, it retained much that we have lost, or will soon lose, in the UK. Denmark finds itself today in the single market and a member of the customs union, and it is able to enjoy all the benefits they bring. Denmark also remains in control of its own defence policy, its own foreign policy and its own fiscal policy. There, in a nutshell, is the difference. Within the UK, Scotland controls none of those.

James Cartledge: The hon. Gentleman is making a very good speech. On controlling economic policy, I am intrigued. Given that the SNP advocates independence if it does not get its way on this issue, can he confirm whether the SNP believes his country should then join the euro?

John Nicolson: No, I believe Scotland should hold a referendum whether we get our own way on this or not. I believe in independence whatever the outcome of the vote tonight. [Interruption.] An hon. Member with an incredible degree of prescience announces that we lost the referendum. I am not sure whether that takes our debate very much further, but I am happy to acknowledge, sir, that we did indeed lose the referendum. We will win the next one, however.

During Scotland’s referendum on independence, it looked like some of this might change. The Prime Minister assured Scotland that we were a family of nations. Membership of the EU was sold to the Scottish electorate as one of the defining benefits of remaining within the United Kingdom, which must be a cruel irony on the day that we are debating this.

I am intrigued by what the Prime Minister means when she says that we are equal partners. What kind of equality is it when England, 10 times our size, attempts to compel us against our will? That is not equality as I understand it.

Joanna Cherry: My hon. Friend is putting the Prime Minister right on a couple of matters. Would he have also supported the Prime Minister right on a couple of matters? Would he also care to put her right on her oft-repeated mistake in seeming to suggest that the SNP wants to take Scotland out of the EU, and then perhaps some of the scribblers on the Government Back Benches could pass it on to her?

John Nicolson: Members will be flabbergasted to learn that I agree with my hon. and learned Friend. We see a key part of our future lying in the EU.

The Prime Minister, mentioned there with such great affection, chose to visit Edinburgh on her first trip to Scotland, and it was a visit full of visual symbolism.
She called on the First Minister, and while they did not hold hands, the Prime Minister said all the right things, including that she was willing to listen to options on Scotland’s future relationship with the EU. Well, what is the point of listening if everything said falls on deaf ears? It is not consultation.

My colleagues, my constituents and people throughout our country want to be part of an outward-looking, cosmopolitan Scotland. We want to be part of a union that is a community of nations and which respects diversity and autonomy. Members on the Conservative Benches profess to love the Union that binds Scotland and England, but the union that is dying is not the EU, with its long queue of candidate countries, but the UK. Margaret Thatcher may have begun the dismemberment, but historians will, I suspect, judge that today Conservative Members delivered the coup de grâce—as our continental partners would say.

5.46 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson), who is a passionate advocate of Scottish issues. It is a pleasure also to see that you have recovered from the curried nut incident last night, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am afraid that this is a speech I never wanted to give and a Bill I never wanted to see, but I feel compelled to speak in this historic debate. Having listened to the debate over the last two days, and harking back in particular to the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and his quote from Edmund Burke, I know that the decision I take must be in the interests of my country—for us to do anything else would lead to unimaginable consequences. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) was also quite right that we have to put country first, constituency second and party last. That is why I have come to the decision I have on the Bill.

Hon. Members will know that I campaigned passionately on behalf of the remain campaign, and the majority of Bath residents—70%—voted, like me, to remain inside the EU. I have not changed my views, and rest assured I will continue to advocate them. Like other hon. Members, I have received thousands of emails and letters, from those on both sides of the debate, on whether I should vote to trigger article 50 and allow the Government to begin the formal negotiations. However, the referendum campaign was fought, the vote was held, the turnout was high and the public gave their verdict. The country voted to leave the EU, and it is the democratic duty of this sovereign Parliament and Government to ensure we do just that.

Had the result been in reverse, I would have hoped that the leave campaign respected the democratic decision of the British people in exactly the same way. It is incumbent on us all to come together as one nation to seek the best possible deal with the EU—a new partnership between an independent, self-governing, global Britain and our friends and allies in the EU. I have called consistently for a White Paper, which I am pleased will be published tomorrow, as I want to ensure that my constituents and, in particular, my businesses, which have been somewhat ignored in our debates, can more systematically feed in their views.

If we are to leave the EU, we must not delay any further. To do so would frustrate our European friends and allies and probably weaken our negotiating hand. I would like clarity soon from the Government about the final vote. Given that the Supreme Court ruled to ensure the introduction of this Bill, I wonder how it would rule if the Government used the prerogative to approve no deal.

I will vote to trigger article 50 tonight, and I implore all Members to do the same.

5.49 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Given the time available, I shall restrict my brief remarks to two issues that are impacted by Brexit: EU nationals; and the single market in aviation, which is an important issue in my constituency.

The 3 million EU nationals and their families living in the UK are understandably extremely concerned. Instead of getting straight answers from the UK Government, EU nationals living in the UK have heard only empty rhetoric and weasel words from the Tories. Johanna Kettunen is one of my caseworkers in my constituency office. Born in Finland, she has lived in Scotland for over seven years, studying at Glasgow University, and she has made Scotland her home. She is extremely upset that she is being used as a bargaining chip by this callous Government in a Tory Brexit game that gey few in Scotland wanted to play in the first place.

As with many other Members, a large number of my constituents have been getting in touch with me to allay their fears that Brexit might rip their families apart. This is a clear indication that the ongoing uncertainty about EU immigration and the right to remain are already harming the UK, and it will continue for as long as the Tories refuse to confirm the right of EU nationals to stay in the UK.

Article 50 and exiting the EU will impact not only on EU nationals, but on businesses across these islands. One sector that has not been given the attention it deserves throughout the Brexit debate is the aviation sector. This vital part of the economy contributes £1 billion a week to UK gross domestic product and £9 billion in taxation. The UK has the third largest aviation sector in the world, which is largely the result of the European single aviation market and the open skies agreement between the US and the EU.

By leaving the EU and the EEA, the UK walks away from these hugely important agreements—agreements that account for a clear majority of UK aviation traffic. Regional airports are vital for connectivity within Scotland, but the Tories’ reckless gamble with our EU membership has caused serious uncertainty for these airports, which could cause a serious detrimental impact on the Scottish economy.

In contrast, the SNP Scottish Government are working hard to ensure Scotland’s aviation sector is a success, despite Brexit, committing to halve air passenger duty by the end of 2021. So, not for the first time, we know what the Scottish Government plan to do with the powers within their remit, but what of the UK Government?

Will the Minister tell us in his summing-up whether the UK plans to remain part of the European aviation single market? If not, can he guarantee that transitional
arrangements will be agreed to ensure that UK airlines and airports are not put at any competitive disadvantage as regards their European counterparts? Will he further assure us that the UK will remain part of the open skies agreement with the United States? The 5,200 people in Renfrewshire in and around Glasgow airport, and the 1 million across the UK whose jobs rely on a thriving aviation sector are watching and expect an answer.

The Prime Minister needs to act now and give UK businesses and EU citizens living in the UK a cast-iron guarantee that their status and rights will be protected.

If she does not, she will leave us no choice but to offer a different guarantee to those living and working in Scotland through “voting yes”—yes to be an outward-facing member of the international family of nations; yes for our children’s future; yes for Scotland; yes to independence.

5.52 pm

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I agreed with the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) when he said that this was a debate he hoped would never happen, but a vote he hoped would never happen. I am a strong remainder, and I campaigned hard for us to stay in the EU. I still think our future would be better within it, but I recognise the result of the British people who voted for Brexit. I also recognise, however, that my Durham constituency, in line with many university cities, voted strongly to remain.

I was worried about the result on 23 June. The north-east has only 1.6% of the population who are foreign-born, and hardly any of them live in Durham, yet in the campaign immigration was the most commonly cited reason for voting leave. It arose because people felt that their views were not being taken into account and that their access to jobs and services was diminishing—not least because of the austerity policies of other parties, which took vital resources out of our most impoverished communities.

I think that we failed to address those concerns in this House. We obviously have to tackle xenophobia and racism, and we have to change our immigration policies. I hope we find a way of doing that without simply withdrawing from the single market, which will create as many problems as it solves. We have also had four decades of negative press about Europe, and it was impossible to overturn it within a few months and make the positive case not only for the EU but for upholding human rights and active participation in global institutions that do so much to maintain peace and to create prosperity in the world. I hope we shall continue to take the international, outward-looking approach that is necessary, and reject the policies of Trump and isolationism.

I was very pleased that my constituents voted to remain, because the impact of Brexit on the north-east will be huge. We have a positive balance of trade, with 58% of our exports going to Europe, but we have no idea whether that will continue if trade barriers arise. We need to hear more from the Government about what will happen to our automotive industries, our universities, our advanced manufacturing, and businesses that are receiving money from the European social fund and the European regional development fund. That would help to create some stability. Our young people, most of whom voted to remain, also need to hear how the Government will deliver a more prosperous country. That is why I think we should adopt Labour’s amendments, and ensure that we have a vote on the final Brexit deal.

I know that my constituents voted to remain, but I recognise that the country voted for Brexit, and I shall abstain in this evening’s vote.

5.55 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Last summer I walked through the fields of the Somme and along the beaches of Normandy. Doing that, one cannot but ask oneself, “How did we get here?” History teaches us that it was the result of a failure of institutions, economics and relationships, and the rise of populism and nationalism. Because of that, I was, and still am, inspired by Europe and what it has achieved, for all its faults, many of which were rightly mentioned during the referendum. To the eastern European states during the cold war, it represented an alternative to the ethnic slaughter in the Balkans, and presented opportunities for hope.

I understand and respect the vast majority of those who voted to leave the European Union, many of whom were members of my own family and people in my own constituency. However, my constituents voted overwhelmingly to remain. Because of my constituents, because of my conscience and because of the facts that I see before me, I shall vote against the triggering of article 50, for the amendment, and also against the programme motion. The debate has been far too curtailed. No doubt the Bill will proceed to a Committee stage, and I shall also seek to amend it then. The result will reflect the referendum. I shall do that not out of disrespect, but out of duty: a duty to stand up for my constituents, to stand up for the 48%, and to stand up in this sovereign Parliament and challenge the Government and their approach.

The Government have no plan, unlike the First Minister of Wales, who has set out a cross-party plan. They have provided no guarantees that Wales will not be left worse off, and no guarantees of the unfettered access to the single market that is so crucial to businesses and jobs in my constituency. They have provided no assurances that powers will not be taken away from Wales, or that our rights will not be removed. They have given no reassurances to EU citizens living and working in our public services in my constituency.

We are told to be optimistic. I have no doubt that the British and Welsh people will find their way through, however difficult things become—we have done that so many times before—but I must be honest. I fear that the concerns that people rightly express about immigration are far from being resolved, and will not be resolved by our leaving the European Union. I fear that many who felt left behind will continue to feel left behind while we have a Government who are advocating a bargain basement, tax haven, race to the bottom economy, and are running across to the United States and throwing themselves before President Trump. I fear that the poorest will continue to suffer, and what then? Who will be blamed next?

The Prime Minister said today that she was a leader, but the truth is that she is a follower. She is following the siren calls of a select group on her own Benches to a
hard, reckless Brexit. Instead of trying to bring the country together, she is now following the lead of a President whose values she does not share in a desperate scramble to make up for the gambles of her predecessor. We are at a turning point—that is certain—but whatever the result of the referendum, there is not only one route forward. We have a choice when it comes to where we head in the future, and we must think very hard about that choice.

5.58 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), who is not in the Chamber at the moment, spoke about the future. The Bill will have huge impacts on future generations, affecting the prosperity of our children and our young men and women. That is thrown into particularly sharp focus in the highlands. For generations, young people left the highlands to seek further education and to seek their future, until we had a Scottish Parliament and benefited from the engagement of the European Union.

The University of the Highlands and Islands is celebrating 20 years of EU co-operation, which has allowed us to have that much-needed symbol in the Highlands—a physical university campus in Inverness. Among other things, our co-operation with Europe has helped to reverse the decline that I mentioned. So, too, have EU nationals, and I was struck by the words of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), because I agree that these people who come to our country to add to it are our friends and neighbours, and they deserve to be treated as such.

However, with the direction that the UK Government are taking, that all changes. The UK is scrabbling about for deals—any deals—with no stone unturned, no matter who is underneath it. Holding hands with Trump, legitimising his symbolic exclusion, his walls and his rising xenophobia, and shaking hands with Erdogan—all this is clearly saying that it is weapons before weans, dogma before doctorates. The alternative to a rock-hard Brexit is a change of course, if not for the UK, then for our universities, for people who will be put in a really difficult position, such as those in Gibraltar, and, of course, for Scotland, where 62% of people and 100% of council areas voted to remain. There is a choice for this Parliament.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Has my hon. Friend noticed a shiver running along the Labour Front Bench looking for a spine to run up?

Drew Hendry: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. I hope Labour Front Benchers and other Labour Members will follow the example of some of those I have referenced tonight and vote against article 50.

If there are exceptions on borders for Ireland, and exceptions for Nissan and the City, this is a matter of choice—it does not have to be a rock-hard Brexit. People in the highlands and elsewhere in Scotland want hope for the future. They want future conditions to reflect our nation: they want a big-hearted, open-minded, co-operative future where all who contribute to a better society, wherever they come from, are valued. They want an enlightened future, not an insular little Britain hand in hand with those who would drag us into the darkness.

6.2 pm

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): I will vote against triggering article 50 tonight as a patriot who believes in Britain, and as a democrat who believes profoundly in parliamentary democracy. I will do it in the interests of my children, my constituents and my country, and in support of my convictions, because I do not believe that the Brexit course we are set on will make Britain a more prosperous, fairer, more equal and more tolerant country. To the contrary, it will make our politics meaner and our country poorer.

Despite all the optimism and jingoism we have heard from those on the Government Benches in the last two days of debate—there have been many terrific and many difficult speeches—I cannot credit the notion that the best way to make Britain a successful global trading nation is to withdraw from the most sophisticated global market the world has ever created. I cannot believe, standing here in London, in the heart of the most global, cosmopolitan trading city the world has ever seen, that we will enhance our chances of improving our economy by cutting off this city from the other great cities around Europe.

I cannot believe that our economy will improve, and I cannot believe that the constituents I represent will be well served. In fact, if the hard Brexit—the rock-hard Brexit—proposed by the Prime Minister comes to pass, I am convinced that it will be constituents such as mine, in working-class communities in this country, who will be hit hardest. And if the alternative version that she is threatening Europe with comes about, they will be hit harder still.

However, the biggest reason why I will vote against article 50 tonight is not the economy—we have made too much of that—but the values that are in jeopardy in our country and across the world. We are a liberal, plural, tolerant, European enlightenment economy and society, and the great British values that Labour has spoken for for so long are at risk today. This Brexit vote began with immigration. The man in charge of leave said it was their baseball bat, which they simply needed to pick up to win the vote. It has ended with the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) saying that the Tory party is now an anti-immigrant party, and with the Prime Minister hand in hand with a racist President of the United States. Are those my values, or are my values those of Angela Merkel, who had to ring up the President to tell him he was wrong? I know where I think this country stands on that issue, and I know that, unless we think again, we are going down a very, very dangerous path.

6.5 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I want to make a few brief points about this Bill. Of course, Wales is a net beneficiary of the EU, receiving £245 million, or £79 per person, more than we pay in. In rural constituencies such as mine, that funding makes an impact way beyond what this figure implies. For rural communities, the common agricultural policy is the most important financial contribution that the EU
makes, yet the Conservative party stands ready to switch off these vital support mechanisms that are essential to our already struggling isolated communities, with no indication of how it will make good the damage, or even whether it intends to.

I shall spend a few sentences exploring the increasingly divisive and much-misused word “freedom”. It was its antonym, “control”, that dominated the leave campaign’s market-tested propaganda, but it was an almost messianic pursuit of this most emotive of concepts, freedom, that drove us to break free from Brussels. [Interuption.] “Freedom to” and “freedom from” are the opposing and disputed understandings of liberty that have arguably underpinned the political divide for centuries. However, if we strip away much of the leave campaign’s divisive and reprehensible rhetoric, we find that it is its dogmatic belief in a freedom from Brussels that catalyses its pursuit of this most emotive of concepts, freedom, that drove us to break free from Brussels. [Interuption.]

6.8 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): One of the more bizarre aspects of the discussion that has taken place since the referendum is the way in which the people who won the referendum have tried to explain what it means by reference to the arguments of those who lost the referendum. Thus we are told that, even though it was not on the ballot paper, the vote is a vote to leave the single European market because David Cameron suggested that it might be. I did hear David Cameron suggest that, but I also heard the leave campaign accuse him of hyperbole and mendacity every time he did so, and say that it was not true.
be respected. The Government say that Brexit means Brexit. Let us see, in the months to come, whether respect means respect.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I rarely get to do this, so I am going to really enjoy it: I am going to raise the time limit for the last few speeches to four minutes.

6.12 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—perfect timing.

I hope that I am wrong, but I believe that the decision that the country took on 23 June will result in the biggest self-inflicted wound since our disastrous intervention in Iraq. That wound is festering and it will leave the UK permanently economically weaker, even after it has healed. I believe that, when Members of Parliament believe that a course of action is going to be a catastrophe, they have a duty to harry, assail and oppose the Government, not to acquiesce.

I respect those who voted to leave. They had, and have, genuine grievances about a lack of jobs or education prospects, and concerns about the changes they see in our society, including concerns about immigration. The Brexiteers claimed that leaving the EU would address those concerns by stopping the cancellation of urgent hospital operations—paid for, presumably, by the tsunami of cash that was going to come to the NHS post-Brexit—improving teacher shortages in our schools and boosting housing supply. It will not do any of those things. In fact, it will make them worse. I doubt that even the leave campaign’s most prominent pledge, to reduce immigration substantially, will be achieved. Why would it be? After all, the Prime Minister has spent many years seeking to reduce the level of non-EU immigration, and nothing changed there.

What leaving the EU will do with certainty is diminish us as a nation and reduce our influence and international standing. That has already happened. Brexit has forced our Prime Minister, a born-again hard-line Brexiteer, to line up with Trump—indeed, to walk hand in hand with him. While European leaders and Canada condemned his Muslim ban, our Prime Minister’s initial response was to say, “Not my business.” Worse, she immediately offered him, with indecent haste, a state visit—far quicker than any other US President—which I am sure had absolutely nothing to do with her desperation to secure a trade deal, any deal, with the protectionist Trump. In “The Art of the Deal”, Trump says:

“The worst of times often create the best opportunities to make good deals.”

To translate that for Conservative Members, the worst of times for the UK create the best opportunity for a good deal for the US.

Jobs are at risk. Six months after the vote, there is still no analysis of how many jobs will be lost after we come out of the single market.

David T. C. Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Tom Brake: I will not give way.

The Liberal Democrat position is very clear: the people voted for departure, not the destination. Now the Government must give them a chance to vote on the destination. If that guarantee were forthcoming tonight, I would vote with the Government.

6.16 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I really appreciate the extra minute, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Order Paper says that we will just be voting on the Bill but, actually, we will be voting on consigning the UK to a red, white and blue Brexit. Anyone who thinks that, by reasonable argument, they can influence this Tory Government to do reasonable things is deluded. It has not happened yet, and it is not going to happen in future. Anyone who votes in favour of triggering article 50 will be consigning us to a red, white and blue Brexit and a future shaped by the Conservative party. I could not do that in good conscience, and I cannot believe that other Opposition Members could.

In 20 years’ time, when my children are young adults, young people will not be able to travel easily to EU countries. They will not be able to marry people from EU countries for fear that they will not be allowed to live together in the same country. They will not be able to afford the living standards that we have now. There will be an erosion in food quality, for example, because we will have to compromise on our standards in order to have trade deals with countries like America.

We are going to lose farming in communities, such as those in Wales and Scotland, that currently rely heavily on it, that receive a huge amount of EU common agricultural policy money and that rely on the current high standards and the inability of countries to export cheap foreign produce. We are going to lose that.

In 20 years’ time, when my kids are young adults, we will still be negotiating trade deals. The Government do not have the capacity and the civil service does not have the skills to negotiate in a short period of time all the trade deals that we need—trade deals take a long time. The economy will be scuppered. We will see high levels of inflation. We will see people struggling to maintain living standards.

The Resolution Foundation published a paper today saying that, in 2021, the lowest earning quarter of households will earn 5% to 15% less than today; the highest earning quarter of households will earn 4% more. This is a Tory Brexit, and that is only four years in the future. Things will be even worse in 20 years’ time. Productivity will tank further. Productivity in the UK is rubbish, and there is a clear link between open markets, having links with other countries and increased productivity. My children will therefore have to work more hours than I have had to work in order to earn the same wages.

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that Brexit is an economic catastrophe waiting to happen?

Kirsty Blackman: I absolutely agree with what my colleague says. Too many Members in this House have not done their homework on this, and see the positives for the elite few but do not see the return to the 1980s and to the decimation we saw during the Thatcher years. They do not see that future, but it is what is coming. That is where we are heading. The plans from the Tory
Government are for low taxes—for some sort of tax haven—but no country that is a tax haven spends as much on public services as we do; they all spend very small amounts on public services. Are the Tories suggesting that is the way we should go? What is going to happen to our NHS if that is the way we go?

The other thing about this, which the great repeal Bill will show, is that it is a Government power grab. We have been protected from the worst excesses of these right-wing Governments by the European Union. For example, it has protected our workers’ rights, our equality rights and our climate change laws. Now, however, the Tory Government and the unelected Lords are going to be able to dictate to this country all of the law, and we are not even going to get the benefits they said we would. They said we would suddenly be exempt from state aid rules, but we will not. That is not what happens, as the WTO has rules on state aid, and so do any links with European trading partners.

The worst thing of all is that in 20 years’ time, when my children are young adults, we will be a less tolerant and more xenophobic society, because instead of tackling the discrimination and prejudice, this House has pandered to it.

6.21 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): We have here a referendum that Scotland did not want, a Government that Scotland did not vote for and a result that does not reflect the wishes of the people of Scotland. This Government, whose stated policy was to keep us in the single market, are taking us towards the Brexit door at breakneck speed. Government Members have been waxing lyrical over the past couple of days about this wonderful opportunity we have had to debate this issue—since yesterday—but I remind them that they had to be taken to court to give us this opportunity, they spent an awful lot of money trying to prevent this debate from happening in the first place and they had to be forced into coming up with a White Paper. Suffice it to say, the Government are not handling Brexit very well at all.

As with the disastrous policy to pursue the ideologically driven austerity at all costs, this Government are pursuing Brexit at all costs. As many of my SNP colleagues have said, we were told during our referendum that Scotland should vote to keep Scotland in the EU. The people of Scotland have not forgotten the promises made, and the other side are going to have to come up with some answers. When David Cameron gave his first keynote speech of the campaign some two years ago, he talked of the UK having one of the most stable currencies in the world and said that that stability was “hugely attractive for investors”. He spoke about us having “real clout” in Europe. If David Cameron was right, we have gone from being a country at the centre of Europe to one at its periphery, and from demonstrating solidarity with our great allies in France, Germany and beyond, to begging for scraps from the table of President Trump. That is a distasteful downward spiral if ever there was one.

It is not simply that we are seeking to walk away from the table; many Government Members seem intent on burning our bridges on the way out. They seem to have forgotten the language they have used through this entire debate about the EU nationals; they think those people are a drain on this country, yet they want to do deals with their Governments. For goodness’ sake, what sort of negotiations are they going to enter into on that basis?

Tonight, I will therefore be joining my excellent SNP colleagues and some Labour Members in voting against this Bill. I will do so because that is what the majority of my constituents want, because Scotland was promised continued EU membership if we remained in the UK and because this Government are attempting to leave the EU in a haphazard and reckless way, without regard to the constitutional, social or economic consequences. We are not prepared to let them take Scotland over that cliff with them.

6.24 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): First, may I offer you my congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker, on juggling what has been an excessively busy day in this place?

I am proud to follow so many passionate and eloquent speakers from both sides of the House, although I do not necessarily agree with them all. As my constituents from Taunton Deane, in glorious Somerset—home to that famous road, the A358, the Wellington monument and Somerset county cricket club—know, I campaigned to remain, but the majority of my constituents voted to leave, by 52% to 48%. Since then, I have been clear that I will stand by the views of the people and work to make the very best of this brave new opportunity.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that we respect the June vote, as she is correctly doing?

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The point I am making is that I respect the vote. It is important that we demonstrate that we are abiding by the wishes of the people. We would be poor parliamentarians indeed if we did not stick to what we promised. To that end, I shall be supporting this historic Bill, which will set in train the triggering of article 50 and our subsequent withdrawal from the EU.

I wish to express my respect for all those who voted remain. I appreciate and acknowledge their concerns, and want to convince them that I will be doing my very best, as will other colleagues in the House, to ensure a good outcome.

Some fine words have been spoken in this debate, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who waxed lyrical about a return to the happy constitutional system that was known in this country until 1972. It is time to put our shoulders to the wheel and make this work.

I have heard with interest the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union single out one or two specific industries—particularly the finance and motor industries—for fair treatment. I urge that the same fair treatment be given to the all-important agricultural and environment sectors. As 25% of all businesses in the UK are in the farming, food and drinks sectors, that is vital.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that as well as making sure that agriculture is central to our negotiations, we must acknowledge that food standards are critical too?
Rebecca Pow: A whole raft of standards are critical as we leave Europe. We should embrace and harness the standards that have already been set and, indeed, tailor and improve them much more suitable for the way we want to operate.

The agriculture and food industries are especially important in the south-west, where farm-related businesses turn over £2.7 billion a year—more than any other area in the country—and agriculture employs 80,000 people. In reformulating our life after the EU, we must consider very carefully how we are going to move forward after leaving the common agricultural policy. There are opportunities to develop a better framework and to develop an agriculture industry that is inextricably linked to the environment in a sustainable way. After all, we all depend on the environment for our air, water and food. We must build that into our industrial strategy and closely link it with our 25-year food and farming plans. Indeed, we have to make it work not only for the economy but for the rural social fabric so that we have a world that works better for everybody.

I urge the Secretary of State to harness the shared environmental legislation we already have from the EU, take it on board and adapt it so that it works better for us. We must keep to our climate change commitments—I am delighted that the Prime Minister has already spoken out on that issue—and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) mentioned, maintain our high standards of food security and welfare along with our nuclear standards. We must also consider how we deal with seasonal workers so that our industries can continue to move forward.

With understanding, co-operation and consideration, and by demonstrating that we are listening to people—not only in Taunton Deane but throughout the nation—I am optimistic that we can build a better future for generations to come. To that end, I shall be voting with the Government to trigger article 50.

6.29 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Ours is a representative democracy—in fact I would go so far as to say a great representative democracy. The reason why this place will, and should, support the article 50 Bill is that, before the referendum, we made a contract with the British people that this place would abide by the result. I ask all Members who are thinking of voting against Second Reading to give that due regard. It was a commitment made by the Government, and agreed to by many on the Opposition Benches.

I very much look forward to supporting article 50 tonight, and then, following negotiations of up to two years, the Prime Minister getting as good a deal as possible. If this place says that it is not a good deal, no deal is better than a bad deal. May I now focus on a couple of inconvenient truths? To those on the Labour Benches, I suggest that all the talk of parliamentary democracy and scrutiny is fine, but, to those who were here in 2008, I have to say that I do not remember too much scrutiny when the Government of the day passed the Lisbon treaty. It was done very quickly. In fact, the Prime Minister of the day was not even present in the debate. Therefore, for all the talk of parliamentary scrutiny, we sacrificed large chunks of our sovereignty that day, and it is a great shame that Labour Members are now suggesting that they are the guardians of parliamentary democracy, when they were pretty thin on the ground when it came to the Lisbon treaty.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I pay tribute to all the work that my hon. Friend has done on the campaign. He talks about democracy. Some say that this electoral result was too close, but does he agree that, if Members of Parliament had won their parliamentary seats by one vote, not a single one of them would have turned the seat down? They would have come here and taken their seats. In the same way, they should accept this result because the public has now decided and we should enact this legislation.

Mr Baron: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. With a first-past-the-post system, it is very clear that one abides by the result.

Mark Pawsey: On the point about abiding by the result, will my hon. Friend, who has been a strong leaver, recognise the challenges that colleagues on the Opposition Benches face in walking through the Lobby with us today and appreciate the efforts that they have taken to honour the wishes of their constituents?

Mr Baron: Absolutely. I completely agree with my hon. Friend. This will not be an easy decision for Labour, but, at the end of the day, a contract was made and that should be respected.

May I, very gently, point a finger at Scottish National party Members? For all their talk about wishing to remain in the EU, the bottom line is that they won their independence referendum, they would have left the EU. The EU made that very clear. What is more, there was no automatic right of re-entry, and they would have had to take on the euro in that process. For all the talk about being good Europeans, if it had been left to them, Scotland would have left the EU.

In the time that is allowed, let me point out a few more inconvenient truths. I have heard it said many times on the Opposition Benches that we will become a more intolerant country. Immigration has been raised by several speakers with regard to our leaving the EU. I suggest to them that, by leaving the EU, we will no longer discriminate against the rest of the world, which the present immigration policy does. The SNP in particular may not like it, but it is a fact that we cannot stop anybody coming in from Europe, but that we do stop the rest of the world coming into the UK, because no country in the western world has a non-existent immigration policy. For all the talk on the Opposition Benches, by leaving the EU, whatever criteria we choose to guide our immigration policy, it will be fair to the whole world, not just to a particular region. No region will be discriminated against, and that is the point. Whatever the criteria, there will be fairness. No one will be discriminated against based on where they come from.

There is a further inconvenient truth that has hardly been touched on in the debate. Hon. Members suggest that we will suddenly become an economic backwater by leaving the EU. From looking at growth rates across the western world, I can assure the House that the EU remains in the global economic slow lane, with shamefully
high youth unemployment rates to match. There is a world out there growing much faster than the EU. We need to embrace that future.

I very much look forward to our winning the vote tonight. I ask the Prime Minister to do what she can to negotiate as good a deal as she can, but not to be afraid to fall back on World Trade Organisation rules if a bad deal is on the table. There is a very bright future ahead of us.

6.36 pm

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): This has been an important debate, with MPs from every region and nation, from towns and cities, and from rural, coastal, industrial and agricultural communities having their say. There have been so many contributions of quality that it would be impossible to mention them all. This is how Parliament is meant to work; Members are sent here to speak for their constituents and settle, if not always agree, on a way forward.

We MPs usually listen to the arguments, take account of the impact of a decision on our constituents, apply the values of our party and our hearts, and vote accordingly. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) said in his outstanding speech, this decision is different as it follows a referendum, in which 52% voted to leave the European Union. It was a close vote, but a clear decision. As we accept the outcome of the referendum, we must consent to allow the process of leaving the European Union to begin, and we will hold this Government to account every step of the way.

Our challenge to the Government, through our amendments, is to enable this House to have proper scrutiny, to publish regular reports, to allow British MPs the same oversight as Members of the European Parliament and to secure the position of EU nationals living in this country, as a matter of urgency.

Alex Salmond: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jenny Chapman: I will in a minute.

Most important of all, our amendments would allow this House a meaningful vote on our withdrawal agreement at the proper time.

Alex Salmond: Given the many points that have been made across the Opposition Benches on the need for the Bill to be amended, will the hon. Lady and her Front Bench friends be voting against the restrictive programme motion?

Jenny Chapman: I want this Bill to proceed. Our amendments, which we will discuss next week, are all reasonable requests. Many Government Members have spoken in support of a parliamentary vote, and I appeal to all those who have spoken in that way, and who share our desire for a constructive and open process, to consider voting in support of our amendments next week.

We are an outward-looking, internationalist, pro-European party, and that will never, ever change. Let our determination to collaborate, to stand alongside, and to work with our European partners never be in doubt. These are British values. The vote to leave the European Union, as well as leading to a changing mood in other countries, has deepened the sense that the values we hold most dear are under threat: tolerance, openness, co-operation, and solidarity. It is true that the rise of the far right in Europe and the rise of populism in the US have left many of us who believe in those values with an overwhelming sense that the political tide is against us—that xenophobia, fear and isolationism are drowning out our values of inclusion, hope and tolerance. It is more important than ever to stand firm beside those values. Bigotry, fanaticism and narrow-mindedness should have no place in our politics.

Very few Members of this House do not feel any trepidation whatsoever about the future. To deny the complexity—the risks to our manufacturing and service sectors, the disruption and uncertainty—that doubtless lies ahead is to hide from the truth: a truth that, if confronted honestly, can be dealt with and overcome. It is precisely because this process is so complex that we all need to contribute to resolving the issues we now confront. Pretending that these challenges do not exist is negligent.

The Labour party will not neglect its duty to challenge the Government when we think they are getting Brexit wrong. I say this to the Prime Minister: the best Brexit will never come via a cliff edge, however much some of her Back Benchers might wish it. This must be a deal worthy of the consent of this House. If she and her negotiators fail to achieve a deal worthy of our country, they will not achieve our consent. The Prime Minister must deliver the deal that she claims she can, with import-sparing trade, tax-free trade, and a form of customs union membership allowing British businesses all the benefits they currently enjoy—a deal that delivers for British workers and British industry, and protects our safety and security.

That is a good starting point, but for the Labour party that aspiration is not enough. The Britain that the Labour party wants to build is confident of its place in the world. We want a Britain where, though outside the EU, we can protect British jobs by securing a deep trade deal with the EU. Let us remember that whatever deals we reach with other nations in the future, an agreement with our closest neighbours will always be the most important deal we do, where we protect British citizens by maintaining co-operation on justice and security, and protect British jobs by securing a good transitional deal.

The Labour party will use every means possible to bring about the best Brexit for Britain. We will fight for a future where business and industry thrive—especially, as my hon. Friends the Members for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods), for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) and for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) said, in our proud regions. We are the country of Brunel, Rosalind Franklin, Alan Turing, Michael Faraday, and Tim Peake. Our engineers, scientists, academics and creatives need to flourish in this workshop of the world. Labour will work to ensure that, after Brexit, our future as an ingenious, innovative, imaginative and inspiring nation grows and is never diminished.

The British people voted to take back control over their lives, and the Labour party understands the anger expressed through the vote to leave the EU, the sense of low pay, lack of opportunity, insecure work, uncertain futures and a feeling of being remote from decision making in Brussels. To all who voted for those reasons, I
say: we hear you. Labour will stand up throughout the Brexit negotiations for those who may have voted to leave but who did not vote to be poorer.

We will stand up, too, for those who voted to remain: 48% of voters cannot be marginalised or ignored. Many, although they accept the outcome of the referendum, do not see a prosperous future.

**Tim Farron**

Jenny Chapman: Much as the hon. Gentleman would love to rerun the political battle we have just enjoyed, the political battle now centres on the terms on which we leave and the country we aspire to become. Labour is ready to take on those who offer empty reassurance based on nothing but their own dogmatic conviction.

Brexit must work for all our communities, especially the most disadvantaged. My party will step up and make sure that the Government fulfil their duty. As a former President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, said to the Democrats:

“Ours must be a party of liberal thought, of planned action, of enlightened international outlook, and of the greatest good to the greatest number of our citizens.”

That is how we must proceed—not for the 52% or the 48%, but for 100% of the people of Britain.

6.47 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones):** May I start by paying tribute to all the right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to what my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), in her excellent maiden speech, rightly called an historic debate? Members on both sides of the House, supporters of both leave and remain, have spoken with passion and sincerity, and there have been some outstanding contributions. Several times over the past two days we have seen this House at its very best. A wide range of issues have been raised during the debate. I will seek to address them in the time available to me, but I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I do not address every single point made by every single speaker.

Let me be clear: what we are considering is the most straightforward Bill possible. The Bill is necessary to implement the referendum result and respect the judgment of the Supreme Court; it is positively not a vehicle for exercises in this country’s history. As pointed out by the former President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, said to the Democrats: “Ours must be a party of liberal thought, of planned action, of enlightened international outlook, and of the greatest good to the greatest number of our citizens.”

That said, the Supreme Court was clear in its judgment that triggering article 50 is a reserved matter for this Parliament, and that the devolved legislatures do not have a veto. But we have been clear that we will work very carefully to ensure that as powers are repatriated from Brussels back to Britain, the right powers are returned to Westminster and the right powers are passed to the devolved Administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Secondly, I would like to touch on engagement with the devolved Administrations, which has figured strongly in this debate. Before and throughout the referendum campaign, it was clear that the outcome would apply to the whole United Kingdom, and that is what we are committed to delivering. We are committed to securing the best deal for the whole United Kingdom, in the interests of all its constituent nations and regions. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear her determination to uphold and strengthen the Union, and we will continue to engage with the devolved Administrations through the established Joint Ministerial Committees. We understand that there are unique and diverse interests across the UK.

Mr Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Jones: I do not know why the hon. Gentleman does not understand; I am not taking his intervention. In particular, we are wholly committed to the Belfast agreement and its successors. We will work with the Irish Government to maintain the common travel area on the island of Ireland and not return to the borders of the past. We have received, and we are grateful for, the submissions from the Scottish and Welsh Governments, which are being considered.

That said, the Supreme Court was clear in its judgment that triggering article 50 is a reserved matter for this Parliament, and that the devolved legislatures do not have a veto. But we have been clear that we will work very carefully to ensure that as powers are repatriated from Brussels back to Britain, the right powers are returned to Westminster and the right powers are passed to the devolved Administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Many hon. Members raised the question of the status of EU citizens living and working in the United Kingdom. Let us be clear: this Government value and appreciate the role that they play in our economy and in our communities, and we are determined to provide as much certainty as we can, as soon as we can. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been clear that guaranteeing UK citizens’ rights in the EU, and EU citizens’ rights in the UK, is one of our immediate objectives in the upcoming negotiations. Indeed, we stand ready to reach such a deal right now if the other countries of the European Union agree. To the EU citizens who are living, studying and working in the UK I say, “You will still be welcome in this country, as we trust our citizens will continue to be welcome in yours.”

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.
Mr Speaker: I hope it is a point of order, rather than a point of frustration.

Clive Efford: What is the point in the Minister coming here, reading out a pre-written statement to the House and not listening to interventions from hon. Members who have legitimate questions to ask of the Government?

Mr Speaker: These debates will run for a long time to come, but that is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr David Jones: Moving on to the forthcoming negotiations, I want to repeat that although we are leaving the EU, we are not turning our back on Europe. We will be seeking a broad new partnership with the EU outside the single market, including a bold and ambitious free trade agreement. We will maintain strong relationships with our European partners as we work together on wider issues, such as security, justice and migration.

Ian Blackford: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is an excitable Zebedee. It has been made abundantly clear to him that the Minister is not giving way.

Mr David Jones: We have made clear commitments to protect workers’ rights, and will ensure that they keep pace with the changing labour market. Let me be as clear as it is possible to be: all the workers’ rights that are enjoyed under EU legislation will be preserved by the great repeal Bill and brought across into UK law. Let me also say that we have no plans to withdraw from the ECHR.

Let me deal with the question of Euratom. Euratom and the EU share a common institutional framework, including the European Court of Justice, a role for the Commission and decision making in the Council, making them uniquely legally joined. Triggering article 50 therefore also entails giving notice to leave Euratom. The nuclear industry is of key strategic importance to the UK, and we have been clear that this does not affect our intention to maintain close and effective arrangements relating to civil nuclear co-operation, safeguards and safety with Europe and the rest of the world.

Let me move on to the role of Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out our plan for the United Kingdom’s withdrawal in her speech at Lancaster House, and she has confirmed that Parliament will have its say on the final deal we achieve with the European Union by putting that deal to a vote of both Houses. There has already been extensive scrutiny in both Houses, and we will publish our White Paper tomorrow, before Committee. The White Paper, however, is entirely separate from this Bill, which simply gives the Government the power to trigger the process of exit from the EU, in accordance with the instructions that we have received from the people of this country.

There has also been much debate over the past two days about the many opportunities that leaving the UK—[Interruption]—that leaving EU affords the UK. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, we will be an outward-facing, bold and global country, seeking ambitious trade deals, forging new friendships and consolidating existing partnerships, and we will remain a tolerant and open country. The triggering of article 50 will start the process of our withdrawal from the European Union, and during that process, the House will have plenty of opportunities to debate and play a crucial role in scrutinising the great repeal Bill and related Bills to come. My right hon. Friend has set out a detailed plan for building a new partnership between an independent United Kingdom and the European Union in the years to come.

Let me say how much I agree with the hon. Member for Dartington (Jenny Chapman): the people have made their decision, and now we must strive for an outcome that, as she said, works not just for the 52% or the 48%, but for the 100%. All of us in this House must work together in the national interest, but let me repeat that tonight we are not voting on the outcome, nor on the wider issues, but simply to start the process. It is absolutely essential that Parliament moves quickly, under the timetable that this House voted for in December, to trigger article 50 by the end of March.

In short, this is a straightforward Bill that delivers on the promise made to the people of the United Kingdom to honour the outcome of the referendum. We must trust the people, and I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put. That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 100, Noes 336.

Division No. 134

Division No. 134

[6.58 pm]

AYES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Arkless, Richard
Bardell, Hannah
Berger, Luciana
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Bosswell, Philip
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Bryant, Chris
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Cragagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Day, Martyn
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Maria
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Farron, Tim
Gabe, Mike
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hayes, Helen
Hendry, Drew
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kyle, Peter
Lammy, rh Mr David
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeill, Mr Angus Brendan
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McGarry, Natalie
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O’Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Pound, Stephen
Pugh, John
Ritchie, Ms Margaret

The House divided: Ayes 100, Noes 336.
1 FEBRUARY 2017

European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill

Robertson, rh Angus
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Owen
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Thewlis, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Timms, rh Stephen

Weir, Mike
Whiteford, Dr Edilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Wishart, Pete
Ziechner, Daniel

Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, rh Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hafson, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Jones, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hoey, Kate
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, rh Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver

Lewish, rh Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Liddington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Marris, Rob
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCormick, Jason
McCourtney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryl
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Philip, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prents, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Question accordingly negatived.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)), That the Bill be now read a Second Time.

The House divided: Ayes 498, Noes 114.

Division No. 135

[7.12 pm]

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Ashworth, Jonathan
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Barwell, Gavin
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Byrne, rh Liam
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Carling, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crausby, Sir David
Crouch, Tracey
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cumnings, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
De Piero, Gloria
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Drake, Liz
Drax, Richard
Dromey, Jack
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Dugher, Michael
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Eagle, Ms Angela
Efford, Olive
Elliot, Julie
Elliot, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elwood, Mr Tobias
Elmore, Chris
Elphicke, Charlie
Esterson, Bill
Eustice, George
Evans, Chris
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evans, Mr Nick
Evennett, rh David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Frank
Field, rh Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fielo, Robert
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Kevin
Fovargue, Yvonne
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fumiss, Gill
Fysh, Marous
Gardiner, Barry
Garner, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, rh Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Graying, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Greenwood, Margaret
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffith, Nia
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gwydyr, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Haigh, Louise
Hafon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hamilton, Fabian
European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill

1 FEBRUARY 2017

European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill

Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Carolyn
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Hayman, Sue
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Healey, rh John
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Holern, Kate
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollonbone, Mr Philip
Holloway, rh Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hopkins, Kristina
Howells, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Husain, Imran
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Jarvis, Dan
Javid, rah Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrew
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Diana
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keely, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Kinnock, Stephen
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Lavery, Ian
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Liddington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackey, David
MacLaughlin, rh Fiona
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, rh Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malhotra, Seema
Maltman, Kit
Mann, John
Mann, Scott
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon
Matheson, Christian
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCabe, Steve
McCarron, Jason
McCarron, Karl
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McPadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McLaughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McMahon, Jim
McPartland, Stephen
Meale, Sir Alan
Menzies, Mark
Mengs, Tino
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, rh Mrs Edward
Millington, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morrison, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, Graeme M.
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sherryl
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Nandy, Lisa
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Opperman, Guy
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, rh Mr George
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Pearce, Teresa
Penning, rh Mike
Pennycook, Matthew
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Philip, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Powell, Lucy
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, rh Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Purseglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raab, Mr Dominic
Rayner, Angela
Redwood, rh John
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Marie
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, rh Geoffrey
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rotheram, Steve
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Ryan, rh Joan
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Sheerman, rh Mr Barry
Shelbrooke, Alec
Sherriff, Paula
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Skinner, rh Mr Dennis
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Cat
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Nick
Smith, Royston
Smyth, Karin
Sogollavy, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spellar, rh Mr John
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Starmer, Keir
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Steward, Bob
Stewart, Ian
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Streeting, Wes
Stride, Mel
Stringer, Graham
Sturt, rh Ms Gisela
Sturt, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Sym, Mr Robert
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Derek
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thomson, Emily
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tohurston, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Trickett, Jon
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turley, Anna
Turner, Mr Andrew
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David
European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill 1 FEBRUARY 2017  

European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gavin Williamson and Jackie Doyle-Price

Tellers for the Noes:
Marion Fellows and Owen Thompson

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read a Second time.

EUROPEAN UNION (NOTIFICATION OF WITHDRAWAL) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)), That the following provisions shall apply to the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Proceedings in Committee and up to and including Third Reading

(2) Proceedings in Committee, any proceedings on Consideration, any proceedings in legislative grand committee and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken in three days.

(3) The proceedings shall be taken on each of those days as shown in the first column of the following Table and in the order so shown.

(4) The proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Time for conclusion of proceedings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First day</td>
<td>Four hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the first day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to parliamentary scrutiny of the process for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union</td>
<td>Seven hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the first day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to devolved administrations or legislatures</td>
<td>Four hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the third day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second day</td>
<td>Seven hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the second day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to a vote on the final terms of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union</td>
<td>Five hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the third day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to impact assessments</td>
<td>Seven hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the second day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to the priorities in negotiations for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All new Clauses and new Schedules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Four hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the third day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second day</td>
<td>Seven hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the second day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to a vote on the final terms of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union</td>
<td>Five hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the third day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Clauses and new Schedules relating to impact assessments</td>
<td>Seven hours from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the second day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill

1 FEBRUARY 2017

The House divided: Ayes 329, Noes 112.

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afridi, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Sir Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriet
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bovick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Mr Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Sir Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Mr Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, r Sir Alistair
Cahms, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cartidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Gibb, rh Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, rh Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hancock, Mr Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, rh Philip
Holloway, rh Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, rh Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Hudson, Sir Robert
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Mr Sayid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, rh Bernard
Jenkins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Mr Jeremy
Johnson, Mr Michael
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Khan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryl
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Philip, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raaab, Mr Dominic

Further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.

The House divided:

(2) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.

(Heather Wheeler.)
European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill

1 FEBRUARY 2017

THIRD READING

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question

Question accordingly agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

TRADE UNIONS

That the draft Important Public Services (Education) Regulations 2017, which were laid before this House on 5 December 2016, be approved.—(Heather Wheeler.)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 8 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

TRADE UNIONS

That the draft Important Public Services (Transport) Regulations 2017, which were laid before this House on 5 December 2016, be approved.—(Heather Wheeler.)

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 8 February (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Scottish Fiscal Commission Act 2016 (Consequential Provisions and Modifications) Order 2017, which was laid before this House on 19 December 2016, be approved.—(Heather Wheeler.)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).
Immigration

That the draft Immigration (Health Charge) (Amendment) Order 2017, which was laid before this House on 20 December 2016, be approved.—[Heather Wheeler.]

Question agreed to.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Before the House disperses, may I, on behalf of those of us who took part in the debate, thank you very much for having sat in the Chair for most of the day, both yesterday and today, with very little by way of refreshment, as far as I could see? For conducting these proceedings, which have obviously been quite historic, with a huge number of Members wanting to be called, we thank you very much.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful. The hon. Gentleman is a gentleman, and I am just doing my duty, but I am very grateful for what he has so kindly said.

Petition

English Language and English Literature GCSE-Level Examinations

7.47 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): This petition is being lodged, and was organised by, year 11 pupils at Greenfield Community College. I would like to put on record the names of Aidan Wong, Melissa Foster and Christina Davies.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to provide a level playing field in the rules applied to English Language and English Literature GCSE-level examinations in state-funded schools and independent schools, including provision for coursework and opportunities for sitting examinations.

Following is the full text of the petition:

'The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that in independent schools, pupils sitting GCSEs in English Language and English Literature can still take advantage of 40% coursework as part of their final mark and have the option of sitting their examinations in January or June; and further that this is not comparable to state-funded schools and offers an unfair advantage to independent schools.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to provide a level playing field in the rules applied to English Language and English Literature GCSE-level examinations in state-funded schools and independent schools, including provision for coursework and opportunities for sitting examinations.

And the petitioners remain, etc.'

World Hijab Day

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Heather Wheeler.)

7.48 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Thank you very much for granting this Adjournment debate on the subject of World Hijab Day, Mr Speaker. Hijab is an Arabic word meaning barrier or partition. In Islam, however, it has a broader meaning. The most visible form of hijab is the head covering that many Muslim women wear. I should say now that I feel that Muslim women should wear it only if they want to wear it; it absolutely should be a matter of choice. Although Hijab Day was started in New York by Nazma Khan, the movement has been organised almost solely over social media networking sites. For many people, the hijab is a symbol of oppression and divisiveness. It is a visible target that often bears the brunt of a larger debate about Islam in the west. Although Hijab Day is designed to counteract such controversies, it encourages non-Muslim women or even Muslim women like me who do not ordinarily wear a hijab to don one and experience what it is like to do so as part of a bid to foster better understanding.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this Adjournment debate today. At a time when Muslims are being demonised by an extreme right-wing agenda on the other side of the Atlantic, does she agree that initiatives such as Hijab Day serve a very important purpose not only to celebrate our diversity, but to break down barriers across different communities?

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: My hon. Friend makes an important point. As I said earlier this week in the Chamber, we must not be afraid to stand up to racism and xenophobia where it exists, but I fear that, sometimes, we lose our ability to do that when we see who the proponent is. We must never do that.

The Hijab Day founder said:

"Growing up in the Bronx, in New York City, I experienced a great deal of discrimination due to my hijab. I figured the only way to end discrimination is if we ask our fellow sisters to experience hijab themselves.”

In middle school, she was known as Batman or Ninja. She said:

“When I moved on to college, it was just after 9/11, so they would call me Osama Bin-Laden or terrorist. It was awful. I figured the only way to end discrimination is if we ask our fellow sisters to experience hijab themselves.”

A report, which was published by the Scottish Government social research team in 2011, discussed the experience of Scottish Muslim women wearing the hijab. This was one case study—a personal story:

“You get looks...It makes you feel very uncomfortable. It makes you feel very unwelcome as well. By a few people I will add, Yeah, the majority of people are quite nice and respect you...I think some people still have in their minds that we’re Muslims and we’re not meant to be here, but...that’s what I feel. Probably some don’t feel that way. Probably they just think that’s the way we’re dressed.”

The story went on:

“I agree with that. Especially...that is why I wear a hijab and I do, like, feel kind of...if you’re walking with someone who’s not, you can see the way you’re treated differently, and I’ve felt that quite a lot.”
Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and bringing this matter to the House who looks at a phenomenon. Does she agree that the United Kingdom is a multicultural society, and that that is something of which we should be immensely proud? However, does she also agree that multiculturalism shows a facet of what being British means, and that foundation should always give us pride, as it is about being part of the wonderful United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which allows for diversity, faith and belief on our shores?

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, some of which I agree with and, as he will understand, some of which I do not. This idea of what it means to be British is very much under question. However, I do know what it means to be a human being and to stand up for human rights and for what is right. I do not think that that is defined by where someone comes from in the world, which is why I say again that, wherever there are things going on in this world, we must not be afraid to stand up to them.

Today is an opportunity to combat the prejudice that exists. Hate crime remains a serious issue. Civic groups in England and Wales have been monitoring the rise in hate crime. The Muslim Council of Britain’s group of mosques said that it had compiled a dossier of 100 hate crimes over the weekend of the EU referendum. Dr Shafi, the secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Britain said:

“As the results of the referendum became known, I called for our politicians to come together and heal the divisions that have emerged as a result of the campaign. Now we are witnessing the shocking extent of this with reports around the country of hate speech and minorities being targeted. Our country is experiencing a political crisis which, I fear threatens the social peace.”

I do believe that we are making progress in this area. One extremely positive move has been the recent adoption of the hijab as part of the police uniform in Scotland. In 2006, Police Scotland announced that women from Muslim communities may now wear the hijab as part of their uniform. Speaking on behalf of Police Scotland, a spokesperson said:

“I hope that this addition to our uniform options will contribute to making our staff mix more...and add to the life skills, experiences and personal qualities that our officers and staff bring to policing the communities of Scotland.”

That is something that I absolutely support.

However, challenges remain when it comes to combating prejudice. It would be remiss of me not to mention the well-documented situation that arose between the journalist, Fatima Manji, and Kelvin MacKenzie. Channel 4 news presenter, Fatima Manji, was criticised in July 2016 by former editor of The Sun, Kelvin MacKenzie, for wearing a hijab while reporting on the Nice truck attack. MacKenzie said in his column in The Sun:

“I could hardly believe my eyes...Was it appropriate for her to be on camera when there had been yet another shocking slaughter by a Muslim? Was it done to stick one in the eye of the ordinary viewer who looks at the hijab as a sign of the slavery of Muslim women by a male-dominated and clearly violent religion?”

It was reported that 1,400 complaints were sent to the Independent Press Standards Organisation about that column. Fatima Manji responded to MacKenzie in an article, saying:

“He has attempted to smear half of them further by suggesting they are helpless slaves. And he has attempted to smear me by suggesting I would sympathise with a terrorist.”

A YouGov poll following the events found that 44% thought that MacKenzie’s remarks were wrong and should not have been printed. The right of women to wear a hijab if they so wish is a right, like any other, for women to wear what they want when they want.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that, although it is right for us to mark World Hijab Day in this Chamber, we must acknowledge and recognise that some women are forced to wear the hijab? Ultimately, this is about women’s right to choose to wear what they want to, and for us to stand against the bigotry that we have seen lately in this country. For example, women have had their hijabs ripped off their heads. That is not acceptable.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: The hon. Lady makes an excellent point. Yes, too many crimes are committed whereby women—even young women and girls—have their hijabs pulled off. I agree with her point that, as Muslim women, we stand by those whose choice it is not to wear the hijab and whose choice it is not to do what they may be told by male counterparts in their family. Islam is about equality. Anyone who suggests otherwise does not know or understand that religion. We will continue to stand up against those who try to paint our religion in a negative light. We ask people not to expect us to apologise for everything that is done wrong in society by a Muslim. We are not responsible for all of them. We are each, as individuals, responsible for our own actions and for speaking up when we think that wrong is taking place.

It is the right of women to wear what they want where they want, including in this Chamber and beyond, without any fear of what people might suggest the repercussions may be. That brings me to another case in point. In 2016, Nicola Thorp, who was working as receptionist at City firm PwC, was sent home without pay for refusing to wear high heels. She was required to wear a heel of two to four inches. She went on to launch a petition asking to make it illegal for a company to require female employees to wear high heels at work. The petition garnered 152,420 signatures and will be debated in Westminster Hall on 6 March. I cannot wait. The Government’s initial response to the petition stated:

“Company dress codes must be reasonable and must make equivalent requirements for men and women. This is the law and employers must abide by it.”

The Petitions Committee and the Women and Equalities Committee published the “High heels and workplace dress codes” report on 26 January, recommending that the Government take urgent action to improve the effectiveness of the Equality Act 2010. It recommends that

“the Government...review this area of the law”,
and, if necessary,
“ask Parliament to amend it”.

It calls for “more effective remedies” such as increased financial penalties “for employment tribunals to award against employers who breach the law” in order to provide an effective deterrent.
I agree with the Committees’ inquiry findings, as the report also states:

“We heard from hundreds of women who told us about the pain and long-term damage caused by wearing high heels for long periods in the workplace”

perhaps I should not be the one giving this speech, because I am currently wearing heels, by choice of course—

“as well as from women who had been required to dye their hair blonde, to wear revealing outfits and to constantly reapply make-up.

The Government has said that the existing law is clear, and that the dress code that prompted this petition is already unlawful. Nevertheless, discriminatory dress codes remain widespread. It is therefore clear that the existing law is not yet fully effective in protecting employees from discrimination at work.”

There is much to do.

I reiterate that women—I know that everyone in the Chamber will agree with me; I dare them to say otherwise—should have the right to wear what they want without fear of discrimination. No one, but no one, has the right to discriminate against someone on the basis of their religious beliefs, whatever those beliefs may be or if they hold none at all. We are living in a world where women are feeling more threatened and more vulnerable. Telling women what they can and cannot wear, or how they should and should not look, is detrimental not only to women but to society as a whole. We need to work together to create a safer society where everyone can feel free to express religious beliefs without fear of discrimination, and everyone can feel comfortable to wear what they want, whenever they want.

8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Percy): I thank the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) for introducing this important debate and for regaling us with her own fashion choices in terms of footwear. I cannot match the high-heel wearing—not in the Chamber, anyway—but I can certainly match her support for people wearing what they wish to wear through their own free choice. I entirely agree with her on that. The Government fully support people’s right to celebrate their faith and are firmly opposed to policies that seek to stigmatise or create division on the basis of faith, race or nationality.

As the hon. Lady and other Members said, we have a strong tradition throughout these islands—throughout the United Kingdom—of tolerance and freedom of expression. We are proud that we are a diverse nation. This House has further to go on that, but even in my short time here, I think we have been getting better. We want to build a nation where people are free to express their religious identity, including through the wearing of the hijab, the kippah, or whatever else fits with their religious beliefs. As I said in the debate on Holocaust Memorial Day a couple of weeks ago, I was shocked, when I was vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on anti-Semitism, to go Brussels to meet young Jewish students who were afraid of going out in the streets there with their kippah on. The hon. Lady referred to instances in this country of women wearing the hijab who have similarly been subject to abuse. That is completely and utterly unacceptable, and we would all condemn it on both sides of the House.

We should, as the hon. Lady did, celebrate the many successful women in the country who do choose to wear the hijab by free choice—women like Fatima Manji, who became Britain’s first hijab-wearing TV newsreader in March 2016.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) on securing this debate. As a supporter of sensible shoes, I am particularly in favour of the comments about high heels. The Minister mentioned Fatima Manji. Will he add his voice to mine and those of other MPs who condemned Trevor Kavanagh, a board member of the so-called Independent Press Standards Organisation, who called Fatima Manji a fool for bringing the case against Kelvin MacKenzie and said that wearing a hijab was a provocative gesture? Does the Minister agree that that was a most unsuitable comment from somebody who is a board member of the so-called Independent Press Standards Organisation?

Andrew Percy: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her intervention. I was not aware of that case, but it is clearly completely unacceptable to suggest that because somebody is a member of the Muslim faith they are in some way responsible for a terrorist atrocity committed by people apparently in the name of that religion.

As I said, we should celebrate women who decide, through their own choice, to wear the hijab. I mentioned Fatima Manji. Nadiya Hussain, another woman who chooses to wear the hijab, was named as one of the BBC’s top 100 women in 2016 after her unforgettable triumph on “The Great British Bake Off”, which I am sure many of us watched with joy. Malala Yousafzai, the youngest holder of the Nobel peace prize at the age of 17, is a young woman who has stood up against all odds to promote the rights of education and freedom for all.

We are very clear as a Government about the profound contribution that people from all religious backgrounds make to our society. Whatever our faith, we share British values that we should all be proud of. We share those values regardless of our political beliefs, whether we are nationalists or Unionists; the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) alluded to that. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law, equal rights and the equal treatment of people and individuals define us as a society. We should be very proud of those values, which are supported by the overwhelming majority of people in the United Kingdom and sustained through our important local and national institutions.

We should also be proud of the fact that this country has, for a very long time, been home to many different cultures, religions and communities. As the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire has said, it is of course right that we celebrate the positive contribution that diverse groups make to Britain. Scotch, Welsh and Northern Irish life—I am trying to be inclusive.

We also need to recognise that more needs to be done, as the hon. Lady said throughout her speech, to make sure that nobody is excluded or left behind. On race relations and racial equality, the Government have been very clear that we want to create a fair society in which all people, whatever their ethnic origin, sexual orientation or social background, are valued and able to participate.
fully and realise their potential. We have work to do in that regard across the United Kingdom. Nobody should be held back because of where they are born, the religion they choose or their sexuality or gender.

The Prime Minister was very clear on the steps of Downing Street that we believe in a union not just between the nations of the UK, but between our citizens—each and every one of us. That is why the Government have set ourselves a mission of creating a country that works for everyone, which is something on which we can all agree.

We have launched a unit to look into racial disparities in our public services, and it stretches right across Government. As a former schoolteacher in some difficult areas, I am pleased that the Government will focus on the disparity between white working class boys and other boys in this country, because the divisions are not always where we expect them to be. The study will highlight the differences in outcomes for people of different backgrounds in every area—from health and education, to childcare, welfare, employment, skills and the criminal justice system. During Prime Minister’s questions today, the Prime Minister used some powerful words to describe the changes we have made to ensure fairness in the criminal justice system. That audit will be published this summer.

We also need to ensure that women are truly free to choose whether or not to wear the hijab, as the hon. Lady so eloquently said, and that all women are able and empowered to access their full rights as British citizens. The promotion and protection of women’s rights is enshrined in international human rights law, and it is vital to ensure that stable and prosperous societies enable women to participate fully in political, economic and social life.

Dame Louise Casey’s review, which was published just before Christmas, makes it clear that there is more to be done in this country to integrate isolated communities, precisely to ensure that people are not marginalised and are able to access the full range of opportunities available in this country. The Government are considering her recommendations as part of a new integration strategy, which our Department will lead on and which will be launched this spring so that we can continue to build a country that works for everyone.

The review highlighted the issue of English language provision, because 22% of Muslim women in Britain in 2011 spoke no English, compared with only 9% of Muslim men, less than 1% of Christian women and 0.4% of the female population overall. That is not acceptable in modern Britain, which is why in January 2016 the former Prime Minister announced a new English language offer worth £20 million over this Parliament to help at least 40,000 women in the most isolated communities get the training they need to enable and empower them to play a full part in our society.

The Casey review also highlighted issues faced by women in specific communities, including domestic abuse and other disgusting criminal practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so-called honour-based crimes. I am proud to serve as a White Ribbon ambassador, for a charity that is doing so much with a range of different communities across the country to encourage men to stand up to violence against women.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The Minister is making an excellent point. Does he agree that it is extremely important to challenge rape myths based on beliefs about what women wear and, therefore, their intentions? We should always challenge and stand up against rape myths, because the conviction rates for such crimes in our courts are desperately low. We must do all we can to address juror bias.

Andrew Percy: I could not agree more. There is absolutely no connection between what somebody chooses to wear and whether that awful, heinous crime is committed against them. We should be absolutely clear on that.

It is important to emphasise in debates such as this one that men are also the victims of domestic abuse, but there is no doubt that the majority of the victims of domestic abuse are women. It is particularly difficult in certain communities to access those victims, and charities such as the White Ribbon Campaign are really important to that.

Violence against women and girls is a very serious crime. Such crime has a massive impact, not just on the individuals concerned but on our economy, health services and criminal justice system. As I have made absolutely clear, we as a Government—indeed, we are in complete agreement on this across the House—will not stand for those crimes. Protecting women and girls from violence, and supporting victims and survivors of sexual violence, remains a priority for the Government. That is why last year we published our violence against women and girls strategy for this Parliament.

Women who choose to wear the hijab can often be targets of hate crime, and the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire gave some examples of that in her speech. I agree with her, and I want to make it very clear from the Dispatch Box that that form of hatred is un-British and it will not be tolerated. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government said recently:

“Hate crime has no place whatsoever in British society. We will not stand for it. All communities must be able to live their lives free from fear of verbal or physical attack.”

None of us could disagree with that. That is why we have adopted a zero-tolerance approach towards all forms of hate crime. Anti-Semitism has been a particular concern in our political discourse, and neither of those forms of hate crime . Anti-Semitism has been a particular concern in our political discourse, but more still needs to be done to address that. Islamophobia is also a concern in our political discourse, and neither of those is acceptable.

I am proud that we have some of the strongest legislation in the world to tackle hate crime. It includes specific offences for racially or religiously aggravated activity, and offences of stirring up hatred on the grounds of race, religion or sexual orientation. We have put stronger sentences in place for those who are found guilty of perpetuating hate crime. Both the police and the Crown Prosecution Service are absolutely clear that those who perpetrate any form of hate crime will be punished with the full force of the law. We should be proud of that.

We cannot be complacent. We need to do much more to understand the hate crime we are seeing and to tackle it at its root. That is why we worked on the cross-Government hate crime action plan, which we published last summer. It includes measures to increase reporting of hate incidents and crimes, improve support for victims
and prevent hate crime, particularly through education and by targeting at-risk groups or locations, such as public transit, which has been a particular problem in that regard.

I am proud of my Department’s role in helping to create an environment that prevents hate crime from happening in the first place. We contribute to a number of projects, such as the Anne Frank Trust and Streetwise, which support young people and encourage them to challenge prejudice and hatred. That is particularly important given the fact that sadly, according to research, and as is the case with so many crimes, young people are both the main victims and—more shockingly, perhaps, given the tolerance that we expect from young people—the main perpetrators of hate crime.

We also support third-party reporting initiatives, such as Tell MAMA, which play a vital role in monitoring and recording incidents of anti-Muslim hostility, in supporting victims and in raising community awareness of the importance of reporting. There is a double-edged sword: hate crime figures have increased during the past few years, which is shocking to many of us, but that is also evidence of the success of many of these organisations in encouraging communities to come forward and report hate crime.

I recently met a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews. They are often very obvious targets, because of the physical dress they choose to wear. Previously, they did not report hate crimes. Quite a significant effort has gone into encouraging them to do so, and we are seeing more of them come forward, which is all to the good. We will not tolerate the few individuals in this country who target people because they happen to look a bit different or to dress a bit differently, and we encourage anyone who has experienced hate crime to report it to the police.

We are committed to creating a strong and integrated society in which hatred and prejudice are not tolerated, and all people are free to express their religious identity and live their lives without fear of hatred or discrimination. Despite the problems we have, we should actually be very proud of the fact that such is the experience of most people living in this country. We want a society that treats people with equality and respect, and our Government are committed to that.

I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. She has raised awareness of women’s right to dress as they choose—not just the hijab, but high heels, as she said—and to celebrate their faith. Importantly, we are in agreement that, as she said herself, that right must be balanced within society by a woman’s right to choose for herself and not to feel under any particular pressure. If a woman chooses to wear the hijab, or anything else for that matter, it should be of her own free will and free choice.

I again congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate, and on securing such a good turnout of SNP Members and other hon. Members who have contributed to it. We should be proud of our values of tolerance and respect in this country. There is more to be done, and she can be assured that the Government are 100% committed to doing what is necessary.

Question put and agreed to.

8.16 pm

House adjourned.
The House met at half-past Nine o’clock

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General was asked—

Crown Prosecution Service: Victim and Witness Support

1. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): What steps the Crown Prosecution Service is taking to support victims and witnesses giving evidence in court.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps the Crown Prosecution Service is taking to support victims and witnesses giving evidence in court.

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): Prosecutors can apply for special measures to allow victims and witnesses to give evidence in court unseen by the defendant. The Government are making available the opportunity for vulnerable witnesses to give pre-recorded evidence without going into a courtroom at all. In addition, recent CPS guidance, now implemented nationwide, makes it clear what prosecutors can do to explain what is likely to happen at court, so that victims and witnesses can better understand the trial process and give the best evidence they can.

Tim Loughton: I am encouraged by the Attorney General’s words, but half of all cases going through the courts at the moment are connected with sexual abuse, and with police investigating no fewer than 70,000 claims of historic child sex abuse this year alone, that figure is likely to remain high. Given the traumatising impact on historic survivors and children especially of reliving their experiences in the witness box, what additional measures are being taken to make the process less intimidating and ensure that appropriate counselling services are readily available?

The Attorney General: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is important that the system does all it can to reduce the effect, particularly on vulnerable witnesses, of giving evidence in these difficult cases. That is why I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor has decided to extend what I believe was a successful pilot of pre-recorded cross-examination. It means that vulnerable witnesses, particularly children, can give their evidence outside a courtroom environment and have it all done and dusted before the trial begins, which also means that they are not affected by any delays that the trial may then be subject to. That is hugely important, as is the opportunity for prosecutors to speak to witnesses and explain what is going on, and I am pleased to say that that has resulted in much improved satisfaction rates among witnesses for the support they get from the CPS.

Nigel Huddleston: Will the Attorney General join me in thanking the NSPCC and Esther Rantzen for their campaigning work to reduce the intimidating environment in courts for children, and will he confirm how many children give evidence in court?

The Attorney General: I will have to write to my hon. Friend with the figure he asks for, but I entirely agree with his comments about the NSPCC. It is worth noting that a variety of organisations assist tremendously in the work of the criminal justice system in making sure that all witnesses can give their best evidence. That is in the interests of the whole system, and it is particularly important when we are dealing with children.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I have only attended one trial—a murder trial—where, in the summing up, the family of the young lady who had been brutally murdered had to listen to an absolutely appalling character assassination. It was totally fraudulent, but they had to sit there and listen to that. Has anything been done to stop that horrible practice?

The Attorney General: I understand entirely the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. He will recognise that in a criminal trial it is necessary that the defence case is put. That is what we need to see to make sure that the process is fair, but we are doing what we can to ensure that the experience of those who are in court not of their own volition—because they are the victim of an offence or a witness to it—is as easy as it can be, although we accept that it will never be wholly easy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister outline what steps have been taken to address the 2015 report by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary and Her Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate, which revealed that some vulnerable people are being let down by the inconsistency of approach to criminal case file management, and will he say how successful those steps have been?

The Attorney General: I recognise the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. This was a troubling report in some ways. One of the most troubling aspects is the way in which victims of crime in particular are communicated with by the CPS—the language used and the sensitivity shown. My hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General and I have been particularly keen to ensure that the CPS takes those lessons on board and acts on them, and I am confident that it is doing so.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): What steps has the CPS taken to support victims and witnesses with mental health issues?
The Attorney General: My hon. Friend makes a good point. There are many people within the system, both defendants and witnesses, who have mental health difficulties and it is important that the system is sensitive to that. What we need to do is understand better what the particular needs of each witness may be and then respond to them as best we can. The way to do that is to have the maximum number of tools available and ways in which evidence can be given, whether that is pre-recorded cross-examination, as I have mentioned, or the assistance of others in court who can help those who give evidence.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will the Attorney General ensure that no witness or defendant can give evidence to a court while wearing a full-face balaclava or the burqa?

The Attorney General: What is important is that the court and in particular the jury can assess the evidence that a witness gives, so it is important that that witness is able to give evidence in a clear way, so that a jury can assess whether they think that witness is telling the truth or not. Anything that gets in the way of that, I am sure the court will wish to consider very carefully.

Unduly Lenient Sentences

2. Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): When he plans to extend the scope of the unduly lenient sentence scheme. [908565]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): We committed ourselves in our manifesto to extending the scope of the scheme. As a first step, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced that we would extend it to sentences in the Crown court for terrorism offences, and we are working with her to implement that.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for confirming that our manifesto commitment is still on track, but I should also be grateful if he was a bit more specific about the dates on which we might be able to make some headway, because these reforms are long overdue.

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is right to press the Government for a commitment to action. Work is being done with the Ministry of Justice, and both the Attorney General and I are committed to ironing out the obvious inconsistencies in the system, which cause understandable frustration among victims and their families.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Over the last 12 months, how often has my hon. and learned Friend been asked to review sentences handed down by the courts?

The Solicitor General: The number of sentences continues to increase. In 2015 we considered 713 requests, but of 80,000 passed in England and Wales in that year, only just over 100 were varied by the scheme. I think that that represents a vote of confidence in our judges and magistrates.

Hate Crime: Non-UK EU Citizens

3. Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What assessment he has made of potential trends in the level of prosecutions for hate crime towards non-UK EU citizens once article 50 is triggered. [908567]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The Government are working closely with the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and community organisations to monitor any changes in hate crime levels, and we will continue to do so after the triggering of article 50. However, it is not possible to predict prosecution trends, and the data on the nationalities of victims are not disaggregated.

Gerald Jones: What steps is the CPS taking to improve the conviction rate for hate crimes against disabled people? Does he support the call by the shadow Solicitor General, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), for parity in the treatment of all protected characteristics in the aggregated offences regime?

The Solicitor General: The hon. Gentleman will be glad to know that rates of disability hate crime prosecution continue to rise. The rise last year was 41.3%, the conviction rate for hate crime being just over 83%. The total number of hate crimes prosecuted last year was 15,442, which is the highest number to date. I do, of course, take very seriously the helpful and sensible submissions made by the shadow Solicitor General.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): What steps is the Department taking to prevent the spread of hate crime by the media?

The Solicitor General: As we know, in an age of social media it has become all too easy for perpetrators to spread hate and intimidation. The Crown Prosecution Service takes very seriously offences which cross the line to constitute grossly offensive communications, and prosecutions take place regularly. We will continue to work with social media to ensure that the detection of such crimes can be improved.

Legal Costs: Article 50

5. Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What the cost to the public purse was of fees related to legal proceedings on the triggering of article 50. [908570]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): The case that concluded in the Supreme Court last week dealt with an important constitutional issue. It was absolutely right that the Government both defended their position and appealed against the first-instance judgment in England and Wales to the Supreme Court, where the case was heard alongside connected litigation from the Northern Ireland courts. The figures for the total costs of those cases will be published in due course, but I can confirm that the Advocate General for Scotland and I, who appeared on behalf of the Government, received no additional fee for our work on the case.

Justin Madders: I thank the Attorney General for his response, although I am not sure that we have got any closer to learning the figure. Given that every serious legal commentator in the land said that the Government’s
The Attorney General: I am afraid that I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman’s premise. Let me point out a number of things to him. First, I think that the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom is the right place in which to decide a case of such significance. Secondly, if the Government’s arguments had been as hopeless as the hon. Gentleman suggests, three Supreme Court justices would not have agreed with them. Thirdly, as I have already pointed out, the case was in the Supreme Court partly because judgments in Northern Ireland cases were appealed against to the Supreme Court, not by the Government but by the other parties. The Government responded to those cases, and, incidentally, were successful. Fourthly, the Supreme Court was dealing with arguments presented by the devolved Governments, which had to be dealt with by the Supreme Court. In that instance, the Government were again entirely successful.

Lastly, let me say this to the hon. Gentleman. I think it is a good thing that, in a system governed by the rule of law, a Government are prepared to go to court to argue their case, to make use of appeal mechanisms like any other litigant, and then to abide by the final outcome. That is what has happened, and I think it is a good example of the way in which a rule-of-law system should work.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that when members of the public bring cases on a matter of this importance against the Government in Northern Ireland and in England and Wales and there are conflicting decisions, our Government have no alternative whatsoever but to pursue this matter to the Supreme Court?

The Attorney General: I do agree. It is important that the Supreme Court resolved this matter and gave us clarity on what should now happen, and it is now for Parliament to decide what to do next—and I am pleased to see that last night Parliament began to answer the question it had been posed.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): When the costs are eventually published, will the Minister ensure that the price that was exacted was for liberty and freedom from the bureaucrats in Brussels, against which it is very difficult to attach any cost?

The Attorney General: I take the hon. Gentleman’s point. This will be an expensive case, but the answer the British people gave should be respected and acted upon, and that, as I say, is now a matter for Parliament—it is no longer a legal matter—and I hope very much that Parliament will answer it clearly.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The Attorney General maybe needs to think again about some of the dubious shorthand that he uses in respect of the devolved cases. The Supreme Court really only made clear judgments in relation to two of the five matters that were referred in relation to Northern Ireland, and on one of them some of its observations are politically telling in ways that the Government are yet to respect.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): The other three issues were not determined because they did not need to be, as other aspects of the case were decided as they were. But I am afraid the position is very clear: in relation to the arguments being made, particularly by the devolved Administrations, that there should be the capacity for those Administrations to veto the process of leaving the European Union, the court simply did not agree and rejected those arguments unanimously.

Mr Speaker: On the subject of the cost to the public purse, I hope, rather than a rerun of all the arguments, which would be very tedious.

Richard Arkless: I think the whole House would like to know that we got value for money in that judgment, and of course there are lots of rights and obligations in many Acts of Parliament and it is the courts’ job to interpret them. Can the Attorney General explain why the Supreme Court held that the Sewel provisions in an Act of Parliament were not a matter for the courts?

The Attorney General: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will read the judgment carefully: it says that whereas the Sewel convention might be important politically, it is not a matter for the courts to enforce. That was perfectly properly for the Supreme Court to say. What respect the Sewel convention is given in political terms is of course not a matter for the court. The judgment made that clear.

Mr Speaker: The operative words are “public purse” and “fees”. Can we stick to that? It would be helpful.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): If the Government were genuinely motivated to spend this money by wanting a definitive answer from the courts on a constitutional question, why did they not thank the judges in the divisional court in November for such a clear answer, instead of being in a position where the Justice Secretary had to be pressured into giving a lukewarm defence of them?

The Attorney General: No, the Government have always been clear that, at every level, the courts are entitled to consider the cases brought to them and to reach whatever judgment they think appropriate in the light of the arguments they have heard. That was true in relation to the High Court and it is true in relation to the Supreme Court, too. But the hon. Gentleman knows, as an eminent lawyer himself, that the appropriate thing to do if we disagree with the court of first instance is to appeal the judgment. That is exactly what the Government did, doing exactly what any other litigator would do—and, incidentally, exactly what some litigators in this case did in Northern Ireland.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Is it not absolutely remarkable that we have significant numbers of litigants in person in our courts because of the Government’s legal aid cuts, yet when the Government wanted a lawyer, the money was found? Is it not the case in terms of access to justice that there is one rule for the Government and another rule for everybody else?
The Attorney General: I am tempted to point out that, as I said earlier, when the Government wanted a lawyer, two out of the three they used in the Supreme Court did not cost the taxpayer anything. I also point out to the hon. Gentleman that when cases like this one are brought—and I make no criticism of those who brought these cases so that these issues could be resolved—it is important that they are resolved through proper and full legal argument. That was done through the High Court and then the Supreme Court. That is the right way to get to the answer the Supreme Court has now given, and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I have made clear very many times that the Government will honour and respect the judgment of the Supreme Court.

War Crime Investigations: Syria and Iraq

6. Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): How the Government collect evidence for use in their investigations into alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Syria and Iraq. [908574]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): UK nationals can be prosecuted in our domestic courts for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes that have taken place abroad. My hon. Friend will know that the UK Government are also working with other Governments to explore international legal mechanisms whereby Daesh can be held to account for its crimes.

Fiona Bruce: It appears that no steps are currently being taken by the International Criminal Court to pursue prosecutions for crimes against humanity or genocide in Syria and Iraq, despite a substantial vote in this House advocating such action. Is the UK taking any steps to use its own legal competences to prosecute UK nationals who might be committing such crimes in those countries?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend will know that the UK Government sought to pursue a route whereby the International Criminal Court would consider offences of this type committed in Iraq and Syria, but that our approach was vetoed by the Russians and the Chinese, so there has been no lack of effort on the part of the United Kingdom. In relation to domestic law, we will certainly pursue those offences as and where we can. She will also recognise that the primary practical difficulty is that of obtaining the necessary evidence, and we are working at international level to determine how evidence can be properly collected and retained in theatre so that it can be used for prosecutions when the time comes.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Statutory Sex and Relationships Education

1. Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): If the Government will introduce statutory sex and relationships education to tackle homophobic bullying and sexual harassment in schools. [908513]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening): The Government want to ensure that all schools are safe, inclusive environments where pupils can fulfil their potential, and we are actively considering how to improve the delivery of sex and relationships education, including updating the existing guidance, which was originally drafted in 2000.

Helen Hayes: New clause 1 of the Children and Social Work Bill would make sex and relationships education compulsory under the safeguarding duties of schools. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will be supporting that new clause on Report so that all our young people can be equipped and empowered to keep themselves healthy and safe?

Justine Greening: I very much appreciate the support around the House for the fact that it is time to look at how we can do better in regard to sex and relationships education, and we are actively looking at how best to improve the quality of delivery and accessibility so that children can be supported. As the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Edward Timpson), has set out, the Government are committed to updating Parliament further during the passage of the Bill.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Police information released today by Barnardo’s shows a 73% increase in reports of children sexually abusing other children. We know that children are not being effectively taught in our schools about mutual respect, self-respect and consent. Will the Minister consider particular amendments to the Children and Social Work Bill that would address those issues? We are running out of time and letting children down.

Justine Greening: I have said that we will provide an update during the next stage of the Bill, but my right hon. Friend is right to suggest that a lot of time has elapsed since the guidance was drafted in 2000, and the world is now a very different place. It is time to look at how we can ensure that children have the right access to what I might rename relationships and sex education, and to ensure that it is high quality education. That is why it is right to ensure that the next steps we take are the right ones, and that they can move this forward for the long term. We need to ensure that the young people in our education system today leave school with not only the relationships education but the broader life skills they need to lead successful lives.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. Lady take on board the fact that successive Select Committees have looked at this matter, and that it is vital not only that every school offers this kind of education but that, critically, we train people to have the right skills to deliver it?

Justine Greening: I have said that we need to make progress on this, and I have reflected on the fact that there have now been 16 years in which we really have not done so. When Ofsted produced its recent report on this in 2013, it identified issues around the quality of teaching. As the hon. Gentleman says, this is not just about what our young people should be taught in schools and their access to that teaching; it is also about the quality of the teaching. This is a broader question than simply one of updating the legal perspective of where SRE is taught.
Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): There is a worrying trend among people on the left of both sides of the House that things that they do not like should be banned and that things that they like must be made compulsory. What is wrong with the principle of freedom? What is wrong with parents having a role in deciding what is appropriate for their children to be taught?

Justine Greening: I strongly agree that parents’ involvement in ensuring that what children are taught at school is acceptable to them and appropriate is vital. However, the most important voices that now need to be listened to are those of young people and children, who say that they do not feel that they are getting the necessary level of education in this area and want a more up-to-date approach to enable them to deal with the world in which they are growing up.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): More than half of lesbian, gay and bi pupils have experienced direct bullying, and LGBT people are twice as likely as heterosexuals to have suicidal thoughts or to have attempted suicide. The Minister will be aware that people are committing terrible homophobic and hate crimes online—crimes for which they would be held accountable offline. The “#no2LGBTHate” campaign is calling on Twitter to take action against users who spread homophobia on the site. Does the Minister support the campaign? What is she doing to tackle homophobic hate?

Justine Greening: It is important that we support campaigns that are trying to play a role in reducing LGBT bullying. In September last year, we set out a £2.8 million programme to invest in charities that are working to prevent and address homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in schools in England. The Government have launched their own “Disrespect NoBody” campaign to help young people recognise and challenge abuse within teen relationships. It is important to work in schools to change attitudes due to, as the hon. Lady sets out, the level of discrimination and abuse that many young people say they have received.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I am pleased that the Government are considering the views of charities, campaigners and Members of this House in introducing statutory relationship education. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on plans to update the statutory guidance, which was last updated when I was the ripe age of 13?

Justine Greening: I did not realise that my hon. Friend was quite that young. He sets out the serious point that the world has changed immeasurably since 2000. Children now learn about relationships in different ways, but the challenge is that they are learning about them in ways that give them a skewed, inaccurate view of what relationships are about. It is important to look at how we can ensure that the guidance genuinely works and reflects the world as it is today, therefore giving ourselves and our children a better chance to get the education that they need.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman’s beard is deceptive.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend have a word with our excellent Secretary of State for Education and identify the best schools in the country that tackle homophobic bullying and sexual harassment together with the parents of their pupils, and roll out that best practice across the country?

Justine Greening: I will not comment on that, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that many schools are doing that—I visited a school in Birmingham that is doing great work in this area. Excellent work is under way, but it is now time to look at how we can learn from what works and see that percolate through our school system so that all schools can do a better job for all children on teaching SRE.

Gender Pay Gap

2. Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to tackle the gender pay gap for women in their 30s and 40s. [908515]

8. Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to tackle the gender pay gap for women in their 30s and 40s. [908521]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage): The gender pay gap is now the lowest on record, at 18.1%, but that is still too high and eliminating it altogether is one of the key targets of this Government. That is why we have extended the right to request flexible working and introduced shared parental leave, and it is why, from September, we are rolling out 30 hours of childcare to the working parents of all three and four-year-olds.

Joan Ryan: I thank the Minister for her reply. Does she agree with the overwhelming evidence suggesting that the £1,200 employment tribunal fees introduced by her Government are creating a significant barrier to women being able to hold their employer to account for gender pay disparities in the workplace? That is all women, not just low-paid women.

Caroline Dinenage: The Government take that very seriously, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Courts and Justice will be coming forward with more information shortly. The Government are committed to ensuring that people from all backgrounds can access justice. Although we are very keen to see much more in the way of mediation, and ACAS has dealt successfully with more than 80,000 cases without having to go to tribunal, on Tuesday we launched a consultation on proposals to widen the support available to people under the help with fees scheme, following the completion of the fees review.

Julie Elliott: The gender pay gap in the north-east is 28%, some 10 percentage points higher than the national average. What is the Minister and the Government doing to address those very stark regional variations?

Caroline Dinenage: It is vital, now more than ever, that our economy is able to benefit from everybody’s skills. We simply cannot afford to waste the talents of a single person. That is why, from April this year, we are requiring all employers with more than 250 staff to
publish those gender pay gap figures. We are great believers in what gets measured gets managed, but what gets published gets managed even better.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Can my hon. Friend tell the House what the gender pay gap is for 30 and 40-year-olds in each Government Department? Does she agree that the Government should be getting their own house in order before trying to lecture others in the private sector?

Caroline Dinenage: I am delighted to tell my hon. Friend that the gender pay gap in the Department for Education is only 5.9%. Although that is 5.9 percentage points too high, it shows enormous progress in the Department for Education. Across Government, the figure is just below 13%, and we will keep working until it has been eliminated altogether.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Given that it is now 42 years since Barbara Castle’s Equal Pay Act, why is there any gender pay gap, not only for 30 and 40-year-olds but for people in their teens, twenties, thirties and sixties?

Mr Speaker: I thought it was 47 years this year, but maybe my maths is wrong. It was certainly a long time ago.

Sir Simon Burns: Wasn’t it 1975?

Mr Speaker: I thought it was 1970. [Interruption.] Anyway, we are agreed that it is a long-standing statute.

Caroline Dinenage: Yes, I think we can all agree that it has been a long old time. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) is right to point this out. We have legislation that stops people being paid differently for doing the same job, but what drives the gender pay gap is the fact that girls tend to go into lower paid sectors compared with men and, of course, the pay gap really kicks in at around 30 and 40 when women leave work to have children and may not be supported back into the workplace as well as we would want. That is why gender pay gap reporting is so vital.

Mr Speaker: We are all now better informed.

Racially Motivated Incidents

3. Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What steps she has taken in response to trends in the level of racially motivated incidents since the EU referendum. [908516]

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): I hope I can say on behalf of the entire House that all Members are clear that hate crime of any description should not and must not be tolerated. We have been working with the police, EU embassies and community groups to monitor the situation, to provide reassurance and to encourage reporting of racist incidents. Recorded hate crime has now fallen to pre-referendum levels. Police force areas continue to monitor racist incidents on an ongoing basis to ensure that any increases are addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Gerald Jones: I thank the Minister for that answer. Across the UK we saw a rise in hate crime and religiously aggravated offences following the referendum—it was 41% higher in July 2016 than in July 2015. Will he inform the House of what provisions have been put in place to avoid any repetition specifically in relation to the triggering of article 50?

Brandon Lewis: There are a couple of points to make to the hon. Gentleman. We have put in place the Government’s new hate crime action plan, which is taking a number of steps, for example, to boost reporting. There is also new guidance for prosecutors and a new fund to ensure that we have protective security measures and additional funding in place for community organisations so that they can tackle hate crime. I also gently say to him that the Labour party should look carefully at this morning’s CST report, which clearly indicates a 36% rise in totally unacceptable recorded anti-Semitic crime, related directly to the problems in the Labour party.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for mentioning the CST report. Clearly, the concern of the Jewish community in this country is that hate crime against Jews is on the rise. He has seen the report and the whole community wants to know what he is going to do about it, so that we stamp out anti-Semitism, once and for all.

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. As I have outlined, it is important that we stamp out all forms of hate crime, which is why that action plan was put in place in July by the Home Secretary. We also all need to look at ourselves. It is clear when we look at the CST report that although we should be pleased about people having the confidence to come forward to report crime—the increase in recording is good—a rise in hate crime of any description, particularly a 36% rise such as this one, is disgraceful. I hope Members from across this House will be doing all they can to stamp that out.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): The Minister will be aware that the European Union has been a beacon of hope and a key proponent of equality for citizens’ rights across the globe. Will he categorically confirm to the House not only that the discrimination laws and rights bestowed upon people across the UK will be upheld following a UK exit from the EU, but that citizens living in the UK will not be left behind and have their rights taken hostage by Brexit?

Brandon Lewis: We have been very clear all along that we want not only to stamp out hate crime, but to play an important part in this with our partners right across Europe. Indeed, in the autumn, I spoke at the EU Council on this very issue, and aside from the Commission, we were the only ones from any country to talk about it. We should be proud of the fact that this country has some of the toughest laws in the world on hate crime. Just a few weeks ago, on 19 January, we hosted some 19 countries’ embassies to talk to them about what we are doing and what can be done further to drive out hate crime.

Violence against Women and Girls

4. Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): If the Government will support Girlguiding UK’s campaign to reduce violence against women and girls. [908517]
The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening): Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is totally unacceptable and should not be tolerated, and I pay tribute to the fantastic work of Girlguiding UK, which is tackling this important issue. We are working with it as we take forward the commitment we made in response to the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry on sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools to review existing guidance and then to look at what further support we can put in place for schools.

Oliver Colville: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. How much training and emotional support is given to girl guides and other young girls who are bullied online?

Justine Greening: Tackling all forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, is a priority for us. We are investing £1.6 million over two years directly in anti-bullying initiatives, including via the Diana award project, which has a focus on digital resilience for young people. The Government have also funded the UK Safer Internet Centre to develop new cyber-bullying guidance for schools and an associated online safety toolkit. My hon. Friend’s question highlights the fact that the world is a very different place for our young people these days, and our guidance, laws and teaching need to stay up to date.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Government support Girlguiding’s “Girls Matter” campaign to update the school curriculum to include sexual consent, online safety, tackling violence against women and girls, and LGBT and healthy relationships?

Justine Greening: I have set out my feeling that it is time we look at the guidance that is in place and how we can improve the teaching. That is the right thing to do. We will set out our next steps at the next stage of the Children and Social Work Bill, but we are already doing other things, too. We have already held our first advisory group on looking at updating our guidance on tackling bullying. Through that and the frameworks we have in place, we hope that we can help schools to develop improved codes of practice to combat bullying, too.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the Minister confirm that there is co-operation at a comprehensive level, particularly with uniformed organisations such as the Girls Brigade, as well as Girlguiding, to combat this pernicious aspect of the 21st century?

Justine Greening: Those sorts of organisations can be vital and incredibly powerful in changing attitudes and helping young girls in particular to understand that they do have a voice and should not accept this sort of behaviour. When I was at the Department for International Development, we worked very closely with Girlguiding on gender equality more generally, and I am pleased that that relationship can continue now that I am at the Department for Education.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): A vital part of fulfilling the aims of Girlguiding’s campaign to end violence against women and girls is challenging the attitudes and behaviour of the perpetrators of these crimes. What are the Government doing to ensure there is national coverage for high-quality, accredited, community-based perpetrator programmes, such as the ones I was involved in—I declare an interest—before I became an MP and came to this place?

Justine Greening: The work that the DFE does is part of a cross-Government programme on tackling harassment, bullying and intimidation. It is about not only supporting people—particularly young people, in the case of the DFE—who are bearing the brunt of that behaviour, but understanding what is driving it and tackling the root causes.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): The Girlguiding survey found that 20% of 13 to 21-year-olds have had unwanted pornographic imagery sent to them, and 5% have had indecent images shared without their consent. If the Government really do want to support the Girlguiding campaign, why is the Department cutting the funding to the revenge porn helpline, which has taken more than 2,500 calls in the past year? How will the Minister ensure that victims of revenge porn have access to bespoke support, as promised in the Government’s violence against women and girls strategy, when she is shutting the only helpline in March?

Justine Greening: I do not think the hon. Lady has the right information; in fact, we have not made any announcements in relation to that effect yet. Alongside all the comments made by hon. Members today, it is worth reflecting on the fact that another thing we can do is improve the evidence base in this area, which is why we have included specific questions on sexist and racist bullying in the next wave of the National Foundation for Educational Research Teacher Voice survey. We hope that some of the findings from those questions will be available later this year.

Independent Domestic Violence Advisers

5. Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Home Secretary on the Government’s plans to continue direct grant funding to support independent domestic violence advisers after March 2017.

[908518]

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): The Home Office has engaged closely with other Government Departments, through the violence against women and girls inter-ministerial group, to oversee delivery of the violence against women and girls strategy, including the commitment of increased funding of £80 million for the services. We have also engaged closely with commissioners and voluntary sector partners on the support provided for independent domestic violence advisers and our move to support better local collaboration and early intervention through the VAWG service transformation fund.

Mr Cunningham: Some 84% of victims reported feeling safer with an independent domestic violence adviser, and just over 1,000 advisers are needed to support the current number of known victims, yet there are currently only half that number. What steps will the Minister be taking to increase the number of independent domestic violence advisers throughout the country?
Brandon Lewis: As I just said, we have increased the funding to VAWG services to £80 million, and we are working with commissioners in local areas to make sure they can deliver the service in a way that they understand are correct for their area and the women who live there.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I am proud that my local authority, Powys County Council, has become a white ribbon authority. Will my hon. Friend the Minister do all he can to encourage all local authorities to follow that example?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend gives a really good example of where local work is delivering really good local results in a way that others can look at. We have to get better, throughout this country, at sharing best practice, and that is a really good example that others can look at.

**Gender Recognition Certificates**

6. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What progress the Government is making on reviewing the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and the process relating to gender recognition certificates. [908519]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage): The Government are continuing our work on our commitment to review the Gender Recognition Act 2004. We have begun stakeholder engagement programmes to look at how the gender recognition process can be improved, as well as looking carefully at international comparisons. We will provide an update later this year.

Kevin Foster: I thank the Minister for her answer. My constituent Rebecca Cook applied for a gender recognition certificate, but her application was rejected on the basis that the statutory declaration was more than six months old and she “may have changed her mind.”

Given that the statutory declaration is a lifetime declaration, will the Minister confirm that the six-month time limit will be reviewed as part of the overall legislative review?

Caroline Dinenage: I am really sorry to hear that my hon. Friend’s constituent has encountered those difficulties, and he is absolutely right to bring that kind of case to the House today. We have committed to review, streamline and demedicalise the gender recognition process, and we will certainly consider evidence of any administrative barriers to people gaining the legal gender recognition that they want.

**Personal, Social and Health Education**

7. **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential role of personal, social and health education in promoting equality. [908520]

The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening): We want schools to put high-quality PSHE at the heart of their curriculum, ensuring that all young people are prepared for life in modern Britain. Effective PSHE not only helps provide pupils with key life skills, but gives them the knowledge to understand their rights and responsibilities to respect individual differences and to challenge prejudice and discrimination.

Neil Carmichael: Does the Secretary of State agree that embedding PSHE—life skills as she correctly terms it—will help us to deal with social mobility and productivity, and that we should see proper, age-appropriate teaching across the piece in our schools?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to link this matter with social mobility. We know that strong PSHE can make the biggest difference to young people growing up in more disadvantaged communities. It is important not only that we have healthy, resilient and confident pupils coming out of our education system who are better placed to do well academically, but that we improve our non-academic outcomes, as that is also hugely valued by employers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister will recognise that the churches play a key role in personal, social and health education. What discussions has she had, or will she have, in relation to that role that churches can play in education?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, because we have a large number of faith-based schools. Indeed, the values that we want to give our young people as they come through the education system are not only British but often underpinned by faith values. Coming back to the point on the economy, PSHE can really help students develop their teamwork, communications skills and resilience—precisely the sorts of things that British business wants.

**Department for Work and Pensions Estate**

9. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What assessment the Government have made of the potential effect on equality for social security claimants of its proposals on the future of the Department for Work and Pensions estate. [908522]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): The Government are committed to complying with our public sector equality duty, and we will take account of feedback from our public consultations. We will undertake an equality analysis as part of the detailed planning for service reconfiguration, which will include feedback from public consultations in those locations where this applies.

Gavin Newlands: Last week, the UK Government announced the closure of 15 jobcentre sites in Scotland, including the Lonend site in Paisley. This follows a proposal to close eight jobcentres in Glasgow, which was announced in December. Does the Minister agree that it is a dereliction of duty and an insult to those affected not to conduct an equality impact assessment in advance of these plans, given the hardship that they will cause to thousands of the most disadvantaged people?

Caroline Nokes: The views and opinions from the consultations we are carrying out with claimants who use the services across the country, not simply in Scotland, will be fed into our equality analysis.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): The single biggest boost to equality delivered through our Department for Work and Pensions estate is the introduction of named universal credit work coaches and their personalised support. What is the current roll-out timetable?
Caroline Nokes: The roll-out of universal credit is increasing apace, and from September we expect it to roll out to 43 jobcentres every single month. My right hon. Friend is right to point out that work coaches are a crucial part of getting people back into work. As part of the service reconfiguration, we are working to ensure that individual claimants can maintain the relationship with their work coaches.

State Pensions: Working-Class Women

11. Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the effect of recent changes to state pensions on the income of working-class women in retirement. [908525]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): Women reaching state pension age in 2016-17 are estimated to receive more state pension on average over their lifetime than women ever have before. By 2030, more than 3 million women stand to gain an average of £550 a year through the introduction of the new state pension.

Chi Onwurah: Working-class women are more likely to be in manual trades, which take a greater toll on the body as it ages, and to die younger due to the health inequalities from which we still suffer. The Minister did not mention the word “class” in her reply. Will she say right now that she will ensure justice for working-class women and all WASPI women by giving them a fair deal in the spring Budget?

Caroline Nokes: The equalisation of the state pension age has been well rehearsed in this Chamber; and, no, I will not use the word “class” because, to be quite frank, we are all working now.

Topical Questions

T1. [908548] Mrs Sherryl Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justice Greening): The whole House will welcome the fact that the Turing law has now come into effect. Alongside that, Parliament this week approved the regulations introducing mandatory gender pay gap and bonus gap reporting for private and voluntary sector employers with 250 employees or more. Transparency over time can make a big difference. It is one of our key manifesto commitments, and the Government are holding themselves to the same high standards that we expect of others. That is why we have now laid regulations for gender pay gap reporting in the public sector, which we look forward to debating in this House at the earliest opportunity.

Mrs Murray: What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the recent trends in the number of women in work?

Justice Greening: My hon. Friend may be aware that the number of women in employment has increased by 229,000 over the past year alone. The female employment rate is now at a record high of 69.8%.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): As of the 2016 autumn statement, 86% of net savings to the Treasury through tax and benefit measures come from women. The Treasury continues to fail to provide any impact assessment of its fiscal policies or to send a Minister to the Women and Equalities Committee to answer questions. Will the Minister therefore commit to ensuring that women do not suffer the same abysmal impact from the spring Budget?

Justice Greening: I have just set out that the female employment rate is at a record high, which is good news and we want it to progress. Indeed, it is the third highest female employment rate in the whole G7.

T4. [908551] Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What are the Government doing to support men to take a more active role in looking after their children?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage): We know that when fathers take an active role in childcare, it is not only great for their relationships with their children; it is also important in eliminating the gender pay gap. That is why we have introduced shared parental leave and extended the right to request flexible working, helping both mums and dads to balance their work life with their family commitments.

T2. [908549] Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the Equality and Human Rights Commission must publish an equality impact assessment of its planned redundancy programme before that programme proceeds any further?

Justice Greening: The EHRC is an independent body that was established under the Equality Act 2006. It has been subject to a substantial reform programme to ensure that it can carry out its core functions effectively, but it must be able to do that under its own steam because it is an independent body.

T5. [908552] Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): Research by England Athletics shows that more than a third of women have suffered harassment while out running. I chair the all-party parliamentary group for running. What further help can my right hon. Friend offer to challenge that behaviour, which is clearly a barrier to getting more women out running?

Justice Greening: I totally agree that such behaviour is unacceptable, and we should not tolerate it in any form. I regularly go running, and I have been stopped for selfies, but never subjected to any catcalling. We can do more. Sport England’s This Girl Can campaign and other initiatives have really helped to narrow the gender gap in sports participation. The new Active Lives survey demonstrates that 59% of women are now doing at least 150 minutes of physical activity a week, which is the amount recommended by the Chief Medical Officer, but we can do much more to ensure that there are no barriers to women participating in sport.

Mr Speaker: I do not know whether the Minister has been stopped for selfies because of the quality of her running, her celebrity status or, more likely, both.
T6. [908553] Patricial Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Four thousand eight hundred women in my constituency and countless thousands across the United Kingdom are WASPI women, losing out on thousands of pounds that is rightfully theirs. Does the Minister agree that this affects a generation of women who very often suffer from pay discrimination, and that denying them their rightful pension only heaps injustice upon injustice?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): The Government have been very clear: bringing about state pension age equality was an important principle, and one that we have to maintain. We have made £1 billion of concessions to women in this age group but, as the pensions Minister has made clear, there will be no more transitional arrangements.

Mrs Marina Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The Government have been very clear about the fact that they want equality law to be protected when we leave the EU. That is particularly important. Can the Minister update the House on whether that will form part of the White Paper to be published today?

Justine Greening: This is an important point, and it is one of the reasons the Prime Minister set out a number of objectives in her speech recently. I am not going to pre-empt the White Paper, which is being published today, but it is certainly important to ensure that we absolutely maintain—and, indeed, continue to advance—issues of equality and rights.

T7. [908554] Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): The Government have said that setting the age threshold for their living wage at 25 creates a financial incentive to employ young people, but given that the Federation of Small Businesses has advised its members that employing a young person at 25 creates a financial incentive to employ young people, but given that the Federation of Small Businesses has advised its members that employing a young person will introduce the living wage to make sure that all people have said that setting the age threshold for their living wage to make sure that all people have the chance to improve their financial situation, does that not make a nonsense of the Government’s supposed concern for gender equality?

Caroline Dinenage: On Tuesday, we launched a consultation on the proposals to widen the support available to people under the Help with Fees scheme, following the completion of the employment tribunal fees review last year. However, it is also important to point out that ACAS has seen the number of people who are able to sort out their differences via mediation go beyond 80,000, and I think a number of people would be much happier going back into the workplace they have come from having sorted out their problems through mediation rather than tribunals.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): This week marks the start of LGBT history month, and, of course, we all celebrate the great achievements the LGBT community has given this country. However, hate crime against the LGBT community remains far too high, with Stonewall saying that one in four LGBT people hide their sexual orientation. Will the Minister take urgent action to tackle that, first by increasing the sentences for those who commit hate crimes against LGBT people?

Caroline Dinenage: We do have a lot to be proud of, and the UK continues to be recognised as one of the most progressive countries in Europe for LGBT rights, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we must not rest on our laurels. We must make sure that anybody who attacks anyone on the basis of their sexual orientation is brought to justice. LGBT history month is a fantastic opportunity to celebrate and recognise the contribution that gay, lesbian, bi and trans people have made to British history, British society and British culture.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Great Repeal Bill

1. Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): If he will bring forward a motion to disapply Standing Orders No. 83J to 83X from proceedings on the Government’s planned Great Repeal Bill. [908556]

2. Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): If he will bring forward a motion to disapply Standing Orders No. 83J to 83X from proceedings on the Government’s planned Great Repeal Bill. [908557]

3. Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): If he will bring forward a motion to disapply Standing Orders No. 83J to 83X from proceedings on the Government’s planned Great Repeal Bill. [908558]

4. Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): If he will bring forward a motion to disapply Standing Orders No. 83J to 83X from proceedings on the Government’s planned Great Repeal Bill. [908559]

5. Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): If he will bring forward a motion to disapply Standing Orders No. 83J to 83X from proceedings on the Government’s planned Great Repeal Bill. [908560]
The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): The Standing Orders of the House of Commons will apply to the repeal Bill in the usual way.

Martyn Day: Given the importance of the great repeal Bill to the devolved Administrations, will the Leader of the House give a clear guarantee that all Members of this House will be able to scrutinise and vote on all parts of this Bill to ensure that the great repeal Bill does not turn into the great power grab?

Mr Lidington: Yes, of course. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman himself acknowledges, the so-called EVEL provisions under our Standing Orders do not bar any Member of the House of Commons, from any part of the United Kingdom, from taking part in votes on the different Readings of any Bill and on amendments to any Bill.

Richard Arkless: Given that we cannot categorically rule out EVEL and that the Secretary of State for Scotland has said that a legislative consent motion will be required for the great repeal Bill, what exactly is the Government’s position?

Mr Lidington: The Standing Orders of the House apply in the usual way. If any Bill, any clause of a Bill or any amendment to a Bill affects only England, but covers matters that, in Scotland, are devolved, it must, in addition to commanding a majority among Members of the House as a whole, command a majority among those Members representing English constituencies.

Patricia Gibson: The Procedure Committee, on which I sit, produced a report that noted: “There is an apparent lack of appetite for debate in legislative grand committee at present.” Given that the Government are tabling programme motions that allow absolutely no time for debate, surely the Leader of the House must share my opinion that current EVEL procedures are a piece of nonsense.

Mr Lidington: The Standing Orders of the House apply in the usual way. If any Bill, any clause of a Bill or any amendment to a Bill affects only England, but covers matters that, in Scotland, are devolved, it must, in addition to commanding a majority among Members of the House as a whole, command a majority among those Members representing English constituencies.

Margaret Ferrier: The UK Government continue to tell us that Holyrood is the most powerful devolved Parliament, yet they are not consulting Scotland on the triggering of article 50. Does the Leader of the House agree that by also refusing Scottish MPs the opportunity to vote on all areas of the great repeal Bill, the Government are doing everything possible to stop the voice of Scottish people being heard on Brexit?

Mr Lidington: Quite the contrary: I think that both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland have made, and will continue to make, every effort to ensure that the interests of the people of Scotland are fully represented at all stages of the forthcoming negotiation as part of the package we are seeking for the United Kingdom.

Kirsten Oswald: During the referendum campaign, we were told that all non-reserved powers would return to Scotland. Worryingly, the UK Government have not opened any discussions with the Scottish Government about that. When will the Government discuss with the Scottish Government what additional powers may be devolved to Scotland as a result of the UK withdrawing from the European Union?

Mr Lidington: We have said already, including at the Joint Ministerial Committee, that we are going to talk intensively to the Scottish Government about how to address the issue of powers that return to the United Kingdom from the European Union. If we look, for example, at fisheries—an issue that is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, in respect of UK fisheries policy—we see that that also involves third-country agreements negotiated between the EU and other nation states. It involves United Nations conventions. The Scotland Act 1998 says, in terms, that international agreements are a reserved matter. Those are exactly the things that we need to thrash out in detail in the conversations with our colleagues in the Scottish Government.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): How about 83A? I whipped Bills through Committee perfectly effectively before we introduced the dismal practice of routine guillotining, but perhaps we were all better behaved and more reasonable then.

Mr Lidington: I am sure that my right hon. Friend sets an example to all Members of the House with his common sense and good reason. I say again that I think it was perfectly fair and right for this House to change its Standing Orders in response to the different balance of powers that now exists in the United Kingdom as a consequence of devolution.

Restoration and Renewal

6. Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What plans he has for the House to debate and vote on the timetable and budget for the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement. [908561]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis): I am eager to schedule a debate on the Joint Committee’s report and recommendation to refurbish the Palace of Westminster as soon as possible. That will be announced in the business statement in the usual way. The Joint Committee’s report recommended the establishment of a delivery authority that would develop a business case and budget prior to a final vote in Parliament, following a decision in principle. By its own admission, the Joint Committee was not in a position to provide detailed budgets before the establishment of a delivery authority.

Mr Hollobone: If the Palace of Westminster needs to be renewed and restored, I am pretty sure that my constituents in Kettering would want me to vote for the cheapest option. If that happens to be the quickest, so much the better. Will the Leader of the House make a recommendation to the House ahead of the vote?
Michael Ellis: That is a matter for the House. It is vital that the Palace is safeguarded in the right way for the reasons that my hon. Friend has indicated. The Government want to ensure that the solution is deliverable and value for money, and are taking their time to consider the detail of the proposed recommendations and the implications very carefully.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): “Taking their time” is the understatement of the year! The Joint Committee was chaired by two Ministers, one of whom, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), is sitting on the Front Bench. He was staring at the back of the head of the Deputy Leader of the House, going, “Just get on with it, man.” Get on with it!

Michael Ellis: There are pressures on parliamentary time—I think the hon. Gentleman is responsible for some of those pressures—but the reality is that the matter is of significant importance, and we will proceed as soon as possible.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the fact that the Government are taking their time to consider the best option for dealing with this historic Palace. Given the amount of taxpayers’ money involved, will the Deputy Leader of the House reassure me that such a cost will deliver an effective Parliament and a solution that taxpayers believe is genuine value for money.

Michael Ellis: It is crucial that value for money is safeguarded. Advice is being taken on a range of the technical and governance recommendations made by the Joint Committee report—we have studied it very carefully—and the independent Major Projects Authority is also being consulted.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Deputy Leader of the House says that there is pressure on parliamentary time. We spent 45 minutes trooping through the Lobbies last night and we will spend hours doing so next week, so if the Chamber is to be decanted, will that not be an opportunity to introduce modern practices, such as electronic voting?

Michael Ellis: I am surprised to hear that Scottish National party Members feel Divisions are a waste of time. I am sure they could avoid Divisions if they saw fit.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Is it not the case that the large majority of people in the House of Commons are not in fact Members? There is a constant risk not only on health grounds, with asbestos and the rest, but of a fire, and we certainly do not want a repeat of 1834. Should not those who complain about the cost involved—they are quite likely to come from outside—be told that they have such an absolute right to complain because this place exists?

Michael Ellis: I recommend any Member of the House who has not read the report to read it, because it particularises in fine detail some of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman mentions about health and safety and about risk.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): First, people started talking about the great reform Bill—where do all these greats come from?—and now there will presumably be the great reconstruction bill for the House of Commons. All the time I have been a Member we have made do and mended, and we have got on perfectly well. Why do we need to have this reconstruction? Let us just patch things up a bit and carry on as normal.

Michael Ellis: Again, I recommend that the hon. Gentleman read the report. It is decades—in fact, many decades—of patching and mending that has led to patching and mending no longer being practicable in the opinion of the authors of the report, so clearly a number of major issues need to be addressed.

Mr Speaker: We are out of time, but I really want to hear the last question, not least because the hon. Gentleman is a newly elected and extremely keen member of the Committee about whose name he is concerned. I call Mr Philip Davies.

Women and Equalities Committee

7. Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): If he will bring forward proposals to change the name of the Women and Equalities Committee to the Equalities Committee.

Michael Ellis: The Government currently have no plans to bring forward proposals to change the name of the Women and Equalities Committee. I have received no representations from the Committee to make such a change. Should the Women and Equalities Committee recommend such a change, the Government would consider it in consultation with the Procedure Committee.

Philip Davies: Every single departmental Select Committee is named after the Department it scrutinises. I am also on the Justice Committee, which scrutinises the Ministry of Justice. The only exception is the Women and Equalities Committee, which shadows the Government Equalities Office. Surely this Committee should be called the Equalities Committee. If the Deputy Leader of the House does not agree, will he tell us why women’s issues cannot be included in a Committee called the Equalities Committee?

Michael Ellis: I suggest that my hon. Friend approach the Chair of the Select Committee of which he is a valued member and invite her to write to the Leader of the House. The matter will be considered in the normal way.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Is my hon. Friend at all worried that members of, for example, the black and minority ethnic or the gay and lesbian communities, might feel that the title of the Committee suggests it will be giving priority to the concerns of women over their own concerns?

Michael Ellis: I gently say that achieving gender equality is good for everyone. For example, the introduction of shared parental leave allows men to take time away from the workplace to bond with their new children. There are issues to be addressed for women, as discussed
in this place earlier today. Names of Committees are a matter for the House and are considered with the Procedure Committee in the normal way.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister confirm whether he has received any representations from anyone from a BME community about their happiness or otherwise of the title of the Women and Equalities Committee? As a member of the BME community, may I say that I am very happy with the name of the Women and Equalities Committee?

**Michael Ellis**: The hon. Lady’s contentment has been noted. No such representations have been made. If any are made, they will be considered very carefully.
Airport Capacity and Airspace Policy

10.41 am

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about airport capacity and airspace policy.

In October last year, I announced that the Government had selected a new north-west runway scheme at Heathrow as its preferred scheme for new airport capacity in the south-east. Aviation expansion is important for the UK, both in boosting our economy and jobs, and in promoting us on the world stage. Leaving the EU is a new chapter for Britain and it provides us with a great opportunity to forge a new role in the world. We are determined to seize that opportunity, and having the right infrastructure in place will allow us to build a more global Britain. By backing the north-west runway at Heathrow airport and publishing our proposals today, we are sending a clear signal that when we leave the EU Britain will be open for business.

Today, I lay before Parliament a draft airports national policy statement and begin a period of extensive public consultation on the proposals it contains. The draft airports national policy statement is accompanied by an appraisal of sustainability, which assesses the potential impact of expansion on the environment in the UK, both in boosting our economy and jobs, and in promoting us on the world stage. Leaving the EU is a new chapter for Britain and it provides us with a great opportunity to forge a new role in the world. We are determined to seize that opportunity, and having the right infrastructure in place will allow us to build a more global Britain. By backing the north-west runway at Heathrow airport and publishing our proposals today, we are sending a clear signal that when we leave the EU Britain will be open for business.

Over the past 70 years, the UK has failed to build the capacity needed to match people’s growing desire for travel. Unless we take action, every London airport is forecast to be full by 2040 and almost entirely full by 2030. Doing nothing is no longer a choice we can afford to make. Without expansion, constraints in the aviation sector would impose increasing costs on the rest of the economy over time, lowering economic output by making aviation more expensive and less convenient to use, with knock-on effects in lost trade, tourism and foreign direct investment.

The Government believe that a new north-west runway at Heathrow best delivers the need for additional airport capacity. The draft airports national policy statement sets out this rationale in full. It is expected that Heathrow will provide the greatest economic and employment benefits, delivering tens of thousands of additional local jobs by 2030 and up to £61 billion of economic benefits, not including wider trade benefits. The scheme will benefit the whole of the UK. I expect Heathrow airport to work with airlines to improve domestic connectivity, including the addition of six more domestic routes across the UK by 2030, bringing the total to 14. This will strengthen existing links to nations and regions, and develop new connections.

Heathrow’s location means it is already accessible to business and the rest of the UK. In future, it will be connected to Crossrail, and linked to HS2 at Old Oak Common. We are also bringing forward plans to deliver western and southern rail access to the airport as quickly as possible to provide greater flexibility, accessibility and resilience for passengers. The Heathrow north-west runway scheme is expected to deliver the greatest support for freight. As we leave the European Union, we will need to get out into the world and do new business with old allies and new partners alike. A new north-west runway at Heathrow will be at the heart of this. In summary, a new north-west runway at Heathrow would be expected to create new global connections, create tens of thousands of jobs, reduce fares for passengers, provide new capacity for freight imports and exports, and spread the benefits of growth to the whole of the UK. Today we are sending a clear message that the Government are not only making the big decisions but getting on with delivering them.

I am clear that expansion must not come at any cost and that we will meet our legal requirements on air quality and obligations on carbon. The airports national policy statement, if designated, will provide the primary basis for making decisions on any development consent application for a new north-west runway at Heathrow. Heathrow airport would be expected to provide up to £2.6 billion to communities affected by the expansion, including noise insulation for homes and schools, improvements to public facilities and other measures. This includes a community compensation fund and establishing a community engagement board.

For those people whose homes need to be compulsorily purchased to make way for the new runway, or for those who take up the voluntary scheme, Heathrow must honour its commitment of payments of 25% above the full market value of people’s homes and its commitment to cover all costs, such as stamp duty, and moving and legal fees. I am also clear that the environmental impact of expansion must be minimised. Industry-leading measures will be required to mitigate air quality impacts, and Heathrow airport will be required to demonstrate that the scheme can be delivered within legal air quality obligations.

The airport should continue to strive to meet its public pledge to ensure that landside airport-related traffic is no greater than today. Measures will also be required to mitigate the impacts of noise, including legally binding noise targets and periods of predictable respite. The Government expect a ban of six and a half hours on scheduled night flights.

Lastly, construction must take place in a manner that minimises impacts on the environment and the local community. Outside of the planning system, I am clear that there must be conditions on cost and that expansion costs will be paid for by the private sector, not the taxpayer. The Government expect industry to work together to drive down costs. I have appointed Sir Jeremy Sullivan, the former Senior President of Tribunals, to provide independent oversight of the draft airports national policy statement consultation process.

The second consultation that I wish to bring to the attention of the House is on UK airspace policy. I am publishing proposals to modernise the way UK airspace is managed, which will be consulted on in parallel. By taking steps now to future-proof this vital infrastructure, we can harness the latest technology to make airspace more efficient as well as making journeys faster and more environmentally friendly. The policy principles set out in this airspace consultation will influence decisions taken later in the planning process for a north-west runway at Heathrow. It is therefore sensible to allow members of the public to express views on both these issues at the same time.

The consultation will set out our plans to establish an independent commission on civil aviation noise and bring forward proposals to improve how communities
can engage and make sure their voices are heard. To complement this, we are proposing guidance on how noise impacts should be assessed and used to inform decisions on airspace options. These proposals aim to strike a balance between the economic benefits of a thriving aviation sector and its impacts on local communities and the environment.

The aviation sector is a great British success story: it contributes around £20 billion per year, directly supports approximately 230,000 jobs across the United Kingdom and supports an estimated 260,000 jobs across the wider economy. I want to build on this success, and this year my Department will begin developing a new strategy for UK aviation generally that will champion the success story of the UK’s aviation sector and put the consumer back at the heart of our thinking. I want to make sure that the sector is delivering more choice for consumers and the country as a whole, and I will come back to the House to update you, Mr Speaker, and hon. Members on our plans as they develop.

Finally, I turn briefly to what happens next. These two consultations will start today and last for 16 weeks, closing on 25 May. At the same time, and as required by the Planning Act 2008, a period of parliamentary scrutiny—the “relevant period”—now begins for the draft airports national policy statement. It will end by summer recess 2017. Although planning is a devolved matter, the consultation will be open to the whole of the UK, as additional airport capacity will benefit us all.

Following consultation and parliamentary scrutiny, consideration will be given to the comments and points raised. In the light of those processes, should the decision be taken to proceed, a final airports national policy statement will be laid before Parliament for debate and there will be the opportunity for a vote in the House of Commons in winter 2017-18.

I will place copies of all the relevant documents in the House; they will also be available online for Members and members of the public. I commend the statement and process to the House.

10.50 am

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for Transport for advance sight of his statement.

Aviation is key to ensuring that the UK remains an outward-looking trading nation post-Brexit, and Labour has consistently been pushing for a decision on runway expansion in south-east England, so after years of dither and delay, it is welcome that progress is finally being made. We have been calling for action on airspace modernisation for some time, and although we cannot see it, our airspace network is in dire need of modernisation. It is over half a century old but is still among our country’s most vital pieces of infrastructure. Modernising airspace will involve tough decisions, but the benefits are huge. It is in the national interest for the Government to ensure they deliver a balanced and sustainable airspace solution.

However, there are outstanding issues, including how Heathrow expansion can be squared with meeting the UK’s climate change objectives and demonstrating that local noise and environmental impacts can be minimised. This can be achieved, but only in the context of a coherent aviation strategy that works for the country, not just for London. It starts with confirming our membership of the European Aviation Safety Agency, as well as taking action on cleaner fuels and improving road and rail access to our international gateway airports.

As the Secretary of State knows, business loathes uncertainty, and aviation is no exception. What assurances can he give that the UK’s continued membership of the European Aviation Safety Agency is and will remain an absolute priority? What does his commitment to leaving the single market mean for leaving the single aviation market? The Committee on Climate Change cautioned against relying on carbon trading for Heathrow to achieve its emission targets, as that option might not always be cheap and available. Will he provide an update on whether he plans to reject that advice?

There is increasing concern about air quality, which is linked to 40,000 early deaths a year. David Cameron’s former aide—now Baroness Camilla Cavendish—claimed that the existing policy on air quality “overclaims and underwhelms”. Given that inadequacy, what further and stringent measures will be proposed to mitigate the expected expansion at Heathrow?

Key to improving air quality, alongside a move to reducing vehicle emissions, is encouraging more people to use public transport to arrive at our airports. Enhancements are needed to Heathrow’s rail services if the objective of having public transport usage of 55% is to be achieved. I invite the Secretary of State to outline what progress he is making and how he can ensure that the business beneficiaries of such enhancements will make a fair contribution. If we are to secure the modal shift to accessing airports by public transport and in the context of the aviation strategy, I invite him to confirm that the National Infrastructure Commission will be asked to inquire into the issue of surface access at all our international gateway airports and seaports.

I welcome the Secretary of State’s commitment to fulfilling our legal requirements on air quality and obligations on carbon, and I note the reference to Heathrow striving to meet its public pledge that airport-related public traffic will be no greater than it is today. But it is not simply about the volume of traffic; it is about vastly reducing the emissions that come from such traffic. Much of that relates to ultra-low emission vehicles, which will be key to securing our shared objectives. The modern transport Bill will hopefully progress the agenda considerably, so, finally, will the Secretary of State tell the House when we are likely to see that Bill?

Chris Grayling: May I start by thanking the hon. Gentleman for his support for my statement this morning? He asked a number of questions, which I shall answer, but I very much welcome the principle of support. This is a long-term project for the country, and a shared vision across this House of the need for expanded capacity is important. I know that there are individual Members who have disagreements, issues and local challenges, but his supportive comments are welcome for the project and I am grateful to him.

Let me seek to answer the hon. Gentleman’s questions. First, we have not reached a definitive position on the European issue. Obviously the negotiations have not started and we have not yet triggered article 50. I am acutely aware that aviation is one of the sectors that we need to handle with great care, working out the best way of protecting our sector and delivering the right
connectivity for the future. I will come back to the House at an appropriate moment and provide more information, but, as he is aware, we are not really in a position to provide detail of the negotiations in advance. However, I appreciate that he will want to understand in due course where we have got to, and we will endeavour to make sure that we keep the House as fully informed as we properly can, given the negotiation process.

As the hon. Gentleman said, aviation is not included in the current climate change target. It is clearly an issue, however, and has been since the recent agreement in Montreal, subject to an international strategy going forward. We are consulting today on things such as the smarter use of airspace. Through airspace reform and the technology that is now available to us, we will be able to avoid, to anything like the degree experienced at the moment, planes stacking over the south-east of England, emitting additional emissions into the atmosphere and using up more fuel. That is one of the benefits that comes from the smarter use of airspace, which will help to make a contribution, as will cleaner, newer generation, more fuel-efficient aircraft, which I think we will see extensively in this country over the coming years.

On the issue of NOx, diesel and emissions on the surrounding roads, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that this is much more a car issue than a plane issue. It is about the propensity of congested areas to cause a genuine public health problem, so it is a broader issue for the Government to address than simply the airport. We have already made a start, with the incentives that are in place for low-emission vehicles and the expansion of charging points that we set out in the autumn statement. We will also shortly be seeing the Bill that he mentioned—it would have been here by now, had we not had a bit of other business to deal with in the House. The issues in that Bill will be important, but I am well aware, and the Government are well aware, that we will have to do much more on the emissions front. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will come forward in due course with further proposals to tackle what is a broader issue than just airport expansion. It is one that we cannot possibly wait until airport expansion happens to address, and we will not.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of rail services, and we already have significant plans for their development. The arrival of Crossrail and of HS2 at Old Oak Common will make a significant difference to public transport access to Heathrow, as will the proposed modernisation of the Piccadilly line, which will significantly expand capacity on that route. We are now also starting the development work on rail access to the south and the west of Heathrow airport, and he is absolutely right to raise this issue. It is something that we are now working on and the private sector will make a substantial contribution to the costs.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman raised the importance of land and surface access to ports and airports around the country. I can confirm to him that we are looking at this in a variety of forums. As we move into this post-Brexit world and in a world where we need to facilitate trade, I am particularly concerned to ensure that where there are blockages, congestion points or limitations around ports and airports, we take the necessary steps to address those, and we will.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his supportive comments, and will obviously try to keep him and the House as informed as possible.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Given that for 70 years we have talked the talk on airport capacity over London, it is welcome that my right hon. Friend is now laying down the plans to walk the walk and get on with building Heathrow’s third runway. Given our antiquated planning rules, is he confident that it will be completed by 2040, when the airports reach their capacity? Can he also give a commitment to local communities around all the London airports that the smarter use of airspace will be used in the interim to reduce noise and other disturbance for local communities?

Chris Grayling: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments, and I am absolutely clear that we aim to deliver airport expansion long before 2040. What we have now is a much more streamlined process, set out in statute—it was introduced by Labour and I am grateful for that—for securing the initial consents. If, when we reach the end of this year, the consultation confirms the recommendation that the Government are making and this House does the same, I hope that we will have effectively reached a point of outline planning consent that allows the airport to press on with the detailed preparation work for the construction and the detailed planning consents.

I think that airspace modernisation makes a real difference to communities in the south-east, because it enables us to put planes on much more exact paths. Today, sat-nav technology allows a plane to follow a much more exact route than the traditional beacons did. It enables us to manage approaches to airports, airport descent and ascents, and the overall use of airports so that we do not experience stacking around the south-east as we do today. I hope that the second part of the process that I have announced, which I believe is as important to communities throughout the country as the airport expansion, will allow us to ensure that the sector becomes much friendlier to the communities that it affects.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I thank the Minister for giving me advance sight of his statement.

We welcome the decision to go ahead with the expansion of Heathrow and the new runway. After many years of waiting, it is time to get on with delivering that, as well as the specific benefits that it can bring. However, building a new runway is meaningless if we do not have access to the air and the EU-US open skies agreement.

Does the Secretary of State intend to seek membership of that arrangement?

The Secretary of State mentioned regional airports, which are vital, and I agree that these connections need to be made. What guarantees will he give to regional airports in Scotland, especially the likes of Dundee and Inverness, about routes and slots following the Heathrow expansion? He also mentioned the need to deal with environmental issues and tackle carbon emissions. What targets will he specify to demonstrate ambition above the legal requirements to which he referred?

Chris Grayling: We and the Scottish Government do not always agree on everything, but I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and his party, and to the Administration
in Edinburgh, for their support for Heathrow expansion. Indeed, following these exchanges, I shall be heading off to the other side of Scotland—to Glasgow—to talk about the importance of my announcement to the United Kingdom as a whole.

The hon. Gentleman asks about regional airports. Heathrow will be under an obligation to fulfil its promises in respect of regional connectivity. I expect this capacity to open links not only between the United Kingdom and the rest of the world, but from within the United Kingdom to Heathrow and the rest of the world. That is important to airports in Scotland, the north of England, and other parts of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland, the south-west, and so forth.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the open skies agreement. As I said earlier, that will be a subject for negotiation. We will obviously seek to provide the best possible arrangements for the future but, whatever the arrangements, the fact remains that there were flights to and from European Union capitals long before the European Union even existed, and that will continue after Britain has left the European Union. We will have strong aviation ties around the world. Of course, this expansion is not particularly about European Union links; it will open up ties between the UK and markets around the world, including emerging markets. It will provide Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England with links to markets where there is great potential and opportunity for the future.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I believe that the Secretary of State is doing his work backwards. How can you consult on airspace strategy when you do not have a credible policy on how to address current noise pollution levels? How can you offer a consultation on a national policy statement when you have no credible or legal plan for reducing air pollution? How can you have consultations ending on 25 May with no credible or legal plans to address critical noise and air pollution levels?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have no credible, legal, or any other plans or pronouncements to make on this matter at all.

Chris Grayling: I know how strongly my hon. Friend feels about this. I know the concerns that have been expressed in her constituency, and I respect her very much for what she is doing. One of the difficulties involved in a big strategy decision such as this is that it is impossible to make it without some impacts. I simply give my hon. Friend my assurance that we will take all steps we can to minimise those impacts, inevitable though it is that there will be some.

Let me say two things about pollution. First, we made our decision on the basis of recommendations made to us by the Airports Commission, and subsequent work was carried out by the Government in the wake of more recent developments relating to emissions from motor vehicles. We are clear in our view that the expansion is deliverable within the rules, but the Government intend to go much further to tackle emissions from motor vehicles. The issue of NOx—oxides of nitrogen—emissions is much more about urban congestion than airports. It is something that we have to deal with, and we will have to deal with it much sooner than when we start to expand Heathrow airport in the next decade.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): This is a long-awaited and welcome statement. Heathrow is the right place for expansion to link with emerging markets—that is essential for our future economic success. How can the Secretary of State convince us that this really will be an integrated transport policy and that, at the same time as developing links with emerging markets, it will address critical issues of environmental concern, including air pollution? What can he do to convince us that that indeed will happen?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady makes two points. On connectivity, the plans for improved rail access around Heathrow will completely transform it as an integrated hub. The connectivity that HS2 will bring to Old Oak Common, Crossrail, the expanded Piccadilly line and the connectivity that south-west rail access will bring into Heathrow itself will mean that it is much more of an accessible integrated transport centre than it has been, and there will be regional connectivity as well.

On pollution, as I have said, we had detailed analysis from the Airports Commission and, since then, from independent consultants. The Government’s judgment is that this expansion is deliverable within air quality rules but, as I have just said, we have a big task in this country to address the much broader issue of air quality. We cannot simply sit with the status quo until the middle of the next decade when this runway opens; we need to have made a big impact before then.

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): I welcome the Transport Secretary’s statement. For my constituents in Esher and Walton, it will be absolutely critical to have tangible reassurances, including on legally binding limits for noise and air quality, the independent verification of both of those things, and a change of policy on flight paths from the arbitrary policy of concentration, which blights communities such as Molesey in my constituency, to a fairer policy of dispersal. Will the Transport Secretary guarantee to work with me to nail down those local reassurances for my constituents?

Chris Grayling: I am happy to give my hon. Friend those assurances. The thing that we share in particular across our two constituencies is the stack south-west of London. The changes that the airspace consultation heralds will change that fundamentally, leading to much less stacking and fuel wastage over south-east England. As a result, there will be less emissions from the aviation flying over south-east England, and I think that there will be a much better experience for my hon. Friend’s constituents.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Department’s re-analysis of air quality involved a qualitative analysis of air quality showing that it was possible that limits would be breached in the areas around Heathrow when the third runway opened. Will the Secretary of State undertake to do a quantitative analysis before the consultation ends that includes real driving emissions and the contribution to air quality problems that the Volkswagen cheat devices have made? Will he give a cast-iron guarantee today that he will not use Brexit as a means of watering down our EU air quality targets?

Chris Grayling: On the latter point, the Government fully recognise that we have a duty to tackle this problem. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State...
for Environment. Food and Rural Affairs will be bringing forward proposals on how we take that further in the future, and the hon. Lady will be aware that my Department has been taking more steps to support the move to low-emission vehicles.

We have carried out further work since the Airports Commission reported, as well as since the Volkswagen emissions issue emerged. It is still the judgment of my team and our advisers that the expansion will be delivered within the current rules but, of course, we intend to go much further than that. We cannot afford not to be much more transformational between now and the middle of the next decade. The problem is to do with not this airport, but our urban areas generally, and we have to deal with it.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I know that it is going to take a lot more than a builder with a bucket of tarmac to do this as the project will involve an investment of not far off £20 billion. It will give a great boost to post-Brexit Britain, on top of the expansion at London City airport. Can the Secretary of State give a great boost to post-Brexit Britain, on top of the expansion at London City airport. Can the Secretary of State give a great boost to post-Brexit Britain, on top of the expansion at London City airport. Can the Secretary of State give me his best estimate of when the first plane will take off from the north-west runway?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend and I share an aspiration to achieve that as soon as possible, but the working assumption is that the first plane will take off in the middle of the next decade. Perhaps we should have come to this decision a long time ago, but at least we are doing it now and we will get on with it as soon as possible. However, we have to do it in the right way and sustainably, taking great care of the surrounding communities.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome today’s statement, but for this to be a truly national policy, it has to include the interests of regional airports such as Newcastle, which is so important to the economy of the north-east. This is not just about infrastructure; it is also about taxation. Today, the Scottish Government are halving air passenger duty and they will abolish it by 2021. Will the Secretary of State urge his Treasury colleagues to address the question of air passenger duty for regional airports, because it could damage their ability to compete?

Chris Grayling: I know the importance of this announcement for Newcastle. When I made my statement to the House in October about the Government’s proposals, I went to Newcastle the following day and met its chief executive. There is clearly enormous support in that area for the expansion of the airport. On APD, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman’s comments will be noted by Treasury colleagues in the run-up to the Budget.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I thought that one Member who was seeking to catch my eye had exited the Chamber at one point during the statement, but it might be that I was experiencing an optical illusion.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Following the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), I should like to point out that the lethal combination of the new technology, the much more precise flight paths and the Government’s current policy of concentration rather than dispersal will lead to a disaster for the people who are right underneath those routes. It should be possible to use the new technology to create an artificial degree of dispersal, as happened before under the analogue systems. Will my right hon. Friend advance on this consultation with the knowledge that this is a very important issue to address for many of our constituents?

Chris Grayling: To be slightly parochial, I can say that those of us who represent Surrey constituencies are well aware of the issues around Gatwick airport and the flight paths that planes have been using there recently. My hope is that the consultation will lead to a system that will enable us to be much more careful about managing flight paths so that we can provide respite to communities and decide exactly how to handle approaches to airports, instead of having a rather haphazard set of flight paths. I can assure my hon. Friend that I think we will end up with a better system for his constituents and those in neighbouring constituencies.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I should like to ask the Secretary of State about certain references in the Airports Commission surface access strategic road network proposals, which were published by Highways England in October. The document includes proposals to widen the M4. The Government made a statement to the media two weeks ago to the effect that that would not go ahead, but the answers to written questions that I have received have not been so clear. Will the Secretary of State confirm that those proposals will not go ahead, and that there will be no land or property acquisition in Heston?

Chris Grayling: I can be absolutely clear about this. I saw those BBC reports. There is no plan to widen the M4, although there is a plan to create a smart motorway on the M4, as the hon. Lady will be aware. There is no plan that I am aware of—or that I have discussed in any way, shape or form—to start buying houses in her constituency for a wider M4, and I have not seen a budget for that either, so she can take it from me that there is no plan to widen the M4.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I commend and support my right hon. Friend’s statement. Will he give me an assurance that the rail link to Gatwick airport will continue to be invested in and upgraded?

Chris Grayling: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. He will be aware that the Government are bringing forward plans to fulfil Chris Gibb’s recommendation of spending £300 million on the route in the short term. We clearly have a modernisation challenge beyond that, and we are looking at how best we can fulfil it. The other issue for Gatwick is the station, and we are in discussions with the airport and Network Rail about what we can do with it. Ensuring that Gatwick has proper modern surface access for the future is also our priority.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I welcome the national airport policy, although I note the warning that aviation could become less
convenient to use, lowering economic output. Unfortunately, many airports are turning themselves into long, tedious, meandering shopping malls, which inconveniences travellers. Glasgow airport, for example, has a quarter of a kilometre meander that not only hinders those needing to travel, but inconveniences people with mobility issues, particularly those going to gates for flights to the islands. I exclude London City airport from that criticism, but will the airport policy consider travellers as well as shoppers by at least providing a shorter route for them?

Chris Grayling: I know what the hon. Gentleman means—we do spend a lot of time walking through the shops—but the counter-argument is that shops are one of the factors that keeps the cost of aviation down, making it more accessible. I am unsure whether I can promise him fewer shops.

Mr MacNeil: Will you look at it?

Chris Grayling: We will be holding a consultation on the national strategy, so the hon. Gentleman is welcome to make that point, which we will consider carefully. More important is providing better links through Scotland’s airports to Heathrow, and better links to his constituency from airports such as Edinburgh and Glasgow. That is important for better connectivity, which is why the proposal will make difference for him, too.

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): I am grateful for your indulgence, Mr Speaker, for reasons on which I do not need to expatiate. This is a matter of grave concern to my constituents and I want to pick up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), who is no longer in his place—[Interruption.]
Okay, he has moved to a different place. His point was about consultation and engagement with local communities, particularly in Surrey and the areas around Heathrow. That is vital for what is an excellent proposal. I just want to hear the Secretary of State reiterate his commitment to engage with local communities.

Chris Grayling: A few people have asked why we are holding a consultation at all. Quite apart from the statutory process, we want to hear from people how the proposal would have an impact on them. Regardless of whether Parliament decides that we should go ahead with the proposal, it is essential that, if we do go ahead with it, we listen carefully and, if necessary, refine it to make improvements for those communities. The airspace reforms also provide an opportunity to make a real difference to areas around the airport that are exposed to take-offs and landings.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I continue to support the third runway at Heathrow as the best option for my constituency in Sheffield, but given the delays we are still roughly 10 years away from the runway being up and running. In the meantime, Heathrow is running at around 98% capacity at certain times of day, and demand will continue to increase during that 10-year period. What are the Government’s plans to manage that increased demand over the 10 years before the runway opens?

Chris Grayling: The truth is that that is a constraint. There is still capacity around London’s airports, and there are some first-rate regional airports near the hon. Gentleman’s constituency. The east midlands and south Yorkshire have access to good airports in Leeds Bradford and East Midlands, both of which have done phenomenally well in recent times and are providing more and more international links. However, we are constrained by the fact that the decision was not taken a long time ago, which is why we need to get on with it now.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I have written to the Secretary of State on numerous occasions, so he will know well that airspace management over parts of west Kent, particularly of night flights, is becoming a serious problem for many constituents. While you, Mr Speaker, can enjoy your nights undisturbed, my constituents sadly do not have that luxury.

Chris Grayling: That is an important point. I have been examining the issue and it is being dealt with in some innovative ways around the country. We will be able to glean from the consultation the public’s views on how we can best manage night flights to minimise the impact on communities. Being able to follow more exact flight paths will make a significant difference and will address some of the issues that I have seen in the many communications that my hon. Friend has received from his constituents that have been passed to me.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Since Cardiff airport was rescued from loss-making private ownership by a public-private partnership, it has earned a top environmental award and is now the fastest-growing airport in the United Kingdom, with passenger numbers increasing 16% last year. Will the Secretary of State welcome the Welsh Government’s purchase of the airport? The Airports Commission report says that connectivity will be improved between the regions and nations of Britain, so will he also guarantee that one of those links will be with Wales?

Chris Grayling: Cardiff airport has been a great success story, and I pay tribute to all those involved. The hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) asked about what will happen in the coming years, and we are fortunate in having some very good regional airports that can not only take up the slack in the coming years but will be a crucial part of our overall airport strategy in the future.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): As the Heathrow decision goes ahead, demand and inward investment in the west of England, bringing jobs and growth, will ever expand. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that our excellent west of England mayoral candidate, Tim Bowles, will be able to join me and colleagues from the west of England in expressing our views on joining the western main line to Heathrow?

Chris Grayling: As my hon. Friend knows, I have received extensive lobbying from his constituency and elsewhere, and from Tim, saying that that is an important part of what we are doing. Rail access to Heathrow will be a crucial part of ensuring that we can deliver the growth that we anticipate without having the impacts on the local environment that massively increased road traffic might generate. I assure my hon. Friend that we are working very hard on that.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I nearly missed the Secretary of State’s statement this morning because my train was cancelled, which is not an unusual
occurrence—it happened yesterday, too. There are already strains on the rail network around Heathrow airport, the draft NPS commits to no net increases in journeys by road and TfL estimates that the cost of upgrading rail infrastructure to meet that commitment will be in the region of £19 billion. Heathrow has committed only £1 billion of those costs. The Secretary of State has told me that he does not accept TfL’s estimates, so what are his own estimates? Will they be funded by the taxpayer?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady and I had the same experience yesterday. My train was not cancelled but, as she is aware, a power failure caused problems on the route—that does happen, unfortunately.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Renationalise them.

Chris Grayling: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman says that, because of course Network Rail is in the public sector and it was a Network Rail problem. On the subject of airport expansion and the importance of ensuring that in the constituency of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) and in other affected areas we do the right thing for local people, I assure her constituents that we will work immensely hard to listen to their views in the coming weeks and to look at ways of minimising the impact of airport expansion. It is something that we need to do very carefully and with sensitivity to those communities, but I simply do not accept TfL’s figures. Heathrow airport will have an obligation to meet the targets that it has set, but I am afraid that TfL’s estimate of £19 billion or £20 billion is just plucked from thin air. I see no evidence whatever to support that estimate.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the broad thrust of the statement, given the vital role that Heathrow plays as the hub airport not just for London but for the whole south-west of England. Will the Secretary of State reassure me that there will be proper co-ordination between this airport strategy and delivering the type of infrastructure, such as a resilient railway and the dualling of the A303, that will be vital to making sure that this is a success?

Chris Grayling: I can absolutely give that assurance. My hon. Friend knows that we are now moving ahead with the development process on the A303. I have made funding available for the next stage of work to develop the right solution to the problems at Dawlish. Of course, the other thing that will benefit the south-west is improved aviation links. Newquay airport, which is a bit further west than his constituency, is one of the regional airports that will benefit from that increased connectivity.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Secretary of State wants 250,000 extra flights over one of the most densely populated parts of Britain—2 million people live in the area—but he has no concrete proposals for dealing with congestion, noise or air quality. How is he going to deal with diesel and other emissions? What about increased freight, which will go by road, not rail? Does he not know that the increases in public transport are already needed to meet local demand? Is he not just passing the buck to somebody else to solve these problems, and not for the first time?

Chris Grayling: No, I am not passing the buck to anyone else. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the plans for improved public transport connectivity around Heathrow, as I described, he will see that Crossrail, HS2, an improved Piccadilly line, the south-west rail access and the western rail access will entail the kind of transformation to access that Heathrow has never seen before. My belief is that, with tight commitments on the airport developers to ensure that they meet their promises, we can deliver this with lower-noise aircraft, a smart compensation package and benefits for the United Kingdom.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The economic case for HS2 is partly built on the fact that we would reduce the number of internal flights within the UK, yet reports suggest a dramatic increase in their number when Heathrow expands. Can my right hon. Friend clarify the position? What commitment is he making to expand regional airports so that they have international flights and people do not have to come to Heathrow?

Chris Grayling: On that latter point, if my hon. Friend takes a look at what some regional airports have achieved, he will see extraordinary amounts of international connectivity. I went to Bristol airport recently to open its expanded terminal building, which is going to serve more than 100 international destinations. Our regional airports are already a great success story, and this is meeting an additional need, not replacing what they do. The great benefit from HS2 is not only the connectivity it generates, but the capacity it releases. We have such congestion on the rest of our rail network. In his part of the world, HS2 alone will deliver thousands of extra commuter seats into Euston in the morning rush hour, in an area that is already heavily congested, by taking those express trains off the existing route. So the business case for HS2 is much broader.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I welcome today’s statement and the comments that have been made about long, tedious, meandering shopping malls. I know the Minister accepts Northern Ireland’s uniqueness, but 60% of those who fly from Northern Ireland go to Gatwick, Stansted and Luton. I heard what he has said about Gatwick, but can we make sure that we expand and look after all those airports, so that this suits everyone in Northern Ireland and the other regional airports?

Chris Grayling: Absolutely, that is important. Those airports are all a central part of our future strategy for aviation and for transport generally. The expansion of Heathrow will have direct benefits for Northern Ireland—for example, Heathrow is recommending a route to Belfast City. It is important that we maintain the best possible links from Northern Ireland to our principal hub airport and through it to those international destinations which are important to businesses in Northern Ireland.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): One may wonder why a Member who represents the hills and valleys of mid-Wales should be speaking in this
debate. It is simply because my constituents will benefit from the expansion of Heathrow. Therefore, may I ask my right hon. Friend to proceed as quickly as possible to development?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point, as the impacts of this proposal will be felt up and down the country. It will be felt in small businesses producing equipment for the new airport. It will be felt in colleges that are training apprentices to work on the new airport. It will affect the regional economies of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. He is absolutely right in what he says and I am grateful to him for his support.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): On jobs at Heathrow, would support for the right hon. Gentleman’s proposals not be strengthened if employers such as British Airways treated their workforce decently? He knows that the mixed fleet cabin crew dispute is still going on because this underpaid, mainly female, workforce are being treated appallingly by BA. Will he intervene and ask BA, “Why don’t you make an improved offer and settle this matter?”

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes his case well, but he would not expect me to become involved in a dispute of this kind. I simply say that I very much hope that BA and the union will be able to reach a resolution that is mutually acceptable.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I welcome today’s decision, as I think it is the right one for the UK. However, the Secretary of State will be aware that on 23 January we had a black alert on air pollution in London, with 12 local authority areas signalling red alerts. That means there was toxic air, and this is at crisis point in London. If we are going to reassure the people of London so that they continue to support this decision, we need a much more comprehensive air pollution strategy, not the Government’s current plans, which the courts said are “woefully inadequate”.

Chris Grayling: We have, of course, taken careful note of the High Court decision and such a plan is in development at the moment, but we are doing things in the meantime. In the autumn statement, we released hundreds of millions of pounds of additional funding for low-emission vehicles, including low-emission buses, and more money for charging points. This is clearly something we have to deal with now. We have to find the right way to migrate the nature of the cars and other vehicles on our roads to a point where they are causing much less of a pollution problem than they do at the moment.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Very shortly, there will be a UK mainland airport from which passengers and their luggage will be able to fly directly into a UK international airport without any security checks on passengers or their luggage. The decision by Highlands and Islands Airports to remove security checks, particularly for Campbeltown into Glasgow, is an unnecessary relaxation of a system that has worked well. Were the Government aware of that, and are they happy to see passengers and their luggage flying into a major UK airport without undergoing the security checks that every other passenger and their luggage has to undergo?

Chris Grayling: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing that to my attention. I was not aware of it but will look into it.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Secretary of State may be aware that today the Scottish Government will pass their budget—an austerity budget that cuts £327 million from public services at the same time as slashing air passenger duty. Incidentally, the budget is supposed to go through with the support of the Green party. Will the Secretary of State tell me what assessment his Department has made of the legal requirement for air quality around Heathrow and other UK airports as a result of the slashing of air passenger duty in Scotland?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman identifies clearly the inconsistencies we all too often see in policies coming from both the Scottish National party and the Green party, and he makes his point articulately. On the emissions around Heathrow, as I said earlier, it is much more an issue of land transport—cars, buses, trucks and vans—than of aircraft. That is why we have to focus our efforts on dealing with the challenge on our roads rather than focussing on aviation. The issue will be dealt with and the pressure taken off Heathrow by our sorting out the issue on the roads.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): As I explained in the debate on triggering article 50 yesterday, many in the aviation sector think that Brexit may lead to the sector shrinking, thus negating the need for an additional runway. Given the fact that air service agreements lie outside conventional trade agreements and the ambit of the World Trade Organisation, will the Minister confirm whether any talks have taken place with the Trump Administration on a US-UK open skies agreement?

Chris Grayling: I can confirm that no talks have yet taken place, but I am expecting to meet my US counterpart in around a month’s time. Discussions took place with the previous Administration and there is good will on both sides to make sure that there is no hiatus in transatlantic air traffic.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I welcome today’s statement, particularly the talk about connectivity with HS2, which will of course be greater if we get an HS2 hub at Crewe. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, once there are three runways at Heathrow, the proportion of slots available to domestic traffic will remain at least the same as it is now?

Chris Grayling: I am looking carefully at how best to do this, because I do not want a situation in which we retain a proportion of slots, but they are always at 11 o’clock at night. It might not be simply about slots; it might be about getting the right mechanism to make sure that there is the necessary capacity to ensure that connectivity. I probably will not say simply that it will be x slots; we will want to make sure that the package is right to ensure the fair treatment of regional airports.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Secretary of State will know that 9,000 people have died unnecessarily in London because of poor air quality. Will he guarantee that, post-Brexit, the Government
will not dump EU air-quality regulations? He did not give that guarantee in response to an earlier question from the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh). What will he do if the airport cannot be delivered within the legal air obligation limits—proceed anyway, change the air-quality objectives, or pull the plug on the runway?

**Chris Grayling:** It is very clear that the airport will not be able to secure its development consent order if it cannot demonstrate its ability to meet those targets. It is binding: it will have to achieve them. On the broader strategy, after we have left the European Union, the air quality standards in place in this country will be UK air quality standards, but it is not the Government’s intention to reduce air quality standards; it is our intention to deliver a strategy that cleans up our air, which we will do shortly.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State’s airspace policy consultation include new measures to protect the public from the danger of drones? Given the recent reports of airspace near misses, will he act now, before a tragedy occurs?

**Chris Grayling:** I can confirm to the hon. Lady that we are indeed consulting on the best regulatory framework for drones. I suspect that that will inevitably lead to some form of licensing for drones of a scale that could be a threat to the public and some limitations on where they can be used. We are listening to the views of the public, the drone development industry and others with a relevant interest to work out the best framework.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, welcome the launch of the consultation. Will the Secretary of State commit to a vote on the national policy statement by the end of this year? I also welcome the inclusion in the statement of the fact that Northern Ireland will enjoy the benefits of Heathrow expansion. In the statement, he refers to six more domestic routes across the UK. Will he ensure that Northern Ireland is one of those?

**Chris Grayling:** It is certainly my hope and aim that we can have that vote by the end of the year, because I want to get on with this as quickly as possible. Belfast City is one of the airports identified by Heathrow as being a likely extra route, and certainly it is right that Northern Ireland should have a proper slice of this cake when it is there.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): May I thank the Leader of the House for the statement? I note that we still do not know when the House is rising for the summer recess, so I ask him again to announce that date.

May I add the Opposition’s voice to your letter, Mr Speaker, and the letter from the Lord Speaker about the summer recess, so I ask him again to announce that date. May I add the Opposition’s voice to your letter, Mr Speaker, and the letter from the Lord Speaker about the summer recess, so I ask him again to announce that date.

Mr Speaker, you will not believe this, but on this day in 2004, Roger Federer began his 237th consecutive week run as world No. 1, and that record remains unbeaten. He has now won the Australian Open—possibly because you, Mr Speaker, interviewed him. Roger Federer has had longer to get to the final of the Australian Open than Parliament has had to debate triggering article 50.

This is not a democratic Government. The Government thought that they could trigger article 50 on their own, but the Supreme Court dragged them back to Parliament. The Prime Minister said that the Supreme Court did
The Speaker of the House of Representatives of Burma, Mr Speaker. Sadly, a key constitutional expert and lawyer Win Myint, was here last week at your invitation, ago that he was not in a position to make a statement.

Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, having said two weeks ago that he was not in a position to make a statement. The money to which she referred was allocated to the NHS if the UK leaves. That has now been proved to be incorrect, so how can we trust them now? That is why Her Majesty’s Opposition has been asking for a plan for the end of last year and for a White Paper since the Prime Minister made a speech to Lancaster House—not this House—which will be published only today.

We cannot trust this Government, because the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union was among those who said that £350 million would go to the NHS if the UK leaves. That has now been proved to be incorrect, so how can we trust them now? That is why the Prime Minister has to report back to Parliament on the deals. Will the Leader of the House, in the interests of the British people and democracy, ensure that there is a vote on the final deal made by the Government so that we can protect workers’ rights and EU citizens, retain tariff-free access to the single market and all EU tax avoidance and tax evasion measures, consult with the devolved Governments and ask the Government to publish any impact assessments?

As the Prime Minister’s words yesterday showed, this is not the Government of the NHS. Could we have a statement on the Prime Minister’s response to the letter from 2,000 senior clinicians who said that they have reached unacceptable levels of safety concerns for their patients, and could that statement also say whether hospitals are operating at safe staffing levels? Will the Government publish a response from the Prime Minister to the letter from the Chairs of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government, the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committee on Health?

Now we see the recklessness of the Government’s policies. They changed NHS bursaries, which has resulted in fewer people wanting to become nurses. It is the same recklessness that was shown by the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who now says that he regrets cancelling Building Schools for the Future. Tell that to the Joseph Leckie Academy in my constituency, which had its allocation cancelled; children now have to be sent home when it rains heavily. With 46% of schools losing funding under the new funding formula, could we have a statement on why the £384 million that was in the education budget has been clawed back by the Treasury? Schools deserve the money now, not in a budget giveaway.

The Leader of the House has failed to respond to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Pat Glass) about the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government today. My understanding is that the Committee to consider the Bill of the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) has now been appointed, but has not yet met.

The hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) mentioned the European Union. I really do think that the line of questioning she pursued this morning was something of a distraction therapy to try to divert attention from the blatant divisions within her party, with different members of the shadow Cabinet and the Front Bench dropping off the perch with every news bulletin. For a two-clause Bill, the second clause of which is simply the short title of the Bill, two full days on Second Reading, including going to midnight on Tuesday, and up to three days in a Committee of the whole House, seems to me a perfectly reasonable allocation of time.

Let me turn to the hon. Lady’s points about school funding. The money to which she referred was allocated by the Treasury to the Department for Education explicitly for the purpose of supporting the full shift of all schools to academy status. The Government, having reconsidered that policy in light of public representations and representations in this place, altered their policy. Therefore, that money was not needed, since those schools were not going to transfer to academy status.

The hon. Lady’s point about Burma is well made. I agree that the case that there is no Member in any party of this House who has not been touched in some way by the case of a relative or a dear friend who has had to fight—sometimes successfully and sometimes sadly not—against this scourge. Like her, I would celebrate the advances of medical science, the skills of oncologists and others who diagnose and treat cancer, and the courage of cancer survivors and their relatives who give them such critical support. Let us keep in our thoughts and prayers those who have been bereaved as a consequence of cancer, and give thanks to those staff in the NHS, and in the voluntary and charitable sector, who work to provide specialist nursing care, including hospice treatment, to people who are having to face the end of their lives.

I turn to the other points raised by the hon. Lady. I want to be able to give the House some news, as soon as possible, on the summer recess and on the restoration and renewal programme, but I am not able to do so today. My understanding is that the Committee to consider the Bill of the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) has now been appointed, but has not yet met.

Mr Lidington: May I first associate myself with the hon. Lady’s words about World Cancer day? It is probably the case that there is no Member in any party of this House who has not been touched in some way by the case of a relative or a dear friend who has had to fight against this scourge. Like her, I would celebrate the advances of medical science, the skills of oncologists and others who diagnose and treat cancer, and the courage of cancer survivors and their relatives who give them such critical support. Let us keep in our thoughts and prayers those who have been bereaved as a consequence of cancer, and give thanks to those staff in the NHS, and in the voluntary and charitable sector, who work to provide specialist nursing care, including hospice treatment, to people who are having to face the end of their lives.

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The hon. Lady’s point about Burma is well made. I shall make sure that it is passed back to the Foreign Secretary, but I can give her an unqualified assurance that this Government will continue, through the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development,
to work to support the cause of building democracy, human rights and community reconciliation inside that country.

Finally, the hon. Lady rightly paid tribute to the stupendous achievement of Roger Federer. It is not only tennis aficionados such as you, Mr Speaker, who will have cheered at his success. Somebody in professional tennis who is in their mid-30s is at quite an advanced age, and there is perhaps a message of hope to all of us that age is just a number and that we can strive for greater achievement whatever age we reach.

Mr Speaker: What a splendid note on which to finish. The man is an inspiration.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Lidington or Federer?

Mr Speaker: I do not wish to be discourteous to the Leader of the House, but I actually had Federer in mind.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): May we have a debate on the power of clinical commissioning groups in the NHS and the fact that they are unaccountable to the public? Is the Leader of the House aware that a clinical commissioning group covering part of my constituency plans to withdraw services from Bridlington hospital and Driffield hospital? That is not on account of cost, but the clinical commissioning group seems hell-bent on doing it, despite overwhelming public opposition. Does he accept that these plans are totally unacceptable? If we cannot have a debate, will he draw my concerns to the attention of the Secretary of State for Health?

Mr Lidington: I will not only undertake to draw my right hon. Friend’s concerns to the attention of the Secretary of State, but I can point him towards Health questions on Tuesday 7 February, when he may have the opportunity to question Ministers directly about this issue. Clearly, the details of the health service in his area are not something on which I would be able to comment, but the principle here is that clinical commissioning groups should engage in proper public consultation in their local area as they draw up sustainability and transformation plans for that locality. Ultimately, the local authority, through its health overview committee, has the right, if it believes that services are being wrongly and adversely restructured, to refer the matter to the Secretary of State.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week.

We like our anniversaries in this place, and I support everything the Leader of the House said about World Cancer day in a couple of days’ time. However, today is groundhog day. I know that most days seem like groundhog day in this place, and I do not know about you, Mr Speaker, but I always seem to wake up like groundhog day in this place, and I do not know today is groundhog day. I know that most days seem like World Cancer day in a couple of days’ time. However, today is groundhog day. I know that most days seem like groundhog day in this place, and I do not know about you, Mr Speaker, but I always seem to wake up to the news that another Labour Front Bench has resigned—perhaps Pimms and a new Labour leader. Thank you for your Whip, Mr Speaker. I know that most days seem like groundhog day in this place, and I do not know about you, Mr Speaker, but I always seem to wake up to the news that another Labour Front Bench has resigned—perhaps Pimms and a new Labour leader. Thank you for your Whip, Mr Speaker.

Three cheers for the Leader of the House for finally getting the White Paper for the Brexit Bill; it has only taken half the time the Bill will take to go through this Chamber, but we have got it at last. Let us hope that it is quite close to the 650 pages we had in the independence White Paper, although I doubt that very much.

This is a Bill the Government did not want and that they are forcing through at breakneck speed, but they must be prepared to listen to the hundreds of amendments that will be tabled to it. I have noticed that in the programme motion there is no programming for a Report stage. That must mean that the Government will arrogantly reject every single amendment without proper consideration. Why are we not getting a Report stage on the Bill as it goes through the House?

May we have a statement on the Government’s intention regarding a second Scottish independence referendum? There is a piece in The Herald today from the Defence Secretary, who seems to rule out entirely a second Scottish independence referendum. We have just heard him on Radio Scotland, where he seemed to backtrack furiously on what he had just said. The Scottish Tories’ leader has said that it would be wrong to rule out a second referendum. Believe me, a Government with only one MP in Scotland telling the Scottish people that they will not have a say in their future could not be a bigger gift to the SNP.

I listened carefully to the response by the Leader of the House to several of my hon. Friends who asked about how EVEL would be applied to the great repeal Bill. He must totally rule it out now. We cannot have a Bill as important as this being considered by two classes of Member of Parliament in this House—one class of Member who has a say in everything, and then the Scottish Members, who can take part only in some of it. Believe me, that could not be a bigger gift to us either.

Mr Lidington: In response to the hon. Gentleman’s points about Scotland, he must totally rule it out now. We cannot have a Bill as important as this being considered by two classes of Member of Parliament in this House—one class of Member who has a say in everything, and then the Scottish Members, who can take part only in some of it. Believe me, that could not be a bigger gift to us either.

Mr Lidington: In response to the hon. Gentleman’s points about the EU withdrawal Bill, I have to remind him that, first of all, this House voted overwhelmingly for the referendum to take place and for the decision to be referred to the British people; and, secondly, only a matter of weeks ago the House again voted overwhelmingly to endorse the Prime Minister’s timetable for triggering article 50 before the end of March this year. The timetable on this two-clause Bill is designed to ensure that those objectives are upheld.

On the hon. Gentleman’s point about Report and Committee stages, the purpose of Report is normally to enable the House as a whole to consider the Bill as it comes out of Committee, where it has been considered by a small number of Members upstairs. On this occasion, we have a full two days and time, if needed, on the third day for consideration of amendments by a Committee of the whole House. The hon. Gentleman is really asking for a further extension of the Committee of the whole House.

Finally, on the hon. Gentleman’s points about Scotland, the Prime Minister could not have been more emphatic, on numerous occasions at the Dispatch Box, in making it plain that we are determined to consult the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive about how their interests, and those of the people whom they represent, are affected by the process of withdrawal from the European Union and the negotiations on which we shall shortly embark.
The EVEL arrangements in our Standing Orders can apply only if three conditions are met: first, that the matter in question is devolved to Scotland; secondly, that the same matter relates to England only, or to England and Wales only; and, thirdly, that you, Mr Speaker, have certified the amendment or the Bill as falling within the definitions prescribed under our Standing Orders. Although I cannot possibly comment on a Bill that has not yet been published, it seems to me—given that international agreements are, under the Scotland Act 1998, defined as reserved, not devolved, matters—that the principles embodied in our Standing Orders ought to give the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues considerable reassurance.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): This week, three of the six district councils in Dorset voted to keep their own sovereignty and independence. Despite that, last night the chief executive of Dorset County Council announced that other councils in Dorset would apply for a hostile takeover. May we have an early debate on how to prevent ineffective and wasteful councils from seeking to seize by compulsion the assets and powers of their financially sound neighbours?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is moving on from the sovereignty of Parliament to the sovereignty of Christchurch. A number of us in the House are very aware that there are often different and competing views—shall I put it that way?—among different local authorities in the localities we represent about the possible shape of future local government reform. As I can see from your reaction, Mr Speaker, you and I are both extremely familiar with this dilemma. As my hon. Friend knows, his view and the views of other colleagues representing Dorset constituencies will be attended to very closely by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and I urge him to continue to ensure that the views of his constituents are forthrightly represented in that quarter.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): May we have a debate about our so-called national airline, British Airways? The manner in which it is treating its workforce, particularly the mixed fleet cabin crew, is a disgrace. They are key to the fabric of our rural community, yet markets. Alongside our livery yards and riding schools, you to one of our three fabulous livestock auction marts, are they key to the fabric of our rural community, yet their future is threatened by eye-watering rises in business rates. Will my right hon. Friend provide time in this House for us to debate why rural businesses are being so unfairly penalised?

Mr Lidington: In my hon. Friend’s relatively short time in the House, he has already emerged as a formidable champion not only of the Richmond constituency, but of North Yorkshire and rural businesses more generally. The position nationally is that the business rate revaluation will, overall, benefit businesses in rural areas across England, and no small property will have an increase of more than 5% from 1 April because of the transitional relief scheme. If my hon. Friend would care to write to me about the particular cases of the auction marts in his constituency, I undertake to draw them to the attention of the Communities Secretary.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): This week we spent 17 hours discussing the European Union, but we did not spend a single minute on the crisis in Yemen, where half the population are still starving. Last Sunday, President Trump authorised the first attack on al-Qaeda in Yemen, causing the death of one American soldier and 14 casualties. When can we have an update on the urgent situation in Yemen? We hold the pen at the UN on this subject. We desperately need a ceasefire. When can we know what is happening?

Mr Lidington: There will be questions to the Foreign Secretary on 21 February, which will provide an opportunity to raise Yemen. The right hon. Gentleman may wish to
take other parliamentary opportunities available to him to focus on Yemen at greater length. The Government have never concealed the fact that trying to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict will be a difficult business. If there were an easy answer it would have been found by now. We continue to support the work of the UN special envoy on Yemen, who is striving ceaselessly to bring about the ceasefire that both the right hon. Gentleman and I wish to see. The Department for International Development continues to do what it can to bring humanitarian assistance to those who are in such need.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): This week, a petition raised by the parents of April Jones, who lived in Machynlleth in my constituency, reached 100,000. April was just five years old when she was abducted and murdered. The person responsible, Mark Bridger, is now in prison. The petition calls for tougher sentences for those looking at child pornography on the internet and greater control of internet search engines. Will the Leader of the House urge the Petitions Committee to bring forward an early debate on April’s law as soon as possible?

Mr Lidington: I understand completely the way in which this appalling and tragic case has shocked the community of Montgomeryshire and the wish of so many people to see this debated in Parliament. As my hon. Friend will understand, it is not for the Government but the Petitions Committee to allocate time to debate e-petitions, but I am sure the Chair of the Petitions Committee will want to consider carefully the case he has made.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): As the Government hurtle headlong into Brexit Britain, may we please have a debate in Government time on our future plans for international trade policy? The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State are jet-setting around the world promising all sorts of deals to President Trump and President Erdogan, but the House has still not had the opportunity to discuss the principles that will underwrite future trade deals or the process we will follow to ratify them. Is this, as I suspect, just another example of Brexit-on-the hoof without policy and without scrutiny by Parliament?

Mr Lidington: I would have hoped that, even while expressing her concerns, the hon. Lady might have paid some tribute to the energy and determination of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department for International Trade ministerial team, who are actively setting around the world promising all sorts of deals to President Trump and President Erdogan, but the House has still not had the opportunity to discuss the principles that will underwrite future trade deals or the process we will follow to ratify them. Is this, as I suspect, just another example of Brexit-on-the hoof without policy and without scrutiny by Parliament?

Mr Lidington: I think the procedure with regard to Committee of the whole House to a certain extent spares you that duty, Mr Speaker, because it falls to the Chairman of Ways and Means. He will, as always, be guided by the rules on order, and ensure that they are properly upheld.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating my phenomenally talented 16-year-old constituent, Ali, from Dewsbury, who has just rejected a multimillion pound deal for his latest business venture? Will the right hon. Gentleman facilitate a debate on how the Government can help other young aspiring entrepreneurs?

Mr Lidington: I am happy to join the hon. Lady in congratulating her constituent Ali. The more we can do to encourage young people not just to understand enterprise but to see setting up an enterprise and giving employment to others as their vocation, the better. I will pass on her case to my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary, but I know that all parts of Government will want to ensure many more Alis in all our constituencies.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Excitement is mounting in Cleethorpes following the announcement yesterday of a visit next week from the northern powerhouse Minister. Earlier this week, the Humber local enterprise partnership held a showcase event here at Westminster, attended by four Ministers, at which the advantages of economic development in northern Lincolnshire and the wider Humber region were shown to the guests. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on the success of the Government’s northern powerhouse policy?

Mr Lidington: I can see that even now crowds are sleeping out in the streets ahead of the ministerial visit and that Cleethorpes is scarcely able to contain its jubilation as the bunting is strung from lampposts. My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Government’s approach to economic and industrial strategy is, in particular, to ensure that those parts of the UK that have not benefited from economic growth in recent decades in the same way as the more prosperous cities and regions are able to do so, and that certainly includes Cleethorpes and the other towns and cities in north Lincolnshire. I hope, for example, that there will be some beneficial spin-offs for the wider north Lincolnshire and Humberside region from Hull’s designation as this year’s city of culture. I know that Ministers are keen to champion my hon. Friend’s work.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): The Government control the vast majority of business and time in Parliament. Considering the crisis in the NHS and the fact that every Member wants to raise the crisis in relation to their own constituency, can I propose to the Government that before Easter an entire week be exclusively dedicated to the NHS and the crisis in it? I would predict that even in a week we would struggle to find time for every Member to outline their concerns.

Mr Lidington: All Members, whichever political party they represent, follow closely the challenges and successes of the NHS, particularly in their own constituencies, and are keen to raise these matters with Ministers. There are Health questions next week. I cannot promise...
the hon. Gentleman a full week of debate, in the way he wishes, but I would point out that the Government are following through on their commitment to put into the NHS the money that NHS England itself said it needed for its transformation and reform plans. At the 2015 general election, his party refused to match that pledge.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the replacement of the pound coin in March? I am not convinced that the general public have been sufficiently informed that the coin as now constituted will not be legal tender in October or that the slots in vending machines will be able to cope with the new 12-sided coins.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend makes a good point. On 1 January we launched a campaign to raise awareness and to encourage the public to return the current, round £1 coins. The message is clear: if someone has a £1 coin sitting at home or in their wallet, they need either to spend it or return it to their bank by 15 October, when it ceases to become legal tender. For some months we have been running a separate campaign to support retailers and other businesses in preparing for the new coin, so that slot machines, machines in car parks and so on will all have been altered.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Why does the Leader of the House not come clean and admit that his failure to plan for a Report stage in the Brexit Bill means that he will have seen that it allocates time for the different categories into which the amendments that he described he will have seen that it allocates time for the different categories into which the amendments that he described he intends to turn down every single amendment from the 128 pages of serious amendments? That railroading—for that is what it is—means that the amendments that lie undebated and not voted on will be longer than the White Paper, which, by the look of it, is not substantial enough to stop a door, never mind start an international negotiation.

Mr Lidington: I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman. The reality is that he is opposed in principle to the Bill, and he seeks to argue that parliamentary procedure should be prolonged so that, in effect, we go beyond the March deadline for triggering article 50. The Prime Minister has set out the plans to be followed which this House has overwhelmingly endorsed. The question of how many amendments are selected for debate is a matter not for the Government, but for the Chairman of Ways and Means, who will decide which debate is a matter not for the Government, but for the Chairman of Ways and Means, who will decide which of the amendments are in order and which are not. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman has studied the programme motion that we voted through last night, so he will have seen that it allocates time for the different categories into which the amendments that he described fall. We will have perfectly sound opportunities next week, during the three days that are available for debate, to go through all the amendments in sufficient detail.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): As chair of the all-party group for communities engagement, I refer to my letter to the Prime Minister and to the point I made to the Foreign Secretary earlier this week about the treatment of UK citizens at border controls around the world. Can we please have an urgent statement or a debate on that matter?

Mr Lidington: The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are both reflecting on that issue carefully following the recommendations of my hon. Friend and the all-party group. I assure him that the Foreign Office and our network of posts around the world take up individual cases when they come to their attention. However, in the light of what he said, we will look at the case for a systemic procedure for recording such cases.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Yesterday, with the greatest reluctance, many Members gushed to the authority of public opinion as expressed in a referendum. Will the House show the same respect to the unprecedented number of people who have signed two petitions since Saturday? Some 1,800,000 people have expressed their outrage at the prospect of President Trump enjoying a state visit here, whereas 200,000 have supported the invitation. Can we ensure that we show respect to people’s sense of horror by having not only a debate in the House, but a vote among hon. Members?

Mr Lidington: The unique feature of the EU referendum was that Parliament passed an Act that expressly referred the decision to the British people. I certainly felt that we were honour-bound to accept the verdict. As for the state visit by the President of the United States, of course people are free to express their opinions, and it is right that the Petitions Committee has allocated time for the petition to be debated. The Government take the view that a state visit is perfectly appropriate. The relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America—including with its elected head of state—matters to the security of our citizens and the geopolitical role of the west, as well as to our commercial and industrial interests. For those reasons, it is right that we should welcome the elected head of the United States of America in the way we have his predecessors.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Yesterday I had the privilege of listening to Susan Pollack, the noted Holocaust survivor, when she addressed Belmont synagogue and a large group of year 8 students from across Harrow. She asked, “What do you think of when I say, ‘What does a Jew look like?'” There came no answer, yet we have heard about the publication today of the report from CST about the terrible, dramatic increase in the number of anti-Semitic incidents. May we have a debate in Government time on that report, and more importantly, on what action they will take to stamp down on anti-Semitism?

Mr Lidington: The best thing I can say is that all of us, within the Government and outside, were appalled by the reported increase in hate crime. There has been progress in tackling that, but even one case is too many. We have published a new cross-Government hate crime action plan to try to tackle all forms of hate crime, but all of us across the House need to make it clear that Jewish people in Britain, like people from all communities, must be able to live their lives free from fear of either verbal or physical attack. In order to tackle anti-Semitism we need to implement effectively our strong legislation against religious discrimination and racially and religiously motivated crime, but there is also a responsibility on us all as individuals and as members of political parties—and people who have leadership positions in our constituencies—to make it clear in public again and again, if necessary, that anti-Semitism has no place whatsoever in this country.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): May we have a debate on property acquired by companies such as G4S in relation to the
dispersal of asylum seekers? In my constituency an independent councillor, Mary Lanigan, has used that as an opportunity to spread hatred and to divide the community along the lines of race and religion by repeatedly using inaccurate phrases such as “illegal asylum seeker”. Her contact details have even appeared on an abusive letter that has been circulated to residents to whip up certain emotions, for obvious reasons. Can we have a debate on G4S properties and on the councillors’ code of conduct in relation to the properties being dispersed among communities?

Mr Lidington: This country has a proud history of granting asylum to people who need our protection. We are committed to providing safe and secure accommodation while applications from individuals are being considered. We are clear that asylum seekers should be accommodated only in properties that are both decent and safe. Home Office Ministers work closely with their contractors to ensure that those standards are met. Where a contractor falls short, we work with them to try to sort those issues out as rapidly as possible. If the hon. Gentleman would like to let me have details, I will pass them to the Home Secretary.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Kevin Horkin, a Ribble Valley resident, has asked me to be a trustee of his charity, the British Pet Role Trust. High on its agenda is looking at legislation relating to the theft of pets. We know that is on the increase—BBC figures show an increase of 22% in the theft of dogs over the past two years—and some police forces do not properly collate that information. Part of the problem is that pets are seen as chattels and not as living creatures. May we have a debate on legislation relating to pets, so that we can get legislation on the statute book to protect them properly?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. In this place we should never underestimate the affection that millions of our constituents have for their pets, and the important therapeutic role that pets often play by giving people companionship who might otherwise be at risk of great loneliness. I will refer his request to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but in the meantime my hon. Friend might want to pursue opportunities to highlight his concerns through the Backbench Business Committee or an Adjournment debate.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am sure that the Leader of the House will wish to join me in congratulating Professor Peter Mathieson, who has just been appointed the new principal and vice-chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, and also pay tribute to Tim O’Shea, who has kept it in the top 20 of the world’s universities. Will the Leader of the House use the time for debate on the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill next week to look seriously at the Labour party’s new clause 6, which could give Professor Mathieson a real boost in his new principalship at Edinburgh University, by saying that EU nationals can not only stay and work here, but are very welcome?

Mr Lidington: I am very happy to congratulate Professor Mathieson on his appointment and Tim O’Shea on what he achieved during his tenure at Edinburgh University. I have visited the university myself and have seen what a formidable institute of learning it is. As for the hon. Gentleman’s point about the Bill, it is for the Chairman of Ways and Means, not the Government, to determine which amendments are selected for debate. However, the Government’s clear position is that we want to reach an agreement at the earliest possible opportunity in the negotiations that safeguards the rights of EU citizens here and, equally, the rights of United Kingdom citizens living in other EU countries. As is spelled out in the White Paper, on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union will be giving a statement shortly, we want to ensure that our future relationship embraces opportunities for us to continue to benefit from the brightest and the best people coming to study at universities throughout the United Kingdom.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Following the announcement that the excellent Mid Wales Holiday Lets company in my constituency is a well-deserved finalist in the Wales business of the year competition, may I have a debate about the importance of holiday lets to our tourism industry and the regulatory environment that surrounds them?

Mr Lidington: Having enjoyed many family holidays in holiday lets in Wales, may I endorse every word that my hon. Friend says and congratulate Mid Wales Holiday Lets on being a finalist in the Welsh business of the year competition? The holiday letting sector makes a hugely important contribution to the tourism business in Wales and the United Kingdom in general. It is a key provider of employment and income, particularly in the rural parts of our country.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I understand that a debate on the comprehensive economic and trade agreement between the EU and Canada has been scheduled for Monday next week. The Leader of the House is aware of the intense interest in the House about this controversial treaty, so can he explain why the House has been given so little notice of the debate and why it is not taking place on the Floor of the House, as the European Scrutiny Committee, under the excellent chairmanship of the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), strongly recommended?

Mr Lidington: I do not think that the notification given is unusual in terms of the period of notice given for European Committee debates. Having had to respond to many of those debates over the years, I can say to the hon. Lady that having to reply to up to 60 minutes of questions in a European Committee is a much tougher outing for a Minister than giving a 10-minute response to a 90-minute debate here in the Chamber. Two-and-a-half hours are allocated for the Committee and 90 minutes are allocated for a debate on the Floor of the House. Nevertheless, as I said earlier in response to the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), who spoke from the SNP Benches, I will additionally undertake to explore whether in future there will be the possibility of a general debate about EU exit and international trade, in which case the hon.
Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) would have a further opportunity to express her views on the Canada deal.

**Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): I was listening to “Good Morning Scotland” on Radio Scotland earlier this week. Lord Lawson was being interviewed, and I was struck by the fact that the interview was from his house in France. Can we have a statement on which Members of the House of Lords actually live in this country at a time when we are engaging in Brexit, the destination of which could mean that our citizens have fewer rights to work abroad, while citizens from the European Union living here face an uncertain future and will perhaps be unable to work?

**Mr Lidington:** The other House has its rules about the domiciliary status of its Members and it is for the House of Lords to police those rules. It was interesting during the referendum campaign to note that some of those who campaigned strongly to leave also took great advantage of freedom of movement. I hope that in the new arrangements between the United Kingdom and the European Union we will end up with a state of affairs where tourists travelling for long or short stays in each other’s countries can still proceed with as little hassle as possible.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): HSBC Bank has announced that it is closing its last branch in my Ogmore constituency, in the town of Maesteg. This will cause considerable upset and distress to lots of constituents, not only in the town but in the surrounding villages and communities. Can we have a statement or debate on the impact of bank closures on towns and villages across the country, and the need for banking to remain as local as possible? Does the Leader of the House also agree that “the world’s local bank” is perhaps becoming a little bit less local?

**Mr Lidington:** As I have said before at this Dispatch Box, I think there is a responsibility on banks, particularly when a bank knows that it has the last branch in a community, to weigh very carefully whether it should move towards closure. There are clearly commercial pressures as more customers, both businesses and individuals, move towards online banking. There is also a read-across to what the Government are seeking to do by bringing high-speed broadband to rural communities more quickly, because the more people in rural areas are able to have good-quality broadband in their homes or business premises, the more likely they are to take advantage of the opportunities of online banking, which people in the cities already have.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Most of the rights that workers enjoy, such as paid holiday leave and maternity and paternity pay, are protections derived from our EU membership. Given that the Conservative party has now styled itself as the party of the workers, can we have a statement to the House that sets out the Government’s guarantees, which have still not been given, on the continuation of those rights post-Brexit?

**Mr Lidington:** I have to say to the hon. Lady that I have sat in this Chamber several times now and heard the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union say in terms that we will protect workers’ rights. After all, some of those workers’ rights—parental leave, for example—go further in this country than those that are mandated under European law. I really think she should be careful before giving credence to these scare stories.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I was very disappointed to learn last week that an important funding bid for my constituency was rejected when the latest round of growth deals was announced. What was also disappointing was the lack of transparency about why the bid, which could have transformed Ellesmere Port town centre, was unsuccessful. May we have a debate to enable the Government to explain why investment in my community is not a priority for them?

**Mr Lidington:** With all those growth deal rounds, there have been more bids from local enterprise partnerships and local authorities than could possibly be met, given that funds are finite, however generous they may be. I suggest that if the hon. Gentleman seeks an Adjournment debate, he would have the opportunity to extract a detailed ministerial reply.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Leader of the House make Government time available for a debate on the impact that Brexit has already had on some of my local businesses and others? They include a business that is having to scale back on expansion because it has been hard hit by the drop in the pound, one that is losing EU employees and another that is worried about the increasing skills shortages among teachers, doctors and engineers. Such a debate would also enable the Government to set out what their analysis of the impact of coming out of the single market will be on British jobs.

**Mr Lidington:** There will be opportunities next week, and certainly when the repeal Bill is introduced after the Queen’s Speech later this year, for all those issues to be explored. The Government’s objective, following the decision that the people took in the referendum, is to make sure that British businesses have the greatest possible freedom of access to, and freedom to operate within, the single European market, and that European businesses have the same opportunities here.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): May I return the Leader of the House to the question asked by my hon Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara) following the earlier statement from the Secretary of State for Transport? We are still in the dark on the issue raised by my hon. Friend. May we have a debate on, or scrutiny of, the proposal to allow passenger aircraft to fly to Glasgow international airport with zero security checks? If security is to be taken seriously, it should be borne in mind that the knowledge that Barra, Tiree and Campbeltown airports will have zero security surely presents risks, and, more widely, makes a mockery of security provision at all airports.

**Mr Lidington:** I will ensure that those points are referred to the Transport Secretary, and will ask for a reply to be sent to the hon. Gentleman.
Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Schools in Cheshire West and Chester were already receiving £400 less per pupil than the national average before the Government recently slashed a further £4.2 million from our education budget, and that will rise to £6.4 million in the next couple of years. May we have a debate on schools funding, so that we can establish why the Government’s new fair funding formula apparently provides neither fairness nor, indeed, funding?

Mr Lidington: Obviously the hon. Gentleman is championing his constituency, but I think he overlooks the point that for many years schools in different parts of the country have received hugely differing levels of expenditure per pupil. The purpose of the new national funding formula is to ensure equality between children, and children’s opportunities, in those different local authorities. Furthermore, we will maintain the pupil premium, which is worth £2.5 billion this year alone and will provide extra support for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. We shall only be able to continue to fund education at current or increased levels if we continue to have a strong economy, creating the wealth and economic growth that make such spending possible.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): May we have a debate about how we can keep Tory Front Benchers awake when important matters relating to Scotland’s future are being discussed in the House? I have received a number of emails and other communications from concerned constituents who were watching television last night and observed that the Deputy Leader of the House appeared to be taking a nap while my SNP colleagues and I were speaking. Does the Leader of the House agree that when the Secretary of State for Scotland cannot be bothered to attend such a debate, it is important for his colleagues to remain awake, no matter how dismissive they may be of Scotland’s interests?

Mr Lidington: I think my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House was concentrating hard on the words of the hon. and learned Lady and her colleagues, as he always does. I assure her, in all seriousness, that the Prime Minister has made it clear to every member of the Cabinet that she considers it vital for us all to have in mind, all the time, the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom as we approach the different aspects of the forthcoming policy negotiations.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Given what the Leader of the House has just said, is it not disgraceful that, according to this morning’s edition of The Herald, the Secretary of State for Defence has said that the UK Government will veto any legitimate demand from the Scottish Government for an independence referendum? May we have a debate in Government time on the question of where sovereignty lies in Scotland? Is it not the case that when the Government talk about taking back control, what they mean is taking back control from the people of Scotland?

Mr Lidington: If I recall rightly, what my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary said to The Herald was that respect works both ways. It is right for the Government of the United Kingdom to respect fully both the devolution settlements and the competences of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, and the interests of Scotland within the United Kingdom in reserved matters, including our European negotiations; but the Scottish Government, and members of the SNP, should also respect the verdict of the Scottish people in the 2014 referendum on the future of Scotland.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House grant a debate in Government time about delays in universal credit payments? Claimants are waiting for at least six weeks, and those who are not paid monthly do not have a month’s salary as a cushion. People in low-paid, part-time or temporary jobs do not have savings to see them through, and are having to use food banks.

Mr Lidington: The virtues of universal credit are that it is a simpler system, with more generous childcare provisions, than the system that it is replacing, and that, for the first time, people will be given extra help when they are in work to make progress and increase their earnings. It will ensure that working more always pays more, and that people are always better off in work than on benefits.

Our purpose in introducing universal credit on a gradual basis is to identify and eliminate teething problems such as those described by the hon. Lady at a very early stage, and to put them right. If there are cases in her constituency that she thinks are not being addressed with sufficient speed, I ask her to let me know the details, and I will draw them to the attention of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions immediately.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Last July the Security Industry Authority launched a new IT system whose implementation led to difficulties caused by system defects. As a consequence, some applications are taking longer to process than they ought to. Constituency cases with which I have been dealing recently indicate that the problem is ongoing, and that a resolution has yet to be found. May we have a statement from the Home Office to update the House on the progress of this matter?

Mr Lidington: I do not know the details of the problems that are affecting the Security Industry Authority, but it is clearly important for it to be able to process applications swiftly and efficiently. I advise the hon. Lady to seek an Adjournment debate, but also to write directly to the Home Secretary with the details of what she has discovered. I am sure that there will be a full response.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Leader of the House will be aware of the issue of compensation for UK victims of the Libyan-sponsored IRA terrorism. He will also be aware of the indication that a private Member’s Bill would come to the House of Commons from the other place. May we have a debate in Government time on the progress of Her Majesty’s Government’s efforts to secure compensation for those victims, as was suggested by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), during a debate in Westminster Hall on 13 December?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman has been diligent in pursuing the issue that he has raised, and I fully understand why it is so important to people in Northern
Ireland, but he will recognise that, given the present situation in Libya, this is not a straightforward conversation to have with the Libyan authorities. However, the Under-Secretary of State—who is the Minister for the middle east and north Africa—continues to pursue the issue. Foreign Office questions will take place in the next few days, and the hon. Gentleman may wish to raise the matter with my hon. Friend then.

Exiting the EU: New Partnership

12.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): With permission, Mr Speaker, I shall make a statement on the Government’s plans for exiting the European Union.

Today we are publishing a Government White Paper on the UK’s exit from, and new partnership with, the European Union. The Government have made clear that they will honour the choice made by the people of the United Kingdom. On 23 June 2016, the United Kingdom will leave the European Union—no, that is wrong. On 23 June 2016, the people voted for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. It is just as well that I corrected that; I should have read this first, shouldn’t I? [Laughter.] Don’t worry, we have two more years to go—two years of this!

The House is currently considering a straightforward Bill that will give the Prime Minister the authority to trigger article 50 of the treaty on European Union and begin the negotiation over our exit. The Bill is not about whether or not we leave the EU, or even about how we do so; it is about implementing a decision already taken by the people of the UK in last year’s referendum. However, we have always said that we will detail our strategic aims for the negotiation and seek to build a national consensus wherever possible. The White Paper sets out those aims and the thinking behind them. It confirms the Prime Minister’s vision of an independent, truly global UK, and an ambitious future relationship with the EU.

That vision is based on the 12 principles that will guide the Government as they fulfil the democratic will of the people of the UK: providing certainty and clarity where we can as we approach the negotiations; taking control of our own laws and statute book; strengthening the Union by securing a deal that works for the whole of the UK; maintaining the common travel area and protecting our strong historic ties with Ireland; controlling immigration from the European Union; securing the rights for EU citizens already living in the UK and the rights of UK nationals living in the EU; protecting and enhancing existing workers’ rights; ensuring free trade with European markets, while forging a new strategic partnership with the European Union, including a bold and ambitious free trade agreement and a mutually beneficial new customs agreement; forging free trade agreements with other countries across the world; ensuring that the United Kingdom remains the best place for science and innovation; co-operating in the fight against crime and terrorism; and, finally, delivering a smooth and orderly exit from the EU. Those 12 objectives amount to one goal: a new, positive and constructive partnership between Britain and the European Union that works in our mutual interest. All of them are key, but let me highlight some of the specific issues in the White Paper.

The White Paper reiterates our firm view that it is in the UK’s interest for the EU to succeed politically and economically. That cannot be said too firmly: we want the EU to succeed politically and economically. We therefore approach the negotiation to come in the spirit of good will and working towards an outcome in our mutual benefit.
[Mr David Davis]

We recognise the EU’s principle of the four freedoms, so the UK will leave the single market. Instead, we seek a new strategic partnership, including a bold and ambitious free trade agreement and a mutually beneficial new customs agreement that should ensure the most free and frictionless trade in goods and services that is possible. That will be to our mutual benefit. As the White Paper notes, we export £230 billion of goods and services to the EU, while importing £290 billion of goods and services from the EU every year.

The White Paper also sets out how, after we leave the EU, the UK will look to significantly increase its trade with the fastest growing export markets in the world. Although we cannot sign new trade deals while we are still members, we can prepare—we are preparing—the ground for them. This means updating the terms of our membership of the World Trade Organisation, of which the UK was a founding member—it was GATT, the general agreement on tariffs and trade, in the first instance. Modern free trade agreements require mechanisms to resolve disputes and to provide certainty for businesses on both sides, so the White Paper examines the precedents in this area and makes it clear that we will negotiate an arrangement that respects UK sovereignty.

We recognise the need to provide clarity and certainty wherever we can during a period in which some uncertainty is inevitable. We will therefore bring forward another White Paper on the great repeal Bill, which will lay out our approach in detail. This legislation will mean the White Paper notes, we export £230 billion of goods and services to the EU every year.

12.45 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Normally I would thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement, but this statement says nothing. A week ago at Prime Minister’s questions, the Prime Minister said that there would be a White Paper. Yesterday she said that there would be a White Paper tomorrow, and the Secretary of State now makes a statement saying that there is a White Paper, but as the White Paper was not delivered until a few minutes ago, how can meaningful questions be asked about it?

For months we have been calling for a plan; that was refused on the basis that there would not be a running commentary. Then the Government agreed to a plan but delivered a speech. They were forced to concede under pressure that there would be a White Paper, but now a White Paper has been produced too late in the day for us to ask meaningful questions of the Secretary of State in this session. That is completely unacceptable.

The first fight on Brexit is very clear: it is a fight about giving this House a meaningful role in holding the Government to account. The Government had to be under pressure that there would be a White Paper, but delivered a speech. They were forced to concede a final vote. Before Christmas, the Secretary of State now makes a statement saying that there would be a vote in this House at the end of the exercise.

The decision to leave was taken on 23 June last year. What matters now are the terms agreed under article 50, and the nature and extent of our new relationship with the EU. In her Lancaster House speech, the Prime Minister adopted a risky approach—a wish list with gaps, inconsistencies and an unacceptable fall-back position. Now we need time to debate this White Paper properly in this House and a vote on its contents.

On the question of votes, from flicking through the White Paper, I see that all that is said about the final vote, at paragraph 1.12, is that the final deal that is agreed will be put to “a vote in both Houses of Parliament.”
We have tabled amendments for consideration next week that seek a meaningful vote—a vote in this House before a vote is taken in the European Parliament. Without such a vote, all hon. Members will have to watch on their screens the European Parliament debating our deal before we get to express any views about it. That is completely unacceptable and it means this House.

Finally, I note from a perusal of the White Paper that there is nothing that progresses the situation of EU nationals in this country. We have been calling time and again for unilateral action to be taken before article 50 is triggered, yet the White Paper disappoints on that front.

Mr Davis: Let me start with the purpose of the White Paper: to inform all the debates—not just today’s—in the coming two years. The shadow Brexit spokesman is exactly right: what matters above all else is not the amour propre of the Labour party or whatever, but the terms that we get for this negotiation. That is about the future of Britain, and it is what this House should care about first and foremost.

The hon. and learned Gentleman talks about a meaningful vote, but I have not yet quite understood what he means by that. I have been here long enough to have voted thousands of times in this House and I have never yet voted on something that I considered not meaningful. Every vote in this House is meaningful.

There will be a meaningful vote at the end. The hon. and learned Gentleman makes much of the time that this has taken, but I have been saying for a long time to the Select Committee—its Chairman is not here—that it was inconceivable that we would not have a meaningful vote at the end of this process.

The hon. and learned Gentleman’s last point was on EU nationals. I have a track record of defending the interests of people who are under pressure. Indeed, the last thing—pretty much—the leader of his party did was to go with me to Washington to get the last Brit out of Guantanamo Bay. I am not going to be throwing people out of Britain, and for the hon. and learned Gentleman even to suggest that is outrageous. Let me quote him: I want the European Union nationals here to have all the rights they currently have, but I also say this to him: I want the European Union to be strong, stable and effective. In these times of difficult international relations, we need the EU as an anchor, and that is the policy that we will pursue.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. He is not a man of few words, but he is perhaps a man of few meaningful words. This is just another panicked U-turn. When it comes to European matters, it is not much of an achievement to be the second most chaotic party in the Chamber. The Government have had seven months in which to pull this together, yet we got the White Paper only a minute before the Secretary of State got to his feet to make his statement. I concede that he is more experienced than I am, but it is striking that we are getting the White Paper after Second Reading of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill and two sitting days before its Committee stage. How are we to question him about the White Paper when we are given it just before he gets to his feet? I believe that that shows an astonishing disrespect for Parliament. He would not have put up with this were he not on the Government Front Bench.

What are the Government afraid of? They do not want to give us any opportunity for scrutiny, so there must be something they are afraid of. They do not have the courage of their convictions. Scotland voted to remain as the blue in the red, white and blue Brexit, so are the civil servants having to pull together all these last-minute policy changes? The Secretary of State said in his statement that the devolved legislatures would face “significant changes”. Does that mean that a legislative consent motion will now be required? This is a mess; it is a bourach. It is going to have an impact on each and every one of us, and people deserve better.

Mr Davis: The hon. Gentleman says that this has taken seven months, but we have been in the European Union for 40 years. This is about reversing—well, not reversing but amending—and dealing with 40 years’ accumulated policy and law. He mentioned Second Reading, but that Bill will trigger the process. It does no more than to put into effect the people’s decision of 23 June last year, so I cannot see how he thinks the publication of the White Paper after Second Reading is problematic. There will be any number of occurrences in this House when the 50-odd Scottish National party Members will have a chance to hold the Government to account, to make their views known on policy, and to put forward the interests of Scotland, whether during the passage of the great repeal Bill or that of the other primary and secondary legislation that will follow on from it. I do not think he can complain about an absence of democracy in this respect.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. There is extensive interest in this statement, which I am keen to accommodate, but to do so will require brevity from Back Benchers and Front Benchers alike, especially in the light of the subsequent business, which is very well subscribed and to which I have to have regard. So it would help if we could have short questions and short answers.
Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for the White Paper. The complaints about it not being detailed enough and arriving only at the last moment are of course nonsense. The Prime Minister set out most of its elements in her 12-point speech, and those who missed that should go back and read it again. They will see that its points are all reflected in this document. I want to ask my right hon. Friend about migration. The key concern in academia and in the high added value, low volume areas is that they should get a much earlier statement about how flexible any future permit system will be. Will he take that a little further and say that those areas will see next to no change, and that it is the low value, high volume areas that we need to control?

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Needless to say, people who were not here at the start of the statement should not be standing. That goes without saying; it is an established feature of our proceedings.

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) is another Member of this House who has given a great deal of time and dedication to this issue. On migration, it is my job to bring the decision back to the House, but it is not my job to make the decisions thereafter. However, it is clear to me that the policies for controlling migration after our exit will be designed to further our national interest. Britain is a science superpower. We are the leading scientific centre in Europe, and as a result we will want to encourage the competition for talent to come here. The same will apply in finance, engineering, medicine and all the other areas in which skills are at a premium. We will want to attract those people, so we do not expect our policies to have any deleterious effects on industry at all.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Secretary of State has said that we will have meaningful votes on a range of things. How can it be, then, that paragraph 8.43 of the White Paper commits us to leaving the customs union, without any analysis of the effects and with no impact assessment?

Mr Davis: There has been considerable analysis of this—

Helen Goodman: Well, it is not in the White Paper.

Mr Davis: Let me just finish my answer. The point is made in the policy paper that we want to have a customs agreement. That will follow directly as a result of the free trade agreement. If we are successful in getting low or zero tariffs in the free trade agreement, and no non-tariff barriers, we should succeed in getting a customs agreement that reflects that, and that makes it very straightforward to continue trading with Europe.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I think it would be wise to get to the end of the negotiations before we draw any conclusions on what conclusions we have come to. That would be the meaningful way to do it, although I think that those who use the word “meaningful” four times in a speech are being rather meaningless. The key point is that what we are after is the same thing that European Union members are after—arrangements that are good for them, good for us and good for the world.

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is exactly right. That is the aim of our policy. He is also right to suggest that, at the end, the House will be able to hold the Government to account and make a meaningful decision about the policy, but that will not be the only opportunity. There will be many points along the way when we will debate every policy issue that arises from the process—from customs agreements to immigration. The House will be very much in control of that.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): In the 60 seconds that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) had to look through the White Paper, he was spot on to zone in on the obfuscation on page 11 about the lack of a meaningful vote for Parliament at the end of the process. There is no point in having a vote after the Secretary of State has already signed things off with the European Union, treating Parliament as some sort of afterthought. Will he rule out now the Government showing such contempt for Parliament?

Mr Davis: This is my sixth statement to the House in less than six months—[Interruption.] Let me finish. The House will have the opportunity to vote on any number of pieces of legislation before we get to the end and then will have a vote to decide whether what it gets is acceptable. I cannot see how it can be made more meaningful than that.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): On page 49 of the White Paper, the Government state:

“We have an open mind on how we implement new customs arrangements with the EU”.

It is important to be admirably clear so that everyone knows where we stand, so will the Secretary of State confirm for the avoidance of doubt that we are not only leaving the EU and the single market, but definitely leaving the customs union?

Mr Davis: If my hon. Friend reads the rest of that chapter, he will see that we will exclude ourselves from the common commercial policy and common external tariff, which amounts to exactly what he says.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I welcome the principles in the White Paper, particularly around protecting and enhancing existing workers’ rights. Will the Secretary of State confirm that there is nothing to negotiate with the other EU countries on workers’ rights because they already exist in our law and will be protected? The people who have been going around saying that such rights are threatened should be told that they are not.

Mr Davis: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The Government’s approach is to maintain every single piece of employment protection that exists now, which incidentally is much better than that of most European countries, and to enhance it. There should be no concern about that at all.
Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I urge the Secretary of State to give priority to the matters in chapter 6 of the White Paper on securing the rights of EU nationals. I have in mind a constituent who is an EU national and who has sadly been receiving cancer treatment for many years. I am anxious to be able to give her certainty as soon as possible that she will continue to have access to the NHS.

Mr Davis: That is part of the point of doing this. We are talking about not only residents’ rights, but the right of access to healthcare. That matters both for Europeans in Britain and for Britons abroad. I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): “The end is not yet and the best is yet to be,” is a benediction that any Presbyterian on the Ulster Bench will welcome—even the Wee Frees who have clambered on at the end. I welcome the White Paper that the Secretary of State has produced today, in particular the three chapters that refer to the Union, to strengthening the relationship with the Republic of Ireland and to fighting and combating terrorism. Is he familiar with the commentary of Dr Ray Bassett, the former Irish ambassador and diplomat? He made it clear that Ireland’s position should now be about forging a new relationship with the United Kingdom, because the other 26 parts of the EU do not really listen to Ireland.

Mr Davis: I am not familiar with that commentary, but I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s view about the chapter on the relationship with Ireland. One of the most important parts of the last seven month’s preparation has been striking a relationship with Ireland that ensures that we underpin the peace process, maintain the stability of Northern Ireland, keep an open border, and so on. It is incumbent on the British Government to be as helpful as we can to the Irish Government because they are in the most difficult position, so that is what we are doing.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Paragraph 8.43 of the White Paper makes it clear that we want to leave the customs union so that we can negotiate free trade agreements “around the world.” If we leave the customs union, we will be bound by an external tariff unless we negotiate otherwise. Is that the correct position?

Mr Davis: Generally speaking, a most favoured nation arrangement applies under WTO rules, but countries are generally allowed to make free trade agreements at whatever level they seek. We want to ensure that as many of the existing EU free trade agreements carry straight over, which will also be lower than MFN rates.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Given the old-age dependency ratio and its importance for the public finances and given the absence of the concrete information in paragraph 5.9 of the White Paper, what level of net migration to our country does the Secretary of State anticipate across future years?

Mr Davis: The Government’s policy is that migration will be at a sustainable level. The point to understand here is that such decisions are made on a year-by-year basis. It is not Government policy to make the British economy suffer as a result of labour or talent shortages or anything else. It is perfectly proper for a Government to want to control their own migration policy and not leave it open-ended. The solution to the problem the hon. Lady cites is not just not managing the problem.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): When the Government serve notice on the European Union under article 50, will they take that opportunity to frame the negotiation by making it clear that we expect to agree the framework of our future relationship, as specified in article 50? Otherwise, we will effectively be negotiating the divorce arrangements in the dark, and the European Union would not be observing the principle of sincere co-operation.

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend refers to the need to negotiate ongoing arrangements in parallel with the departure arrangements. As he says, article 50 refers to having regard to ongoing arrangements, and a negotiation on departure arrangements cannot be concluded before the ongoing arrangements have been concluded. I have already made that point to Michel Barnier, my opposite number, and I think the Prime Minister has made that point to a number of her opposite numbers around the European Union. This will be the first issue that we need to resolve at the beginning of the negotiations, so my hon. Friend is quite right.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will Parliament get a vote on the Government’s intended final deal before the deal is struck with the European Union?

Mr Davis: I suspect that the final vote here will be before the final ratification in the European Union. Its ratification process is much slower than ours will be.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I want to put it on the record that I am extremely pleased that the White Paper has been published, and I thank the Secretary of State and his team for listening to hon. Friends and our calls for a White Paper. Will he join me in sending a message to my constituents to feed in their views? In the spirit of listening to his hon. Friends, will he also clarify whether the Government will consider formal reporting back to the House?

Mr Davis: I am not quite sure what my hon. Friend means by formal reporting. I have visited the Exiting the European Union Committee once and will be appearing in front of it again, and this, as I said, is my sixth statement to the House. We come to the House at every possible opportunity to tell Members what is going on. There will be subsequent debates, including substantive debates on policy. There will undoubtedly be other Brexit debates—more are planned already—so there is no question that the House will not be fully informed. That we are somehow not paying attention to the Opposition is an illusion—a chimera—that they like to run out. We have given them a White Paper and answers about the customs union and the single market. I do not know how much more open I can be without being dissected.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The Government seem to be in a constant state of delayed reaction, but we finally have the White Paper. It contains a statement on a strengthening trade with the world that reads like a tweet, and a conspicuous amount of space that is totally blank. Does that reflect the Government’s thinking on Brexit?
Mr Davis: The Government’s thinking on Brexit is very clear. If someone disagrees with it, that does not mean that it does not exist. That is the problem that SNP Members have had all the way through this process. They just do not like it. [Interruption.] Sure, half a page is blank. Wonderful. I think that is the case in every book I own.

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I welcome the White Paper and hope that it heralds unity both in our party and in the country on our approach to leaving the European Union. May I therefore commend to all Members yesterday’s speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt)? He was the epitome of grace and magnanimity.

Mr Davis: I agree with him entirely on both counts.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Secretary of State accept that the best way to continue the benefits of the common systems and frameworks that enable UK and EU businesses to trade would be to stay in the single market and rejoin the European Free Trade Association? Does he also accept that, for UK businesses to have continued access to the single market, there will need to be mechanisms to ensure that UK regulations do not diverge from EU regulations? Can he explain what happens to sovereignty then?

Mr Davis: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman’s first question is no, because, again, membership of EFTA would put us within the reach of European regulations and the European Courts. Frankly, that would take away what influence we do have. We have laid out in the White Paper what is the best relationship, which is a customs agreement and a free trade agreement. Bear in mind that we are starting from a position of identity. He makes a good point about maintaining that identity, and we will publish proposals on that in due course, but this is what we are going to do. It is perfectly possible to go the route I am talking about without rejecting the decision of the British people on 23 June last year.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend inform the House of how the progress he is making towards a free trade agreement between us and Gibraltar? I understand that such an agreement is a customs agreement and a free trade agreement. Bear in mind that we are starting from a position of identity. He makes a good point about maintaining that identity, and we will publish proposals on that in due course, but this is what we are going to do. It is perfectly possible to go the route I am talking about without rejecting the decision of the British people on 23 June last year.

Mr Davis: The Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), gave evidence to the House of Lords on precisely that—indeed, on all the dependent territories—and it can be taken as read that we will rigorously protect their interests.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State observes that the UK was a founding member of the WTO, but he forgets that we were the driving force behind the completion of the single market. Does he understand how angry British business is that he has abandoned the single market before negotiations even start?

Mr Davis: In these debates, membership of the single market and access to the single market are often conflated. What British business wants is unfettered access, and what German, French and Italian business wants is unfettered access to our market. That is what we seek to produce.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Can the Secretary of State confirm that we will be coming out of the Prüm framework and building a new relationship on data sharing to fight crime and terrorism that ensures that my constituents’ most personal data are no longer subject to the ECJ?

Mr Davis: As we are coming out of the European Union, that will happen almost by definition, but that is not to say that we will not be making new arrangements. The Prüm framework covers data exchange, DNA and so on, and it is very clear in our minds that we will be making new arrangements to keep terrorism, crime and so on under control. We will no doubt protect my hon. Friend’s constituents from the ECJ.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Local Government Association has been asking for meetings with Ministers about the impact of these processes on councils and on how more powers can be devolved, yet in the Secretary of State’s statement I did not hear a single reference to local councils. I cannot see a single reference in the White Paper, having read through it very quickly. Will he now commit the Government to having meaningful discussions with the LGA, and will he commit to the principle of subsidiarity, too?

Mr Davis: There is only so much I can do in a limited statement. The Minister of State has already met the LGA, and he has sent out invitations to local councils so that he can talk to them. In the last statement, or maybe in the one before, I said that I am willing to meet the mayors of the various regions of the country after they are elected in the next round. It must be taken as read that we are not putting the regions to one side. The very first public meeting I had after becoming Secretary of State was with people in Blackburn, Lancashire.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): There are three British ambassadors in Brussels. Does my right hon. Friend think that the staff of our ambassador to the European Union will be enhanced, or indeed might his post be scrapped, after we leave the European Union?

Mr Davis: I assume that my hon. Friend is talking about our permanent representative to the European Union, who has 120 brilliant staff, and they all work for me. I do not know what our representational arrangements will be, but he is referring to an ambassador to Belgium, an ambassador to NATO—I assume—and an ambassador to UKRep. We will undoubtedly have close relationships with the European Union thereafter, so it will be a pretty sizeable embassy I should think, but it will not be what it is now.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): Our current membership of the single market is governed by the European economic area agreement. The Government
content that we are a member of the EEA by virtue of our membership of the EU—that may or may not prove to be the case—but can the Secretary of State be clear about the implications of our domestic legislation in that regard, specifically the European Economic Area Act 1993? Will the Government repeal that Act? If so, when? Will we get a vote?

Mr Davis: As it stands—as far as I can see, having gone through this quite carefully—once we are outside the EU, the question of whether we automatically cease to be a member of the EEA becomes a legal empty vessel. We will look at that. If we do propose to withdraw from the EEA, we will come back and tell the House.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): When European subjects have come to my surgery to talk about their rights, they have left in agreement that those rights must go hand in hand with the rights of UK subjects living in their own country. I hope the Secretary of State has got the message.

Mr Davis: I have got the message and, incidentally, so have the leaders of most of the countries with the most people here. They also understand that we have to protect the rights of British people at the very same time as we protect the rights of their citizens. There is no question that it is not going to happen. The question is when it will happen, and we are trying to do it as quickly as possible.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): We welcome the White Paper, particularly chapter 4 on our links with Ireland, including on trade, security and the wish for unfettered access, but at the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs this week a customs specialist said that, for trading in goods, there will have to be border points either between Northern Ireland and Ireland or, much worse, between Scotland and England and the island of Ireland. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that we are not going to have hard borders of that type?

Mr Davis: We are not going to have hard borders. I will take the question on two different levels. First, the common travel area has existed since 1923 and, in that respect nothing will change. On goods, there will be the softest, most invisible and most frictionless border we can find. There is a lot of technology these days, ranging from automatic number plate recognition through to the tagging of containers, with trusted trader arrangements across the border, and such things operate between Norway and Sweden, the US and Canada, and so on—countries with very amicable relations and very open borders—and we will do the same with Ireland.

Dr Andrew Murray (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The White Paper is an impressive document, for which I thank the Secretary of State—the Venn diagram on page 48 is particularly insightful. He will know that the European Union has concluded a pathetically small number of free trade agreements with other countries, but there are some. Will he confirm that there will either be a continuity arrangement with those countries on Brexit or that the agreements will be the basis for an accelerated relationship with those very few countries?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade has already been in touch with the most important countries to us—South Korea and others like it—and they all seem very keen both to maintain grandfather rights and to improve on the deals and make them much more tailored and specific to both our interests.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): The White Paper says that the great repeal Bill “will preserve EU law where it stands at the moment before we leave the EU.”

The White Paper goes on to say that it foresees two pieces of primary legislation, but that: “There will also be a programme of secondary legislation under the Great Repeal Bill to address deficiencies in the preserved law.” What deficiencies does the Secretary of State have in mind?

Mr Davis: As the great repeal Bill will pass through European law—the acquis communautaire—in its original wording, it might refer to European institutions when it should refer to British institutions. For example, it might say that local government has to publish its procurement contracts in the Official Journal of the European Union, which would no longer be appropriate—it would be more appropriate to publish them on the Government website. Secondary legislation will be principally aimed at such technical concerns. Major areas of policy change will primarily be addressed in primary legislation, which is why we cited those two examples.

Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend’s constructive approach. In that light, I draw his attention to a report by the European Parliament’s Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, which highlighted European businesses’ financial reliance on the City, expressed concern if that access were to be disrupted and urged negotiators to approach the issue in a constructive and open fashion.

Mr Davis: And we fully intend to do so, as we think it is in the interests of both ourselves and the European Union, because we do not want anything that causes instability in the eurozone, any more than we want anything that damages the City.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Remarkably, the White Paper does not contain a single reference to Eurojust or any real indication of our future co-operation with the EU on criminal justice matters. That raises the question: if something so significant has been omitted, what else is missing? Never mind a White Paper, this is a lightweight paper.

Mr Davis: The hon. Lady worked hard to get her soundbite out. The White Paper contains a whole section on justice and home affairs, and we have made it very plain, over and over again—I even said this in my statement at the beginning—that we intend to maintain closer co-operation with Europe, not have less co-operation, on security, crime and intelligence matters. We must understand that Europe has a great deal to gain from this, because we are the intelligence superpower in
Europe—we have the most powerful intelligence agencies—and therefore on things such as tackling crime and terrorism we are very important to them, as we think they are to us, too.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Significant discussion has already taken place between the Prime Minister and the Welsh Government following last June’s referendum, and there has been discussion in the Welsh Parliament, and I very much welcome that. In the interests of UK unity, Wales’s interests must be taken into account, including through discussion of this White Paper. Will the Secretary of State guarantee Wales’s involvement and that it will continue to feature in all our discussions? We accept, of course, that there can be no veto.

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in what he says, and this has been our approach. We have had a number of meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee, two of them chaired by the Prime Minister and three of them chaired by me. We have been to Wales to see the Welsh Government to talk about some of these issues. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is appearing before the Welsh Parliament—

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones)The Committee.

Mr Davis: The Welsh Committee—sorry. He is appearing before the Committee on 14 February, I believe. We are taking the interests of Wales extremely seriously. We will operate this negotiation so that no part of the UK loses—that is the aim.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): If we are leaving the single market and the customs union, will the Secretary of State give a guarantee to my workers at Ford and at Tata Steel, who make the steel for Nissan cars? Two thirds of both Ford and Nissan cars are exported to the EU, so will he guarantee that they will have tariff-free access to the EU markets? Or is this only a promise to negotiate and seek?

Mr Davis: This is a negotiation, but if the hon. Lady reads the White Paper, she will see that it sets out that European exports of goods and services to us total £290 billion, whereas ours to them are worth £230 billion. So they clearly have a strong interest—as strong an interest as we do—in tariff-free goods access, because for them goods are a much bigger part of it as well. The disparity is more than £60 billion, so there is every reason to expect that we will succeed in what we are intending to do, which is protect the jobs of her constituents.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): My right hon. Friend will recall that at last week’s Brexit questions I asked about the seafood sector, and I can tell him that it will be particularly pleased with the comment in paragraph 8.16 giving it full support. However, he will also be aware of the long-standing grievance of the fishing communities up and down the country following their being sold out in the original negotiations. Will he reiterate yet again that that will not occur on this occasion?

Mr Davis: Yes.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State makes much of the process and joked that we might be at this for another two years, yet in that time the unelected and unaccountable House of Lords will have more influence on the implementation of the White Paper, and the negotiations and relationships that we must forge for trade agreements, than the Governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. How does that strengthen the Union?

Mr Davis: That is simply not the case. As I just said, we have regular monthly meetings with the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive—when they are in play—and we are taking what they say very seriously. We will not agree with everything they say, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. The Scottish Government’s paper was presented at the last meeting and there were areas of agreement on employment protection and on environmental protection, but disagreement on the concept of a “carve out” on the single market and a discussion about how the devolution would work. That hardly constitutes not paying attention to the Scottish Government.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I welcome this White Paper and I am glad the Government have listened to Members. EU nationals play a vital part in our universities, workplaces and families. Although I support the need for some control on freedom of movement, will he ensure in negotiations that workers, students and family members find that our borders remain open if they are from the EU? After all, control does not mean arbitrary restrictions.

Mr Davis: Absolutely, control does not mean slamming the door. As I said, it is in the UK’s interest to keep attracting talent, and if we attract talent, we attract the families—that goes without saying. Earlier, I was asked whether I could promise something that is to be negotiated, but this is something we will decide in this House, for the first time, in a couple of years’ time.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): One crucial and reasonable question for the Secretary of State to answer is: how does he see frictionless, unfettered trade with the EU continuing after we have signed free trade deals with other countries? Surely the greater the divergence between ourselves and the single market in external tariffs and standards, the greater their need at some point to impose customs checks on us.

Mr Davis: Obviously, we need to seek to maintain some sort of standard parity, be it by a measure of equivalence or by something else, depending on the product. The area where the deals outside and the deals with the European Union conflict is on rules of origin. We will have to have a good rules of origin scheme, just as any other free trade area has. For example, the Canadian treaty has specific rules of origin and we will need to do the same. But that is a very small burden by comparison with the sorts of things people are worrying about, if we get the customs agreement we seek.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): When, if ever, does my right hon. Friend think the EU will issue an equivalent White Paper, setting out with equal clarity the agreed negotiating objectives of the 27 other members?
Mr Davis: My hon. Friend’s question sort of answers itself, but I hope that it will be once the EU has received the article 50 letter from us—so in April or May. It will receive that letter in March and will respond in April or May.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I know that today is groundhog day, but why are we exiting the customs union in order to recreate the customs union?

Mr Davis: It is to create a customs agreement; it is in order to enable us to develop free trade agreements with that huge portion of the world where there is very fast growth and we have a strong market presence. Some 40% of our trade, or as much as we have with the EU, is with areas where we do not have free trade agreements. So this is a very large area and it is growing, sometimes twice as fast as the EU is. We are taking this approach for the future opportunities. People often talk about the implications of the referendum for young people, but the biggest implication is the prospect of jobs in the future, many of which will come from global markets, not just European ones.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): A lot of the politicians in EU states say that they are against torture, but do they not recognise that the fact that they are not willing to come to a deal with my right hon. Friend about EU citizens being allowed to stay, live and work here and British citizens being allowed to stay, live and work in the EU countries is a form of mental torture and trauma that they are perpetrating upon them? Will he redouble his efforts to get this deal done as quickly as possible and to make the announcement as quickly as possible? If only one or two countries are holding out, for whatever reason, will he be prepared to name and shame them, so that their citizens here can bring pressure upon them to get that deal done?

Mr Davis: I will certainly do the first half; I will certainly redouble my efforts, although they are pretty intense in any case, to ensure that this happens quickly. My hon. Friend is right that we are talking about just a few countries. I suspect their reasoning is the communautaire reasoning of not starting anything before just a few countries. I suspect their reasoning is the fact that so many Members from both sides of the House who wanted us to remain in the European Union nevertheless last night voted to trigger article 50 set a fine example that Members of the unelected upper House would do very well to follow?

Mr Davis: I was sitting there calculating whether my right hon. Friend’s question today was longer than his speech yesterday, and I think it was.

Yes, I hope Members in the upper House do pay attention. The Bill is a manifestation of the will of the people—nearly 17.5 million people—and I would expect the upper House, which quite properly has its place and its rights, to respect that will.

NHS in England

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Select Committee statement

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Select Committee statement. In a moment, the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee of the House, Mr Bernard Jenkin, will speak on this subject for up to 10 minutes, during which time no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, the Chair will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement, and call Mr Jenkin to respond to these in turn. Members can expect to be called only once.

Interventions should be questions, and should be brief. Those on the Front Bench may take part in questioning.

1.31 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to present to the House the seventh report of PACAC this Session, “Will the NHS Never Learn?”, a follow-up to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman report on the NHS in England, “Learning from Mistakes”.

Over the past decade, written complaints regarding NHS services have doubled, from just over 95,000 in 2005-06 to more than 198,000 in 2015-16. Investigations into such complaints have frequently failed to identify the root causes of any mistakes that occurred. Even more frustrating is that they have failed to prevent the same mistakes from being repeated over and over again, despite multiple reports highlighting that as a critical issue from both the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which I chair.

In its report “Learning from Mistakes”, which was published last year, the PHSO highlighted the fear of blame that is pervasive throughout the NHS. That fear drives defensive responses and inhibits open investigations, which in turn prevents NHS organisations from understanding what went wrong and why. That also undermines public trust and confidence, because the public can see that NHS organisations are failing from understanding what went wrong and why. That also undermines public trust and confidence, because the public can see that NHS organisations are failing to learn from mistakes—if they did, that would drive improvement. A combination of a reluctance on the part of citizens to express their concerns or to make complaints, and a defensiveness on the part of services to hear and address concerns, has been described by the PHSO herself, Dame Julie Mellor, as a “toxic cocktail” that is poisoning efforts to deliver excellent public services.

To further understand the issues and what more needs to be done to tackle them, PACAC recently undertook its inquiry, which followed up on the PHSO’s “Learning from Mistakes” report. In PACAC’s report, which was published earlier this week, we conclude that if the Department of Health is to achieve its policy of turning the NHS into a learning organisation, it must integrate its various initiatives to tackle the issue and come up with a long-term and co-ordinated strategy. That strategy must include a clear plan for building up local investigative capability, as the vast majority of investigations take place locally. We will hold the Secretary of State for Health accountable for delivering the plan.
PACAC's report also considered the potential impact of the new healthcare safety investigation branch, which is in the process of being set up. The creation of HSIB, as it is known, originates from our recommendations as the Public Administration Committee in 2015. The Government accepted our recommendation, and HSIB is due to be launched in April. It will conduct investigations into the most serious clinical incidents, and is intended to offer a safe space to allow those involved in such incidents to speak openly and frankly about what happened. In so doing, it is hoped that HSIB will play a crucial role in transforming the expectation and culture in the NHS from one that is focused on blame to one that emphasises learning. It should be a key part, albeit only a part, of the wider strategy that we want the Government to adopt.

Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go if the Department of Health's aim of turning the NHS into a learning organisation is to be achieved. Most importantly, HSIB is being asked to begin operations without the legislation necessary to secure its independence and ensure that the safe space for its investigations is indeed safe. That undermines the whole purpose of HSIB. It is essential that the Government introduce the necessary legislation as soon as possible.

To ensure that the learning produced from HSIB's investigations leads to an improvement in standards, PACAC also reiterates its previous recommendations, made in our 2016 report, "PHSO review: Quality of NHS complaints investigations", that the Government should stipulate in the HSIB legislation: first, that HSIB has the responsibility to set the national standards by which all clinical investigations are conducted; secondly, that local NHS providers are responsible for implementing those standards according to the serious incident framework; and, thirdly, that the Care Quality Commission should continue to be responsible, as the regulator, for assessing the quality of clinical investigations at local level according to those standards.

The purpose of complaints is not just the redress of grievances—which I must say is extremely unsatisfactory in the NHS anyway—although that is clearly important; complaints are a tool by which public services can learn and improve. When medical professionals are forced primarily to be concerned with avoiding liability and responsibility and are trapped in a culture of blame, there can be no learning. There is an acute need for the Government to follow through on their commitment to promote a culture in which staff feel able to speak out and in which the emphasis is placed on learning, not blame. I very much hope that they will implement PACAC's recommendations as a step towards achieving that as soon as possible.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend for his work, and that of his Committee, on producing the report. He is absolutely right about HSIB and the need to underpin it properly. The Government have said that they would cap litigation costs at £100,000. I think my hon. Friend would accept that there will always be litigation, even if we get a more satisfactory means of redressing grievance, in the way he has suggested. Does he think that that cap would be appropriate, particularly since motor costs, for example, are capped at that level? Would that mean that people with grievances would be properly compensated while, sadly, their lawyers would not be?

Mr Jenkin: I confess I am not sighted on the proposal to cap litigation costs, but people resort to litigation only because they feel that their complaints are not being heard and that the problems they have identified in the service are not being addressed. People resort to litigation because they do not feel they are being told the truth. We know from our surgeries that most people who complain come in and say, "I only want to make sure this doesn't happen to somebody else. I don't want compensation." Nevertheless, because that public-spirited attitude to complaining is so often rebuffed in the health service, people resort to litigation because they feel there is a cover-up.

In other fields, such as aviation and marine investigations, where this kind of investigative process is already established and is designed to find the causes of accidents without blame, there is far less resort to litigation at the outset. That does not preclude litigation in the final analysis, but discovering the truth without blame is the first step towards reconciliation.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I, too, greatly welcome this report, as do my constituents. That may seem surprising to some of my colleagues, as, of course, my constituency is in Wales, but all my constituents use hospitals in England for elective care and specialist care, so this is as important to the people of Wales as it is to the people of England. I have also been involved in many of the complaints. Does the Chair of the Committee acknowledge that, in the debates that he has had and in any follow-up debate that he might have, the position of Welsh constituents is key, because, although they are in another Administration as far as health is concerned, they depend on hospitals in England for treatment?

Mr Jenkin: I am most grateful to my Welsh hon. Friend for his question. It gives me an opportunity to highlight not only my agreement with the point that he makes, but that this is just about healthcare safety investigations in England. By pursuing this policy to set up HSIB, the Government have embarked on a very, very major and significant reform, which the health services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are certainly watching. I can assure my hon. Friend that they are being watched all over the world. Different countries in different jurisdictions have tried using various bodies to deal with this question. I do not think that any country before England has embarked on a reform of this scale and nature that has the capacity to transform safety investigation in a health system. I very much hope that Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will either set up their own equivalent of HSIB, or employ HSIB as the pinnacle of their investigation system as well. This matter is not something that necessarily needs to be devolved any more than the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the Department for Transport.

Sir Peter Bottomley ( Worthing West) (Con): Does the Chairman agree that each of us receives from our constituents many more golden letters about their treatment in the health service than letters of complaint? When there are complaints or questions, openness and responsiveness matter most, and most of our constituents
are satisfied with that. HSIB will be for the pinnacle of the hardest cases, but most cases should be resolved locally by the GPs or the hospitals.

**Mr Jenkin**: I certainly agree that the vast majority of our constituents who experience the care of hospitals or GP practices are extremely grateful for the quality of care that they receive. However, we cannot underestimate how corrosive the blame culture has been throughout our health system. Crises such as those at Mid Staffordshire and at the Morecambe Bay maternity unit arise from the defensive culture that exists in the NHS. If we are to change that into a much more open and collaborative system of learning from mistakes, we need HSIB to set the tone throughout the entire organisation. It is not just about dealing with a few complaints, but about setting a whole new standard for a whole new profession in the NHS about how complaints and clinical incidents are investigated. I am most grateful to have the opportunity to present this report.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Labour welcomes this constructive report and thank all of those involved in producing it. It highlights some worrying statistics, including the fact that the most recent NHS staff survey found that 43% of staff thought that their organisations treat staff involved in near misses, errors and incidents fairly. Clearly, from the Chairman’s candid contribution today, there is a long way to go before we eradicate the culture of defensiveness that he has described. To give HSIB the strongest start, it was the clear view of the Committee, HSIB, the Expert Advisory Group, HSIB’s chief investigator and even the Minister himself that legislation is needed, but, as of today, no legislation has been forthcoming. Given that, does the Chair of the Committee agree that it might be better to delay implementation to allow time for legislation?

**Mr Jenkin**: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question and for his support. I am also extremely grateful to my Committee for its work on this report.

I hesitate to lose the progress that we have made. We have approved the appointment of the chief investigator of HSIB, who spent 25 years as chief investigator of the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the Department for Transport. He brings with him that wealth of experience and perspective about how this organisation should work. The answer is, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, for the Government to bring forward the legislation as quickly as possible. I know that efforts are being made in that direction, but perhaps the Minister will have something to tell us.

**The Minister of State, Department of Health** (Mr Philip Dunne): I wish to add my thanks to my hon. Friend and members of the Committee for their considered report. He has succinctly described to the House what more needs to be done systematically to transform the way in which the NHS learns from errors to improve patient safety. We support the main thrust of the Committee’s recommendations and will offer a detailed response to the report in due course. Like us, we put this matter right at the top of our agenda to change the culture within the NHS, of which he has spoken so eloquently today.

We are committed to making our hospitals and GP surgeries the safest in the world, supported by the NHS as the world’s largest learning organisation. The only way in which we will achieve that is through a learning rather than a blame culture characterised by openness, honesty and candour; listening to patients, families and staff; finding and facing the truth; and learning from errors and failures in care.

As my hon. Friend has indicated, the Government have accepted the recommendation of PACAC’s predecessor Committee to establish an independent healthcare safety investigation service. The Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch will be up and running from April. I join him in welcoming the appointment of Keith Conradi, the former chief inspector of the Air Accidents Investigation Branch, who has a strong track record of delivering high-quality investigations in aviation.

The hon. Gentleman’s Committee has again called for HSIB to be statutorily independent, and we agree that it should be as independent as possible if it is to discharge its functions fully and effectively, and we would not rule out the option of legislation. His Committee has also raised, in this week’s report, various suggestions for HSIB and its potential role in setting standards. We will be responding to that formally in due course.

We are committed to ensuring that the NHS becomes an organisation that learns from its mistakes. In response to the Care Quality Commission’s report, “Learning, Accountability and Candour”, from April this year all NHS trusts will be required to publish how many deaths they could have avoided had care been better, along with the lessons that they have learned.

Before I pose my question, I should like to thank the Committee for its response to the Government’s recent consultation, “Providing a Safe Space in Healthcare Safety Investigations”, and we will be responding to it shortly.

Improvements in safety, incident handling and learning in the NHS will not happen overnight, but does my hon. Friend agree that the shared programme of work demonstrates a commitment, across the care system, to improve the way in which all serious patient safety incidents are viewed and treated, and is that not a crucial foundation for lasting change?

**Mr Jenkin**: I am most grateful to the Minister for his question and for the fact that he has personally appeared at the Dispatch Box today with his opposite number from Her Majesty’s Official Opposition. I know that his presence here underlines the commitment of the Secretary of State to this programme of change.

I very much welcome the shared programme of work to which my hon. Friend refers, but, in taking evidence for this particular report, we found that there was some dislocation between the various bodies involved in it. We conclude that it is only Ministers, and probably only the Secretary of State, who can draw this together to ensure that there is a coherent strategy and a plan, which is what we emphasise in this report.

Finally, my hon. Friend refers to legislation in passing, but I hope that valiant efforts are being made in that regard. Perhaps, once we have put this matter right at the top of our agenda to change the culture within the NHS, of which he has spoken so eloquently today.
refers and on which he thanks the Committee for its contribution. The safe space has to be legislated for. Without legislation, there is no safe space. The AAIB, the Marine Accident Investigation Branch of the Department for Transport and equivalent bodies could not possibly function unless they can provide people with protection, so that those people can come and talk openly and off the record about what has happened. That has transformed the safety culture in other areas, and it is the transformation that we need in the health service. I leave with the Minister the word “legislation” echoing in his ears, and I very much look forward to making further progress with him on these matters.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): The House is grateful to the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee for bringing his report before the House this afternoon and for taking questions.
to their MP about any non-military matters of concern. We have taken that great news to be an active commitment to the covenant vision of helping to reduce disadvantage for military families. However, the reality is not quite so clear because the notice still does not reflect this sentiment. I ask the Minister to look again at the DIN, which affects all Ministry of Defence employees—military and civilian.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): I do not intend to respond to all questions at the time they are raised throughout the debate, but this is a matter of significant importance. I want to make it absolutely clear that any member of the service family who wishes to approach their Member of Parliament can do so in the way any civilian would. I am not sure that the DIN does need to be changed—I am not sure that it is as ambiguous as my hon. Friend suggests, although I am happy to check—but if it does, I am happy to commit to doing that.

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank the Minister very much for that intervention. I hope that we can look at that in detail.

The hierarchical and command-based rules that are needed for military discipline in war should never create a barrier whereby military personnel and their families are not free to raise concerns about day-to-day issues that affect them. Those issues, to name but a few, might be: family housing matters, which are subject to the MOD’s oversight; school matters, which come under the purview of the Department for Education; or health matters, which are the responsibility of the Department of Health.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point, although it is one that rather puzzles me. I have spent 20 years in one of the most military constituencies in Britain. I see service people in my surgeries day in, day out, and I deal with all kinds of issues on their behalf. I have never once heard of any kind of restriction on them speaking to me.

Mrs Trevelyan: That is very encouraging, but my postbag over the past 18 months—I have received correspondence from not only local people, but service personnel throughout the country—suggests that people often have a real sense of anxiety about coming forward. Sometimes when wives have done so, there have been repercussions for their husbands, who have been challenged about stepping outside the chain of command into the civilian arena of their MP’s office. I hope that we can encourage other soldiers and their families to do what the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) have done.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I commend the hon. Lady for securing the debate. She is commendable, and I am very pleased that, in principle, the Government have accepted the point, which has been raised on a number of occasions. I am very pleased that, in principle, the Government recognised the issue when the correction was made back in 2015. Although, as I think hon. Members will accept, there are questions over retrospection that we must consider carefully because of the precedent that may be set, I reassure the House, as I have reassured individual Members before, that we are looking carefully into the matter.

Mrs Trevelyan: We will leave that very interesting point with the Minister. We must continually be mindful about war pensions, especially if people are experiencing real hardship and strain. The covenant exists to support not only young men and women coming back from recent wars, but those who have supported and served over many decades. The hon. Gentleman’s question can go on the Minister’s list.

Mark Lancaster rose—

Mrs Trevelyan: Oh, the Minister is going to answer the question.

Mark Lancaster: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for making his point, which has been raised on a number of occasions. I am very pleased that, in principle, the Government are answering the question. I can assure the hon. Member that, in principle, the Government have accepted the point, but by other Government Departments, and wider business and community networks across our nation—to help to reduce disadvantage for our service families and veterans.

This year’s report highlights some of the great work done during 2016 in a number of areas, including: to build up the corporate covenant, and to encourage more private sector businesses to get involved in the practicalities of becoming corporate covenant signatories; to improve regional consistency in the levels of support received by the armed forces, especially through the community covenant; to improve on communicating what the covenant is, what it does and who it supports; and, most critically, to continue to prioritise issues that are known to be creating disadvantage for service families and veterans. I will take a few minutes to discuss each of those areas in the report, beginning with the corporate covenant.

The MOD team that is focused on building up the number of businesses and organisations that sign up to the corporate covenant has been working as hard as ever. More than 1,300 businesses have signed up to make their organisations more military-friendly and understanding, and able to benefit from the great skill sets that service leavers and reservists can bring to business. Last year, our all-party group on the armed forces covenant wrote to the then 850 organisations that had signed up to ask them what they were doing as part of their commitment. From the big boys such as BT,
Google and Hewlett Packard, to small companies such as DJ Rees Services in Merthyr Tydfil, those that have signed up are changing the way they do business and seeking staff so that they support the covenant concept.

I mention DJ Rees because its reply was my favourite. This decorating, building and refurbishment business—an SME—decided that, having signed up to the corporate covenant, it would ask its whole supply chain to do so as well. It drafted a covenant on behalf of each supplier, encouraging them to sign up to the bronze employer recognition scheme—the first rung of the scheme’s ladder—and formally asking them to commit to provide one week’s work placement as part of the armed forces employability pathway scheme. In this way, DJ Rees was able to create, with its suppliers, many more work placements in its part of Wales. Just imagine the impact we could have if every large business that has signed up to the corporate covenant drove such a commitment through its supply chain.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady agree that small and medium-sized businesses in other parts of the United Kingdom, such as European Circuits in my constituency, which have businesses in other parts of the United Kingdom, such as European Circuits in my constituency, which has signed up to the corporate covenant, can also play a major part?

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am keen that MPs from both sides of the House become more involved in spreading the message about the benefits of businesses in their constituencies signing the corporate covenant.

As MPs, we are perhaps more connected than anyone to our local business community, so we have a great opportunity to evangelise about the importance of businesses committing to the covenant and the life-changing impact that that can have for military families. We have more than 5 million SMEs— businesses employing fewer than 250 people—which make up 99% of all businesses across the UK. We have a long way to go to make every business covenant-friendly. We have 1,300 signed up so far, and they are committed in their small or larger way to supporting our military families. We therefore look forward to working with the MOD and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to increase participation in the corporate covenant scheme exponentially in the year ahead.

A key way in which businesses can benefit themselves and help service families is employing military spouses, who have faced a long-standing challenge to find employment that matches their skills and qualifications because, too often, employers see a military address and decide that even though the potential employee might be the best candidate for the role, they will not be around for more than two years. However, a committed military spouse, who will certainly have a posting for two years, and often longer nowadays, should be as valued as any civilian candidate.

From my conversations with military wives, it seems that the key block to getting the right job is often that an employer sees that the applicant’s address is a military base. Will the Minister therefore consider working with me and his BEIS colleagues to remove the address requirement from job application forms, perhaps in favour of something such as a distance-from-work criterion, to ensure that there is no unconscious bias against military spouses?

Ongoing work at Stanford University shows clearly that gender-neutral applications alter employer choices by removing a marked bias towards male applicants. In the same way, it would be fantastic if, as part of our continuing real commitment to the covenant, BEIS led a trial on removing addresses from job applications to see whether that helps to increase successful employment opportunities for military spouses.

It is great news that every council in England and Scotland has now signed up to the community covenant and that colleagues in Northern Ireland continue to make progress on finding ways to build a framework through Stormont and local councils to improve the commitment to the covenant. The community covenant could have one of the greatest positive impacts for military families—serving and after service—because our local councils deal with housing allocation policy, brief GPs and health professionals about the needs of the armed forces community, set up webpages to help to join up local services, support local charities in the military space, and deal with school admissions policy.

Colleagues will no doubt share with the House more details of the excellent work in their areas, so I will raise just one key area with the Minister: school admissions policy. My ten-minute rule Bill, which is going through the House at the moment, calls on the Department for Education to change admissions policy so that military families moving at short notice can get the right school place at any time. I very much hope that the MOD will support the Bill.

This year’s report refers to the work done to identify educational disadvantage. My postbag led me to bring in my Bill because too many families moving at short notice could not access a school place without ending up in the appeals system, which creates even more stress for parents and children alike. Excellent work from the University of Winchester, which the MOD is supporting, shows a marked impact when it comes to higher education outputs for military children. We must at least reduce the stress of moving schools to help these kids to reach their potential.

Lastly—this is a key part of this year’s report—we must look at the prioritisation of key issues that create stress for serving families if we are to reduce the very real retention risk we are now experiencing. Having brought the numbers in our armed forces down for many years to create a leaner, peacetime force, this is an urgent challenge. We must always remember that, without the human capital, all the ships, submarines, jets, planes, helicopters and tanks in the world are no use to us.

Our people are the most important component of the triumvirate of equipment, estates and personnel that makes up our world-class military resource. We train them to the highest standards in the world, and we must ensure that we do all we can for them because, notwithstanding the moral component—I say this as an accountant—we want to make sure we get the best value for money for our investment. If we lose a pilot for lack of a decent house, or a nuclear engineer for lack of a school place, we have failed to assess the value-for-money implications to the taxpayer and the capability needs of our services, and we are failing to enact the spirit of the covenant in practice.
This year’s report highlights the excellent work done by the Department of Health, and internally by the MOD with Defence Medical Services, to build a more robust infrastructure framework. Substantial work has taken place to tackle hearing loss issues, and that will be an interesting area to follow in the year ahead, because the NHS hearing loss treatment guidelines have recently changed. For those whose hearing has been damaged as a result of service, it is to be hoped that they will get full treatment to restore their hearing.

The launch of the e-learning for healthcare programme to help GPs to gain greater understanding and awareness will be useful but, of course, ensuring that the transfer of all medical records works across the country will be key to helping GPs to know their patient’s history and to work with them when crises arise in the years after service.

The new veterans’ gateway is a great step forward in helping families and local service providers, as well as MPs. We have high hopes for it, although there are concerns that gaps in mental healthcare provision, in particular, will remain a stubborn block to providing real and needed support for military families who are, for instance, supporting post-traumatic stress disorder sufferers who are unable to access the long-term medical interventions that they need to help them recover and lead full lives once again. Perhaps the Minister could give us a little more detail about how suppliers at the other end of the gateway will be supported by relevant Government Departments so that there is capacity to meet this well-identified need.

The report also talks about developing an alternative approach to the provision of accommodation for service personnel and their families. I would be failing in my duty to all our military families if I did not mention the crisis in military housing, which is a real and present danger to the retention of large numbers of our highly trained personnel. I have tackled the problems with CarillionAmey’s maintenance contracts in a number of forums already, and the Minister has been enormously helpful in getting a trial MPs’ hotline set up to help us to sort out practical problems for families in service accommodation. However, the problems are extensive and cause enormous frustration to too many.

I have challenged the Minister on the combined accommodation assessment system rental changes, and not a single family I have spoken to minds that their rent is going up, but if the system is to reflect normal social housing rates under the decent homes plus standard, their homes really do need to be DH plus. Too many are not, and the challenge system has been weighted against families getting a fair and honest appraisal of their home’s categorisation. There is more to do to rebuild the loss of trust we really are facing.

However, the most challenging part of the housing debate is the future accommodation model, which the MOD is working on. According to the report, it is aimed at supporting families “to live in the private rental market or enabling them to purchase their own home.” I am grateful to the Minister for publishing the data sets from the survey this week, and we are looking at them closely. I ask him also to publish the additional notes that personnel wrote. He said he would do that, but they do not seem to be in the initial statistical data sets that are online.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): I hear what the hon. Lady says about military accommodation and I think that we all genuinely share her concern. Does she agree that it is particularly worrying that the report indicates that satisfaction has actually decreased? Those satisfaction levels are very low indeed.

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. We should be extremely mindful of the continuing low morale in all services, although the Royal Marines are the noble exception, perhaps because they are very busy on a great number of operations. We should be mindful of the critical point that he raises.

The key concerns in the FAM debate are that, given that the drive towards the universal housing allowance has been clearly set out in documents since 2009, the FAM survey of personnel is just a smokescreen to bring the policy in anyway. No one disputes the aim of providing a way to access good-quality and affordable housing as part of the offer, but we must get that right. Whatever the changes involved in locating the Army and the Air Force in fewer locations, such as by moving submarine activity to Faslane and so on, the reality is that, when deployed, in small numbers or large—we can never predict the future—our military families need to be looked after in decent, well-maintained housing, and to have a framework of real support around them and their children. If we fail in that, we will lose more and more of our personnel at a much earlier stage in their careers to the civilian world. That is not value for money, and it is not good for our capability, or for the morale and corporate memory needed to maintain the unique quality of our armed forces.

Mark Lancaster: I do slightly take offence at my hon. Friend’s suggestion that the survey is just a smokescreen to bring in this policy. The purpose of the survey is to inform opinion. Some 27,000 of our service personnel responded to the survey, and it will form the evidence base for how we move this policy forward. If my hon. Friend is suggesting that we should not have surveyed our armed forces personnel, I entirely disagree with her. However, let me be clear that no firm decisions have yet been made about how this policy will proceed, and I suggest that we should not have surveyed service personnel is fundamentally wrong.

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank the Minister for his comments. My suggestion about a smokescreen is based on the feeling among military families and personnel that four questions were asked, but that the existing SFA opportunity was not among them. There was an opportunity in a separate, non-mandatory question for military families who thought that SFA was a good thing to indicate why they thought so. The survey contained four questions about the four different choices that military families might want to make, which included living in privately rented accommodation and owning their own home. I simply reflect the voices that have shouted very loudly at me that there is a deep sense of anxiety, as all the families’ federations surveys have indicated.

Sir Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Much as I respect my hon. Friend the Minister, when we read the questions in the screenshot we can see how they are designed to produce a particular answer. To take just one example, the most common reason why people are
in favour of change—two thirds are nominally in favour—is that they want to live in a better house. Nowhere are they told that once they go into the private sector, they will be totally responsible for persuading landlords to do something about the maintenance of their homes—unlike in the very expensive Australian model, in which the Department of Defence has kept that responsibility.

Mrs Trevelyan: My hon. Friend reflects the deep concerns about the way in which the survey was put together and the framing of the questions, which left a lot of personnel unable to give the answers that they wanted to give. I think the Minister is mindful of that, and I am glad to hear that no formal decisions have yet been made.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I do not want to get involved in a dispute between two of my hon. Friends, but does my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) agree that, of all the surveys published in recent times, the one that matters most is the monthly service personnel statistics of 19 January this year? They show, sadly, both reservists and regulars voting with their feet.

Mrs Trevelyan: Sadly, that is the reality. I talk continually about retention risk. That risk is very real, and we are suffering from it.

I want to take the Minister and the House a little further into the FAM survey. The survey talked about choices, but no one felt that SFA was a choice that the MOD wanted to keep on the table. The Minister and I will continue to discuss the matter, but that is what the personnel who completed the survey felt. Giving service personnel the choice to live where they want is fine, if the option to live with their family when not deployed during the week is real. However, housing costs in too many parts of the country where forces are based are too high, so the likely reality is that families will be spread across the country and unsupported. We cannot plan for a peaceful world when all our troops are at home.

We are undermanned, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) says, our recruitment numbers are a challenge. The offer needs to hold up if recruits are to remain in service once they have families, and a key component is getting the housing offer right. Choice is a great thing, but it simply will not work to drive a policy change that breaks up patch life or creates effective salary drops because of housing market stresses.

The annual report shows the continuous work of the Department’s team to help to reduce disadvantage. That is commendable, but there is so much more to do. Not a single person here would ever want to hear the words that I have heard far too often: “This is just too hard; we are going to leave the service.” The most recent continuous attitude survey shows that there is a stark gap between the 76% of respondents who are proud of their service and the 45% who would suggest that one should join up. That is a gap that we cannot fix.

I hope that in the year ahead we can focus on actively encouraging service families to talk to their MPs when they have problems, so that a strong new constructive dialogue can begin. The covenant is one of the most powerful tools we have to drive through good decisions, to reduce the looming capability risk gap and to increase our servicemen and women’s belief in their value to us. I fervently hope that we can harness such a dialogue across the House in 2017.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I apologise to the House for my inaudibility. I shall attempt by hand signals to explain what I am trying to say.

2.14 pm

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) in this debate. I welcome the publication of the annual report on the military covenant, but Members will not be surprised if I raise, as I have done on previous occasions, concerns about the implementation of the covenant in Northern Ireland. May I commend the Minister at this stage? I know that he is totally committed to his work as Minister with responsibility for veterans, dealing with the military covenant. We appreciate the interest he has shown in Northern Ireland and look forward to further visits from him in the near future.

May I draw the attention of the House to a letter I received recently pursuant to a case that I had been dealing with on behalf of a constituent, who is a veteran of our armed forces? I had written to the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland, Michelle O’Neill, who is now the leader of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland, having replaced the former Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness. In her response, she said:

“As you are aware the Armed Forces Covenant is not in place here and ex Military personnel therefore do not have the 13YJ code (the code which identifies someone with a history of military service) added to their clinical records for GP referrals.

The Armed Forces Covenant has been adopted by England, Scotland and Wales—

note, not Northern Ireland—

“to provide equal access to healthcare where it can be linked to military service, serving personnel, their families and those who leave the Military Forces. The Covenant has not been adopted here as health care arrangements are delivered on an equitable basis to all members of the community.”

That highlights the extent of the problem we are dealing with in Northern Ireland. I do not include the Minister in this, but I have to say that some associated with the Ministry of Defence are in denial about that problem. The reality is that after more than 30 years of Operation Banner, we have literally tens of thousands of veterans living in Northern Ireland. Indeed, I would argue that in our region we probably have a higher proportion of veterans than most other regions of the United Kingdom.

It is worth bearing it in mind that many of those veterans served with the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service in the communities in which they lived. That brought with it added pressure for them and their families, to the extent that recent reports have indicated that there is a very high incidence of post-conflict trauma among veterans in Northern Ireland.

The University of Ulster is undertaking a study to try to evaluate the level of mental illness among veterans in Northern Ireland, but it is known to be quite high. We are faced with a problem whereby veterans seeking help for their mental illness are being told by the Department...
of Health, “We are sorry, but if you are a veteran in Northern Ireland, the armed forces covenant does not apply here, so we cannot deal with you on the terms on which you might be dealt with by the health service in England, Scotland or Wales.”

The armed forces covenant does not give preferential treatment to veterans. It merely seeks to ensure that those veterans are not disadvantaged by virtue of their military service. And yet the Minister hides behind the notion that applying the military covenant in Northern Ireland would somehow undermine the basis of equality that is at the heart of the Belfast agreement and section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. We in this House, and the Department, need to do more to challenge this muddled thinking and this wrong approach.

The Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs has investigated the matter. In evidence to the Committee, Ministers said that there is not a problem, and that section 75 applies but does not interfere with the implementation of the covenant. But here we have, in black and white, from the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland a clear demonstration of the prevailing attitude that the armed forces covenant does not apply in Northern Ireland, and that it has not been adopted there. Yet my understanding is very clear: the armed forces covenant applies across the United Kingdom and ought to be fully implemented across the UK. It is wrong that veterans in Northern Ireland are suffering from a lack of recognition of the covenant, and we need to do something to put that right.

In evidence to the Defence Committee, the Minister stated in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) that it was the view of the Department that the military covenant in Northern Ireland was being implemented to the extent that some 83% or 84% of its provisions applied there. I cannot evaluate that assessment, but, given that access to healthcare is such an enormously important element of the covenant, the only thing I would say to the Minister and the Department is that if the Department of Health in Northern Ireland says, “Sorry, the covenant does not apply”, I am not convinced that the 84% figure for the proportion of the covenant being implemented in Northern Ireland is an accurate reflection of where we really are.

Mark Lancaster: Let me be absolutely clear. I will not try to evaluate the 83% or 84% figures, but I have been clear both in my evidence to the Select Committee and in the House that, while progress is being made in Northern Ireland—yes, absolutely, the covenant does apply in Northern Ireland—I fully accept that more work needs to be done to ensure an equitable status for veterans who reside in Northern Ireland and those who reside in the rest of the United Kingdom. I have made trying to achieve that one of my priorities during this year.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: The hon. Gentleman is a very good friend of the veterans in Northern Ireland. I share his expectation and, indeed, his hope that that is exactly what will happen. I just want to ensure that Northern Ireland does not lose out, and that Ministers will co-operate with the Northern Ireland Executive and local organisations representing veterans to ensure that this does happen.

I want to raise a concern about a recent decision by Combat Stress to withdraw its regional welfare officers service from Northern Ireland. I have been contacted by a number of veterans from across Northern Ireland, many of them suffering from mental health problems, who have benefited from that very valuable service, which has offered them support at a time of great need. When I met the chief executive of Combat Stress, Sue Freeth, I
[Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson]

was very impressed—and I am very impressed—by what it is doing in Northern Ireland. Sue indicated to me that it would cost in the region of £60,000 per annum to retain this welfare support service. I have written to the Secretary of State about this issue, and I really hope that that funding can be found. It is not a big amount, but it has a big impact.

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman raises a really important issue. It is an issue not just for Northern Ireland, but for the mainland of the UK. The Minister will perhaps address this when he responds, but I cannot for the life of me see why the extraordinarily important welfare contribution made by charities such as Combat Stress—I am a very strong supporter of it—should not be continued. It is very important to have such a link, and I hope the right hon. Gentleman agrees that this is not simply a matter of medical care.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I cannot add to what the hon. Gentleman has said. He is absolutely right, and I urge the Minister to look at this.

In drawing my remarks to a close, I just want to make two points. First, the aftercare service provided by the Royal Irish Regiment is absolutely crucial. In Northern Ireland, we have many thousands of former soldiers who served with the Royal Irish Regiment Home Service and the Ulster Defence Regiment, and the aftercare service is undertaking very valuable work in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will ensure that the aftercare service, which is much needed, will be retained.

My final point is an important one. In Westminster on Saturday, together with the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) and for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan), I shared a rally of veterans from across the United Kingdom of Operation Banner, the longest-running military operation in the history of the British Army. They are concerned about the recent arrests and prosecutions of former soldiers who served in Northern Ireland, some of whom are in their 60s and 70s, and we share their concerns.

We share the concern that after years of service to our country, men and women who ought to be enjoying their retirement are now waiting for the knock on the door. We also share the concern about the circumstances, because it seems that the focus is on what the armed forces and the police did in Northern Ireland, and much less on what the terrorists did. It is worth bearing in mind that the vast majority of the 3,000 unsolved killings in Northern Ireland were carried out by terrorist organisations, yet the vast majority of the resources currently going into investigations are for those relating to alleged killings by the armed forces and the police, which is unacceptable.

I encourage the Minister and his colleagues, both in his Department and in other relevant Departments, to give serious consideration to the introduction of a statute of limitations that would protect the men and women who served our country and who deserve that protection. I recognise that no one is above the law, but when cases have been investigated—in some cases not just once, but twice—and the men and women who served our country have been exonerated only to find, years later, that those cases are being reopened, then I think there is something wrong. It is having a big impact on recruitment to our armed forces. Young men and women are looking at what is happening and asking themselves, “Why would I join the armed forces if I face the prospect of being prosecuted?” I repeat that no one is above the law, but I really do think the Government need to act. They need to protect the men and women who protected us in our darkest hour.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I hope we can manage this afternoon without a formal time limit, because this is a pleasant debate in which there will be a lot of agreement. For everyone to have a chance to speak it would be courteous if Members were to speak for under nine minutes. That would give everybody else a chance to contribute.

2.30 pm

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) with whom, alongside the hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan), I shared not exactly a platform but the plinth on the George V statue on the other side of the road from here last Saturday when 1,000 troops were there.

I endorse everything the right hon. Gentleman said. It is absolutely immoral that the men who fought in that filthy war, wearing the Queen’s uniform and doing their best for their country, facing an enemy who wore civilian clothes and lurked in the shadows among the civilian population, are now being dragged from their beds at 6 o’clock in the morning in dawn raids and dragged off to Northern Ireland. It is unacceptable. I am afraid I have to say to my hon. Friend the Minister on the Government Front Bench that this is not a matter simply for the Police Service of Northern Ireland or for the prosecuting authorities. It is, as I told the Prime Minister, a matter for Ministers. This is a matter of public policy and it must be addressed. I strongly endorse the case made by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley for a statute of limitations. I know many of my hon. Friends would have been on that plinth with me had that been possible.

Mr Gray: On a similar and related point, does my hon. Friend agree that firmly within the Government’s remit is the Iraq Historic Allegations Team, which is, outrageously, criticising 4,500 of our soldiers? It looks like 60, or maybe a little fewer than that, will be prosecuted. Does my hon. Friend not agree that this is an absolute disgrace?

Sir Gerald Howarth: I entirely agree. I felt at the time that that man Phil Shiner was a disgrace. He was a dreadful man engaged in the cowardly and unacceptable activity of trying to find people to stand up and accuse their fellow countrymen who had gone to relieve the people of Iraq from their suffering. He tried to do down those people and I am very pleased to hear today that he has been struck off. Frankly, I do not think that that is enough; but then I always was a supporter of capital punishment.

Dr Murrison: I of course agree with my hon. Friend. Does he agree—I am trying to think of something nice to say about IHA T; I appreciate that that is very difficult—that IHA T has at least the benefit of being relatively
contemporaneous, unlike Operation Banner? Under Operation Banner, people are being dragged out of their beds many decades after the event and trying to work out what they were doing three or four or five decades ago. That is very difficult indeed. At least IHA T is investigating within a relatively short space of time from the alleged incidents.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend who succeeded me as Minister with responsibility for international security strategy at the Ministry of Defence. I would like to say more on this subject, but you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have asked us to be brief.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on introducing the debate and on her incredible work in highlighting this issue. The military covenant is not specific to any particular party. All of us, across the Floor, can embrace this issue. It is a covenant not between the Government and the armed forces, but between the armed forces and the people. We, as Members and Ministers, are acting on behalf of the people. I represent the home of the British Army, Aldershot, which has about 5,000 troops and their families, and we feel that acutely.

Project Allenby Connaught is the largest private finance initiative in the country. Nobody knows anything about it because it is hugely successful—a £19 billion PFI which, I have to say, was started under the Labour Government. I would like to put on record the fantastic job Aspire is doing in running the garrison under the PFI. Admittedly, it has released land to build 3,850 units of accommodation to sell. Nevertheless, the result has been a complete transformation of the military facilities in Aldershot. We have some of the finest single living accommodation and new headquarters—the recently opened Montgomery House—for the home command.

The whole garrison in Aldershot has been transformed thanks to this PFI, so a small note of thanks to Geoff Hoon. He opened the fantastic sports facility, which is the home of the army sports board. There are world-class tennis courts. It really is a great garrison and I pay tribute to all those who have contributed to it. I rarely receive complaints about accommodation. The Minister, whom I actually met in my constituency when he was a sapper with the Royal School of Military Engineering—

Sir Julian Brazier: The picture my hon. Friend paints is an excellent one, but I think he would confirm that the cost of housing, both to buy and rent, in his constituency is extremely high. Is it not so much better to have the arrangement he describes than to put people out on allowances in the private sector?

Sir Gerald Howarth: Absolutely right. I can tell my hon. Friend that the average cost of housing in Aldershot is £259,000. That illustrates the challenge for people in the military trying to find their own homes.

Rushmoor Borough Council, which signed up to the military covenant in 2012, is doing a really good job. There is a tremendous relationship between the garrison and the council. Recently, the council met Hampshire County Council and the garrison commander—another great man, Lieutenant Colonel Mac MacGregor, who is doing a great job. They will carry out a workshop together to discuss how better they can implement the covenant in Aldershot. That is good news.

CarillionAmey is doing excellent work on the married quarters. It has created a forum for quarterly meetings with the wives and I very much hope that that will prove to be very successful.

Mike Jackson House is doing a stunningly good job of providing supported housing to single veterans who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. If any Members know people in my area who could benefit from it, I ask them please to get in touch with me.

As an illustration of how the garrison and the town are working together, a lot of companies have signed up to the community matters partnership project. I am very pleased to say that the new chairman is none other than the garrison commander. There is more that can be done, but a lot of good work has come out of the covenant. It is important to recognise what it has delivered.

I am also bound to say that the Aldershot military wives choir is of course the finest military wives choir in the country. Since my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) is nowhere to be seen, I can confidently say that without fear of challenge. When they come here to sing, I hope right hon. and hon. Members will accept my invitation to listen to them.

The covenant has done a tremendous job to engage with the public on the need to support our armed forces. Much more needs to be done, however, and most importantly on accommodation. I have people who have no connection with the Aldershot area, save that they have served there, come to see me having left the Army—sometimes their marriages have broken up because of PTSD or other such difficulties—and although the council does not put them at a disadvantage, it does not put them at the top of the list either. These men and women deserve to go to the top of the social housing list, as against some of the young ladies who come and see me and say they need social housing because they fell pregnant. It is not quite the same as having suffered PTSD. That is the big challenge. The other big challenge that the Minister should take away is that we will not rest until those who served in Operation Banner no longer face the risk of prosecution while the terrorists get away scot free. That is not acceptable.

2.40 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), although I did not agree with his last comment about women—but we will leave that to one side, as we are here to discuss the military.

I am never sure about these things, but I think I should start by declaring a non-pecuniary interest: my son-in-law is serving with the Army in Cyprus as an active reservist and my daughter has received some leaflets and so on from those supporting families with partners serving abroad. I say that just in case it matters somewhere along the line.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on bringing this debate to the House and the other Members who supported her, the hon. Members for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) and for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat). It is incumbent on us to debate these matters. We all agree that the armed forces—those who have served and those currently serving, as well as their families—deserve great credit and huge respect. When I taught in the 1980s—other
Members might remember this—we did not, in some respects, celebrate or commemorate poppy day, and sometimes it was regarded as inappropriate for military personnel to come into schools. It represents a great step forward for our country that over the last few years the military have been welcome in our schools and we have celebrated poppy day properly. It teaches our children and young people the importance of service, how they live in a country that has been protected by people for generations and that the freedoms they deserve were hard won and need to be maintained. It is important that we discuss these matters, and it is wonderful now to see so many young people at remembrance and other such events through the year. I am sure that everyone has noticed that. It is a huge step forward for us all, and it is happening across the country, including in Northern Ireland—I have been there and seen it for myself. Incidentally, I agreed with many of the remarks of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson). I know how hard he has worked, along with his colleague the hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan), on these matters.

I wish to challenge the Government on a couple of points, but I want to put that in context, because today’s report is generally a very positive one about the progress being made. From a consensual point of view, I think we all believe that progress is being made, but we have heard about accommodation and other such matters, and we all want to try to accelerate that progress and say to the Minister, “These are the challenges that still remain”. I make my comments, therefore, having recognised that much progress has been made. To be fair to the Minister, he recognised that himself in his evidence on 17 January to the Defence Committee.

In every aspect of the covenant, we have made huge progress, but there remain problems. Although every local authority has signed up—as I understand it—their record on implementation and action is variable. We have to find a way of holding local authorities to account. Where they have signed up to things, how do we hold them to account more effectively and help them deliver the outcomes they have committed themselves to? For example, a Local Government Association report has found that, regardless of our efforts, 40% of those who have served in the armed forces still feel that their service personnel is not good enough that some of our service personnel are living in such appalling accommodation. A massive defence estate reorganisation is now taking place affecting some 27,000 families. There is an opportunity there, as well as a challenge, for the Government.

I agree very much with the comments of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed about schools admission policy. It raises an issue that the Minister might want to address in his remarks. What is the Government’s view of not disadvantaging service personnel as opposed to giving them preferential treatment? My own view is that the public accept, in certain circumstances, that we should advantage service personnel because of their service to the country, and I think that schools admissions is one such area in which they should be advantaged.

Sir Gerald Howarth: In Aldershot, I find that Hampshire County Council has been incredibly enlightened: it makes allowances for all the schools in its budgets for what it calls “turbulence”. I am not hearing many complaints at all, so I suggest that the hon. Gentleman has a word with his local education authority.

Vernon Coaker: I am making the more general point that the situation varies across the country. I am sure that it is really good in some local education authorities, but it is not so good elsewhere. Perhaps the situation in Aldershot, which is in Hampshire, is particularly good because there are a lot of service personnel, so they have experience. The Government need to consider what happens when service personnel disperse to areas across the country that do not have so many service personnel and how to give them the same quality of provision.

Finally, the issue of mental health will not go away. Significant numbers of veterans are still struggling to access the services that they need. We can debate why that is, but the reality is that things need to be improved and more needs to be done. This is a hugely significant debate—it has almost been a discussion—and we all want the best for our veterans. We talk about their service to the country, and we need to make sure that the country does its best for them.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who has maintained his interest in the armed forces and the military despite the fact that he is no longer formally responsible for them. I disagree with his last point about positive discrimination in favour of the armed services, but I will come back to that in a moment. Apart from that, I endorse all that he had to say. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), who drilled down into the report with tremendous care. She does an enormous amount of work on behalf of our armed services through her all-party group on the armed forces covenant. She has entered into the armed forces parliamentary scheme with an incredible level of enthusiasm and dedication. She also comes to every all-party group dinner and event—her commitment and enthusiasm for the armed services is not just because she fancies Royal Marines.
On the subject of the armed forces covenant, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr. Murrison). I am glad to see him in the Chamber and I hope we might hear from him later. Some years ago, he wrote the seminal work on the armed forces covenant, “Tommy This an’ Tommy That”. I have the Library’s copy, and I recommend it to colleagues across the House. At least partly as a result of his work, the armed forces covenant was written into law in the Armed Forces Act 2011, so we owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. Incidentally, the same applies to his work on mental healthcare for veterans, on which he wrote a seminal report. Most of his recommendations have been carried out by subsequent Governments, and we should recognise his huge service to veterans.

All of us in the Chamber agree on the need for the armed forces covenant. There is no question about that. Some of us had doubts about whether it should be written into law, but none the less, it was. I welcome the fact that an annual report is now published; it is important to hold the Government’s feet to the fire. However, it would be useful if we had an annual debate on the matter alongside other defence debates. The Government could bring the report to the House and invite a debate rather than relying on the good offices of the Backbench Business Committee. Surely the Government should say, “This is our report. Please ask us questions about it.” I hope that the Minister might consider doing so in future.

We all support the principles behind the armed forces covenant. There is no question about that. It is a contract between the people and the armed forces. In my constituency, the 200-odd occasions when the good people of Royal Wootton Bassett have turned out to welcome home and pay their respects to the 450 coffins returning from Afghanistan perhaps epitomise all the good things that the people of Britain think about the armed forces covenant. We realise that the armed forces do things we would not do, so we must look after, respect and honour them for that, and I am very glad that we do.

The things that we do for the armed forces are important. We must make sure that their physical and mental health are looked after, both when they are serving and afterwards—incidentally, the covenant is not just about veterans and families, but about serving soldiers, sailors and airmen. We must look after their health for the rest of their lives—if they are injured, for example—and we must look after their housing and their children’s education. That is absolutely right, and we must do that.

However, I disagree slightly with the hon. Member for Gedling. In a constituency such as mine, which is largely military—some of the schools, for example, are virtually entirely military—if we allowed the military disproportionately to have access to schools and put them to the top of the housing list, for example, that would, by definition, disadvantage civilians. I am not certain that I could go to my constituents and say, “I’m awfully sorry, your children can’t get into that school because we have given those spaces to military children” or, “You can’t have a council house, because we have given it to the military.” I am not sure that is right. The point behind the covenant should be that the military are not disadvantaged because of their service. However, they should not necessarily be given an advantage over the rest of the community either, otherwise support for the military covenant would quickly disappear.

Wiltshire has been outstanding in its support for the covenant over many years. We set up the civil military partnership in 2006. We have 15,000 serving personnel, 15,000 dependants and 54,000 veterans—and growing. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) claimed that he represented the home of the British Army, but I rather suspect that Wiltshire is, in fact, now the home of the British Army. We have enormous numbers of serving and veteran personnel in the area. As a result, the council has done a huge amount, encouraging local organisations and working with the housing association and the schools, to implement the military covenant in Wiltshire. I pay particular tribute to my noble Friend Baroness Scott of Bybrook, who has taken the lead in this matter over so many years as leader of Wiltshire Council.

None the less, in addition to the community covenant and the local government covenant, we must not forget all the other people who make such great contributions to the welfare of our soldiers and veterans. I am glad that the Minister and I are both wearing the SSAFA tie this afternoon. It is terribly important that we should not forget the charitable side of things, and there are a huge number of charities doing useful things. I was very proud recently to be made the patron of Operation Christmas Box, which sends 25,000 Christmas boxes to all our armed services on deployment around the world every Christmas and is hugely appreciated by the soldiers, sailors and airmen. These things are important. They are not a formal part of the military covenant, but they achieve many of the things that the covenant does. Let us not forget the charitable sector, the local government sector and the business sector, alongside all that the Government do for our armed services.

So far this has been a largely consensual and agreeable sort of debate. I do not mean to detract from that in any shape or form, but I have two or three questions to ask about the way in which the covenant is operating, which the Minister might like to reply to or perhaps take into consideration in the year ahead, as he applies the covenant.

First, I am concerned about a decline in interest. Ten or 15 years ago, when we had high kinetic warfare around the world, the people were very concerned about our armed forces. Today, that interest is rapidly declining, as evidenced by the level of donations to charities. Donations to Help for Heroes, for example, were up to £40 million at one time, but are now sharply down, and it is the same for the Royal British Legion and others. If, as we all hope, we do not see a return to kinetic warfare for many years to come, my concern would be that the military covenant could become a dusty document, that people would forget about it and that the whole thing would become ancient history, as the military disappeared from headlines and public awareness. I would be interested to know what the Minister thinks he could do to avoid that occurring. Annual debates might be one way of doing it.

Secondly, those of us who represent military constituencies are concerned—we are very aware of these things—that the footprint of the military across Britain is now increasingly small. The permanent basing structure that we now have, with the five super-bases for the Army, means that large parts of Britain have absolutely no military involvement at all. I cannot help feeling that the military covenant ought to be a way of spreading the word throughout the entire population of Great Britain that these are things
that we must care about. Again, I wonder whether the Minister has any thoughts about ways in which that could be done.

Thirdly, we have written the military covenant into law, and that is good thing. It provides a good structure for all the things we are discussing today, but there are two problems with it. As the military covenant is written into law, we might be able to tell ourselves that we have done something about this, thereby assuaging our conscience and not doing the much greater things that we would do were it not in law. In other words, the law must not become the lowest common denominator or simply the level below which we must not fall. Rather, there are many more things we should be doing, even if they are not enshrined in the covenant.

I would also be interested to know from the Minister how many legal cases there have been in the last year or two in which the military covenant has been used as evidence against a military defence. In other words, are the armed forces and spouses using the military covenant as evidence to sue the Ministry of Defence for a variety of purposes? It would be interesting to know whether the covenant has become part of the law in that sense.

The final thing that makes me rather concerned is this fixation we have—it is an important fixation—with veterans, families, housing and all those things. Of course they are hugely important—my hon. Friend the Member for South Wiltshire comes in. The great "Tommy" is hugely important; it is about the soldier.

For the soldier, the circumstances that we ourselves would not even contemplate entering into. It is not just about the disabled, the sick and ill, the wives or the children, although they are all hugely important; it is about the soldier.

That is where the book by my hon. Friend the Member for South Wiltshire comes in. The great "Tommy" poem—which, if I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to quote a couple of lines from—absolutely goes to the heart of the military covenant:

"O it’s Tommy this, an’ Tommy that, an’ ‘Tommy, go away’;
But it’s ‘Thank you, Mister Atkins,’ when the band begins to play…"

"Then it’s Tommy this, an’ Tommy that, an’ ‘Tommy, ‘ow’s yer soul?’
But it’s ‘Thin red line of ’eroses’ when the drums begin to roll…"

"While it’s ‘Tommy this, an’ Tommy that, an’ ‘Tommy, fall be’ind,’
But it’s ‘Please to walk in front, sir,’ when there’s trouble in the wind…"

"You talk o’ better food for us, an’ ‘schools, an’ fires, an’ all:
We’ll wait for extra rations if you treat us rational.
Don’t mess about the cook-room slops, but prove it to our face.
The Widow’s Uniform is not the soldier-man’s disgrace.
For it’s ‘Tommy this, an’ ‘Tommy that, an’ ‘Chuck him out, the brute!’"

But it’s ‘Saviour of ‘is country’ when the guns begin to shoot’.

2.59 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), not just on securing the debate, but on what I thought was an outstanding introduction that revealed the depth of her knowledge and her work on this matter. I was not aware of the all-party parliamentary group before, but I certainly am now, and I pay tribute to her for its work. I hope to deal with some of the issues that she raised.

I welcome the report. With all respect to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray), who talked about the importance of the serviceman, I want to say something about support for veterans and their families, and, in particular, about service accommodation.

The covenant is, and must surely continue to be, a lifetime guarantee for all those who have served our country, and now is as good a time as any for me to express my gratitude to them for their service. A couple of months ago, it was my great pleasure to open the annual conference of the new Westminster Centre for Research and Innovation in Veterans Wellbeing at the University of Chester. I have to say that, unfortunately, the centre is not named after this place; it is named after the late Duke of Westminster, who was a great supporter of the armed forces. It is led by Colonel Alan Finnegan, formerly of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and it has links with the veterans community and the regional Army brigade headquarters.

When I was at the centre, I recounted the story of something that had happened in Chester early in my term as the city’s Member of Parliament. One of the apparently homeless people who were begging in the streets—one of the regulars in the city centre whom we recognise—had a sign saying that he was an ex-serviceman, ex-Army. That great 21st-century phenomenon, the social media storm, then blew up: people were extremely angry about what they considered to be a crime of impersonation, and even asked for the police to be involved. They were not suggesting that it was a crime of impersonation on the grounds that this gentleman was not really homeless; their anger was prompted by their belief that he was claiming to be an ex-serviceman when in fact he was not. I do not know whether he was or not, but the incident takes us back to what the hon. Member for North Wiltshire said about his constituent, the late Duke of Westminster, who was a great supporter in Wootton Bassett, and, indeed, to what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker).

There is a real sense of pride in the members of our armed services, which is a welcome change from the atmosphere of past years that my hon. Friend described. I believe that, not only in Chester but more widely in the country, members of the armed forces should be able to wear their service as a badge of honour.

Bob Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Christian Matheson: I will always give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Bob Stewart: May I remind the House that in the 1970s and 1980s, armed forces personnel were specifically ordered not to wear uniform in public because of the Provisional IRA and other terrorist threats? That is one reason why we did not see people wandering around in uniform.

Christian Matheson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. There is, of course, a terrorist threat today, but I believe that the atmosphere has changed, and changed for the better.

For me, perhaps the most important aspect of that conference was the reminder that, for all our important work on mental and physical health, which was mentioned...
by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling, and about which I shall say more later, most of our service veterans are not needy and suffering, but have benefited greatly from the training, experience and comradeship that service gives them, and are continuing to contribute to our society. Discipline, teamwork, initiative, ingenuity and personal responsibility from a young age are all huge benefits to the community as well as the individual.

The report refers to some of the successes of the covenant in business, but I fear that we do not always emphasise sufficiently the contribution of ex-service personnel to society. We must certainly not allow them ever again to be seen as burdens on society.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, there are also health needs to be met. We know that military veterans present with a number of emergent health issues, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and obesity. We also know that the number of veterans who enter the judicial system as a result of violence-related crime associated with significant alcohol abuse is larger than the average. It is clear that a considerable amount of money is allocated to schemes involving the armed forces covenant, but the measurable outcomes of such initiatives are less clear. Covenant grants should, when possible, include measurable outcomes in the applications, and, when appropriate—it could perhaps be said that this is a shameful plug for the university in my constituency—the Government might consider using academic partners to shape the way in which valid and reliable information is collected and subsequently reported. I understand that the MOD covenant is looking at this and has invited expressions of interest, and I welcome that.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed devoted a long section of her speech to service families, which are referred to in chapter 8 of the report, which I welcome. The role of the family can sometimes be overlooked—although clearly not today, thanks to her—when seeking to support our forces and veterans. Any stress on a serviceman or woman also has an impact on their family. As she said, one way of addressing this is to stress on a serviceman or woman also has an impact on the family. As she said, one way of addressing this is to ensure that there is as much stability in family life as possible, with welcoming surroundings—and that stability might also be reflected in retention rates.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire talked about the consensual nature of the debate, but I will now, if I may, depart slightly from that. The Government have decided to sell off the Dale barracks in Chester, which is home to the Mercian Regiment, a successor of the Cheshire Regiment.

Bob Stewart: A fine regiment.

Christian Matheson: Yes, indeed. The decision is myopic and damaging. It will do nothing to maintain morale among the servicemen and families, and the popularity of the barracks is reflected in the number of service families who stay in the Chester area after leaving the Army.

The local schools are used to dealing with service children. This does not just mean, for example, making an extra effort to welcome and integrate new arrivals, to give as much stability as possible; primary schools in the Upton area of my constituency, where the barracks are based, are skilled at dealing with the pressures on children when their mums or dads are deployed away. I was not aware of the ten-minute rule Bill of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, but this issue is of great importance to three or four schools in that area, and I will now be looking at what support I can give her on that Bill.

Closing the Dale is unpopular and wrong, and I believe that it is being done solely because land values in Chester are high, which means that it can be sold off more easily.

Bob Stewart: Speaking as someone who has lived in the Dale barracks—my regiment was based there—I remind the House that the whole barracks was modernised only about 20 years ago, as the hon. Gentleman will know, and was considered then to be a future base for infantry.

Christian Matheson: I am most grateful to the hon. and gallant Gentleman, whom I consider a friend. His service in the Cheshire Regiment we should never fail to recognise, and the experience he brings to the House should never be underestimated. The House may wish to know that he is still held in extremely high regard in my constituency.

I do not think the closure of the barracks will assist the Army in its effectiveness and I ask the Government to think again.

I wish to touch briefly on two other issues. The first was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) and concerns Northern Ireland. The criminal investigations into every death there involving the British Army during the troubles are wrong. If evidence of a crime can be presented, it should be investigated, but a blanket inquiry cannot be justified. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) talked about a statute of limitations; I do not know about that.

As I have mentioned, many former members of the Cheshire Regiment, which served with distinction in Northern Ireland, are either originally from, or have since settled in, my constituency. Their service should be their honour, and I will defend them. Some of them may be implicated now in the new inquiry. In the specific terms of today’s debate on the armed forces covenant, if the Government have not already done so—if they have, I apologise—will they consider guaranteeing full legal support to any ex-serviceman or woman who is dragged into this unfair mess?

My final point is also about veterans and ex-servicemen. I wish to mention my constituent Ray Tindall, along with John Armstrong, Nick Dunn, Nicholas Simpson, Paul Towers and Billy Irving. They remain incarcerated in a prison in Chennai in India wrongly convicted of a crime they did not commit.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this incredibly important point. Does he agree that, as service veterans, they are owed even more of a duty of care by this UK Government, who should be doing everything possible to get them home, where they belong?

Christian Matheson: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady and shall draw my comments to a close on that very theme.

Those people are all ex-servicemen. Ray was in the Indian ocean with the other men to raise a little bit of money, in his case to grow his business in Chester. I will raise the case of the Chennai Six at every opportunity,
because, with the greatest respect to MOD Ministers, I do not believe that our Foreign Office is being vigorous enough in its calls on the Indian Government to release the men. Ray has seen active service in recent conflicts, and if the covenant means anything—to them and to me—it means that we must continue all our efforts to bring him and those other lads home.

3.10 pm

Sir Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on securing this debate. It is a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), whose praise for my hon. Friend and for the late Duke of Westminster I very much endorse.

It is an unavoidable fact that the body of men and women whom we ask to do the most difficult and dangerous tasks for us have, for obvious reasons, no public voice. We in this House therefore have a particular duty to take an interest in their concerns. I am glad to see the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster)—a man who has done three operational tours—in his place today. The growth and flowering of the covenant is in no small part thanks to him, and it grieves me greatly that I shall spend almost all my speech talking about a subject on which we profoundly disagree.

Last year, the Ministry of Defence won a settlement that committed us to defence expenditure of 2% of GDP, which was a welcome move, and to a modest but positive growth path. However, that is still the lowest proportion of GDP since before the second world war. At the same time, we committed ourselves to an equipment programme that has resulted in the amount of money left to pay for our personnel being badly squeezed. This debate on the armed forces covenant gives us an opportunity to discuss that position. The armed forces have felt the same pressures as the rest of the public sector—and rightly so. They had to undergo the same pay squeeze and the same large-scale reductions in pension rights, but on top of that they had already suffered in a number of ways. They have had large rises in rents, restrictions in the availability of various allowances, and even a noticeable decline in the quality of food for single personnel.

The effects of those changes can be seen in the numbers. In my view, the Army now has the best senior leadership for a generation or two, with a new breed of generals who came through middle-ranking command positions in combat now introducing all sorts of reforms, including the 1996 decision to sell and lease back the majority of Service Family Accommodation, which is now a matter of record that I opposed that sell-off.

The second reason is the effect on officers. The statement on ranks refers to the condition of the housing stock and the long backlog of repairs, but I am much more concerned about what it goes on to say about how short-term thinking over the past generation is setting us on a downward spiral. It states: “To manage the estate within its budget, the Department has made decisions that subsequently offer poor value for money in the longer term, including the 1996 decision to sell and lease back the majority of Service Family Accommodation, which is now limiting the Department’s ability to manage this element of the estate cost-effectively.”

An additional problem in that regard will arise in four years’ time. It is a matter of record that I opposed that sell-off.

Against this unpromising background, I have much sympathy for my hon. Friend the Minister as he tries to find a new way forward for housing. He will no doubt tell us that the survey that the MOD has just published suggests that 55% of the 20,000-odd people who responded were broadly in favour of the proposals—almost twice as many as were against them. Nevertheless, I hope to persuade the House over the next few minutes that there are four reasons why that is a profound mistake.

The first reason why the new accommodation model is profoundly wrong is geography. Unlike the Royal Navy in Portsmouth and Plymouth, the majority of our garrisons and RAF stations are not near a supply of affordable housing to buy or to rent. Catterick and Barnstaple, which are our two largest bases, are in the middle of nowhere—my sister lives near Catterick. Our RAF bases in Oxfordshire are among some of the most expensive housing areas in the country. All three of our fast jet fighter bases are in remote locations. Even where housing is plentiful, as in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), it is unaffordable.

The second reason is the effect on officers. The statement in the covenant is clear, but let me digress for a second. America has a policy of having allowances rather than family accommodation in some cases where housing in the area is affordable, but it is strictly based on rank. In contrast, the Government state that the accommodation allowance of tomorrow will be provided based on... need, regardless of... rank”.

I want to focus the House’s attention on the group who will lose out most. The critical group from which we are losing people is that of captains who are about to be majors in the Army. Company commanders and squadron commanders are the backbone of the regimental system. Those people and their counterparts in the RAF, which includes those coming up to the first breakpoint for fast-jet pilots after all those millions we have invested in them, will be told that unless they happen to have a large family, they will be given a small allowance instead of a substantial house in order to fund a much more generous arrangement for junior ranks with large families.

Any civilian business that tried to follow such a principle would go bust within a year or two. Special arrangements for the regimental sergeant-major, the backbone of the regiment, are also being brushed aside.

The third reason is the continuing need for mobility. As long as I have been a Member of Parliament, every Government have committed themselves to greater stability, but there is some evidence that mobility has slightly
increased. The Minister might well introduce a bit more stability, but all the staff training and all the best staff jobs for all three services are in southern England. However, the majority of Army units and almost all RAF units are not. Officers from those two services will continue to have to be posted up and down the country. It is the same for the submarine service, which is in a different position from the rest of the Navy.

Sir Gerald Howarth: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a complete nonsense that senior military personnel should have to go by second-class public transport? I had a general in Aldershot who had a national command. With a helicopter, he could brief his staff at 7.30 am in Aldershot and be up north by 10 o’clock. My hon. Friend is making an important point and the Minister had better listen to him.

Sir Julian Brazier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his endorsement. He makes an important additional point.

This is not only about officers being posted around staff jobs. The centres of excellence where we train the next generation for the Army should get the cream of the senior NCOs from all over the Army. Brecon is shortly to have no Army units near it, but of course we have to post people in and out of there. The same goes for all the other phase 2 training schools. It is crucial that the best of the instructors go to RAF Valley, for example, but the nearby housing market is very thin.

The fourth reason is the question of cost, and that takes me on to the survey, about which I am sure the Minister will enlighten us. Let me provide some examples of how the wording of the questions and the issue of cost weigh against each other. The first is about housing quality.

The Australians operate a successful system whereby they lease properties in the local housing market. Their bases, unlike ours, are nearly all in major centres of population. They work on the basis that all the risk and all the maintenance is taken on by Defence Housing Australia. Such an arrangement is very expensive, and DHA funds it.

The reason that the majority of people gave for preferring the new system, as it was put to them, was that they thought they would get better houses. They were reminded in the survey—I have a copy if anyone wants to see it—that there is a lot of dissatisfaction with existing housing. The survey did not tell them that, in future, they will be responsible for all the risk and maintenance if they go away on exercises—as MPs, we all know how bad some private sector landlords are—unless they take on a huge extra cost.

Again, the survey says that we are going to reach out to unmarried families. I am in favour of that, and there is a serious case to be made for it, but how far do we go? If a soldier enters what might be a short-term relationship with a partner with three or four children from a previous relationship, are we really going to give them a gigantic allowance, perhaps twice as much as an RSM or a major with no children? There has to be a limit somewhere, but this is all dangled in the same survey.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some fantastic points, and forgive me for interrupting him because he is being crystal clear. I merely encourage him to observe one further thing, which is that the nature of military service means that people are frequently dragged away from their home base. That means that a spouse, perhaps from abroad or from a very different part of the country, is then responsible for dealing with a landlord or landlady who might not have their best interest at heart, to put it politely. The spouse will not then have the protection of the command structure above or of the Department, and they will not have civil servants to assist them; they will, quite literally, be on their own.

Sir Julian Brazier: My hon. and gallant Friend puts it in a nutshell, much better than I have.

I will finish in a moment, but I have one last point on the survey—you have been very tolerant, Madam Deputy Speaker. The survey refers to home ownership 11 times. People in the armed forces desperately want to own a home, and they worry about what will happen to them when they leave the service. Nowhere does the survey say that we are moving out of the many garrisons where home ownership is practical: Canterbury has closed; Chester is about to close; and Ripon is closing. We are focusing on areas where it is not practical to become a local owner-occupier.

What do I suggest? We need to come to terms with two basic points. First, within the defence budget to which we have committed ourselves, there has to be a degree of rebalancing. I—and, I suspect, most of the other people in this Chamber on a Thursday—believe that we should spend more money on defence, but if we cannot persuade our colleagues to spend more on defence, with all the threats out there in the world, the budget needs a degree of rebalancing. We either have to accept slightly smaller Regular forces or we have to buy less equipment. Rather that tearing up a model that works, we need to fund it properly.

Secondly, we have to find a vehicle for enabling a route to home ownership. The key to that for many people is buying to let, which means a special arrangement on last year’s Budget change that hugely disadvantaged service landlords, who are treated as if they are ordinary landlords, even though their property is the only one they have. They pay a higher rate of tax on the rent coming in than the relief they receive on their mortgage interest payments. There has been a bit of progress, but we also need to revisit the way in which the Forces Help to Buy scheme operates so that people do not have to apply to let the property, but can just let it when they get moved, with a guarantee that there will be no problems.

We need to find ways of reinforcing that model. We need to put a little more money into it, and we need to address the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) that people in the armed forces at the bottom end of the financial scale should be prioritised on waiting lists. But—and this is a crucial but—it must be done in a way that is fair. This cannot just be where they are serving—my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) made a strong point about this—it must be in their place of origin, otherwise a few communities will carry the whole weight.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you and the House have been very tolerant with me this afternoon. I firmly believe that this Government are strongly committed to our armed forces and I have huge confidence in
our Ministers, and I know that everybody who has stayed behind for this debate on a Thursday cares about our armed forces, but I believe that the new accommodation model is a serious threat to two of our armed forces.

3.25 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): First, I thank the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) for securing this debate. I congratulate her on that, on her passionate support for serving personnel and veterans, and on her knowledge of the issues. I can safely say that we all welcome the publication of the fifth annual report on the armed forces covenant, but we should be very aware of the big challenges that remain, while welcoming the progress that has been made. The announcement last year of the £10 million per annum covenant fund was clearly a step forward, and the 300 projects that have resulted from it are a positive foundation that can be built on.

In recent years, society has become more aware and has more understanding of the effects of military service on the mental and physical health of those who chose to serve, and on their relationships with their families and their communities. However, quite apart from the rigours of their jobs, the challenges that face current and former military personnel in their own lives are many and varied, from post-traumatic stress or physical rehabilitation, to simply finding a house and job upon leaving the military.

Veterans are an asset to society and deserve our thanks, respect and support. There are some 13 million veterans in the UK today, amounting to one of the highest densities of veterans in a major country. In Scotland alone, approximately 1,800 men and women complete their military service and settle in our communities every year, many with their families. The transition from the armed forces to civilian is a hugely unsettling process. It involves leaving behind a job, a home, a community and a unique way of life—possibly the only life many servicemen and women have known in their adult lives. The importance of caring for veterans was underlined even further this week with the publication of a report entitled “Multiple deprivation in help-seeking UK veterans” by the charity Combat Stress. Among its key findings was the clear link between residence in areas with higher risks of deprivation and mental health difficulties. In addition, there was the startling finding that individual veterans take an average of 11 years before seeking help after leaving the military.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): My hon. Friend is right to highlight the stress that can be caused to servicemen and women, and their families and dependants, when they leave the service. Will she therefore join me in congratulating the Scottish Government’s commitment to supporting our ex-service personnel through the Scottish veterans fund, which contributes some £600,000 over three years to a range of one-off but vital projects in our communities?

Marion Fellows: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I was coming on to that, and indeed will do so shortly.

For all the progress that has been made in recent times, there is clearly still much to be done to encourage veterans to seek the help they need and deserve. The fifth annual report does cover what has happened in Scotland but does not provide much detail, so I hope to provide that. In January 2014, Cabinet Secretary Keith Brown announced the creation of a Scottish Veterans Commissioner to act as an ambassador for ex-service personnel. On 28 June 2014, Eric Fraser CBE, a former Royal Navy officer, was appointed to that post. On 13 December last year, the Scottish Government announced that Mr Fraser was to be reappointed until August 2018. The commissioner has published three briefings on Scotland’s veterans: “Transition in Scotland”, in March 2015; “Report on Provision of Information on Housing for Service Leavers and Veterans in Scotland”, in August 2015; and, most recently, “The Veterans Community—Employability, Skills and Learning”, in November 2016. I recommend reading them—they read much better than their titles, which I have tried to enunciate.

As alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara), the Scottish veterans fund was established by the Scottish Government in 2008 to assist groups and organisations that offer assistance to Scotland’s ex-service personnel and their families and dependants. It is administered by Veterans Scotland and has been designed to provide discrete amounts of funding to one-off projects. However, after last year’s announcement of £600,000 of funding over the next two years, the fund will now accept applications for two and three-year projects. It is worth noting that one of our big employers in Edinburgh, Standard Life, has contributed £240,000 to the fund.

In February last year, the Scottish Government set out their ambitious agenda for the future in the report “Renewing Our Commitments”, with the goal of making Scotland the destination of choice for service leavers. On healthcare alone, since last year’s report on the covenant, the Scottish Government have put in considerable work to improve services for current and former service personnel. For example, in partnership with NHS Scotland, the Scottish Government have provided £1.2 million for 2016-17 to fund specialist mental health services for veterans. They also continue to fund and roll out a network of Veterans First Point centres across Scotland, so that any veteran can get help with any difficulties they have—and that is not confined to any one area.

The Scottish Government give veterans priority access to low-cost housing through the low-cost initiative for first-time buyers, and provide schemes to help with deposits for private renters. In addition, they have awarded £1.3 million of grant funding to the Scottish Veterans’ Garden City Association—another mouthful—to build new homes, 25 of which are now complete across six local authority areas, to support impaired ex-service personnel. I am delighted to tell the Chamber that I pass 10 of those new homes every time I visit my constituency office in Motherwell and Wishaw.

The Scottish Government support applications to the education support fund and encourage veterans and personnel to grasp the opportunities that the fund is there to give them. As an ex-further education lecturer, I have had practical experience of teaching service personnel—mainly those who were still serving but were committed
to leaving the forces and preparing for civilian life—and I have to say that I found them all to be both committed and diligent.

In Scotland, the most obvious and far-reaching differences found by personnel leaving the services concern the provision of public services, most of which have been devolved to the Scottish Government and are now delivered by local authorities and NHS Scotland. It is almost inevitable that everyone leaving the military in Scotland will need to engage with those organisations as part of their personal transition process, whether about their health, housing, education or employment.

Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech. I recently visited one of my constituents, who is quite severe mental challenges, and has recently been diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome. Does my hon. Friend agree that the armed forces covenant and the work she has mentioned will mean—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I am sorry, but I have just done some calculations and, given the number of Members who wish to speak, I am going to have to impose a six-minute limit on speeches after the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) takes her seat. That was a very long intervention, which would normally be fine on a Thursday, but we are going to be very pressed for time today. In the light of that, if the hon. Lady. Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I said that I hoped the hon. Lady was reaching a conclusion. Every minute that she takes is coming off subsequent Members. The speech limit is six minutes now, but it is rapidly coming down unless she really does conclude.

Marion Fellows: I apologise Madam Deputy Speaker. I got carried away in my enthusiasm.

In Scotland, we try very hard, through our devolved services, to support personnel and veterans. Scottish Veterans’ Employment and Training Service deserves a mention. It covers a wide variety of public, private and charitable institutions, and helps people who have left the military to gain employment. I have also experienced at first hand Motherwell and Wishaw citizens advice bureau, which provides, through the Armed Services Advice Project, programmed help for people in my area.

We all must play a part in improving the lives of serving personnel and veterans across the UK to recognise the valuable role that they play in the defence of our citizens. Scotland is well versed in partnership working, and this is a well-used route to help veterans in Scotland. I commend it to the Chamber.

3.38 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). May I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on securing this debate and on the manner in which she presented it? Her work does her very great credit, particularly that in relation to the Public Accounts Committee.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) for giving us a wonderful plug and for promoting my book, which is available from all good booksellers. In a similar spirit, may I thank him for his work as chair of the all-party group for armed forces?

It seems like the covenant has been around for a long time, because, semantically, it has biblical or mid-17th century connotations, but the truth is that it was really only invented in 2000 in a staff paper. In 2007, the then Leader of the Opposition decided that it would be a good idea to create a Military Covenant Commission and appointed Frederick Forsyth as its chairman. People such as Simon Weston served with great distinction on that commission. It informed the thinking of the then Opposition and subsequent Government, and resulted in the inclusion of the military covenant in the Armed Forces Act 2011. That pretty much brings us to where we are today.

This report contains some great news. I give credit to the Government for their hard work and commitment, and I particularly thank my hon. and gallant Friend the Minister, who approaches this work with dedication and enthusiasm. There are a lot of positive things in the report. I was particularly taken by the fact that 73,000
pupils benefit from the pupil premium, which I feel strongly about as many of my young constituents benefit from it. Some 9,000 personnel are accessing the forces Help to Buy scheme, so that is having a real impact on people. The innovation is entirely compatible with the modern way of living for young people and has much to commend it, notwithstanding the points raised, quite rightly, by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) about the future accommodation model. I share many of those concerns. I could see that the Minister was listening attentively, and I am sure that he will go away and reflect on my hon. Friend’s insightful remarks.

Having been ever so nice about the Government, I would just like to reduce my diminishing prospects of preferment by pointing out that we have recently had some fairly bad news about the recruitment and retention figures for regulars and reserves. I am particularly worried about the Army. The figures are really very bad. Of all the surveys we do, this one matters most. People are not daft. They pick up on what is going on around them and vote with their feet. We are at a time of reasonably good, robust employment and people have other options, so we have to work twice as hard as ever to attract people and, much more importantly, to retain them.

Mr Gray: Does my hon. Friend agree that one thing we have to get right is the means by which people are recruited into both the reserves and the regulars? It is currently taking far too long.

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People simply walk. They do not give a reason; they just get fed up and go. That will not be reflected in any statistics. Those people are a wasted asset. I think that a lot of men and women who consider joining the reserve forces simply go and do something else.

The figures would have been even worse had we not changed the way in which we count people. We have now included phase 2 trainees in our trained strength. The logic behind that is perfectly sound in that phase 2 trainees can be used in the UK to do all sorts of exciting things do to with resilience and all the rest of it. Nevertheless, one is left—being a cynical politician—with the sense that this is, in fact, improving the figures. We have to compare like with like, but if we do that, we end up in an even more unhappy place—[Interruption.] I have been reminded that, of course, we are talking about phase 1 trainees: people who have completed phase 1, but not yet embarked on or completed phase 2.

The new employment model, the new recommendations for the service families accommodation and the future accommodation model have been discussed at length. I cannot expand on that in the time available, but I entirely agree with some of the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury. What has been proposed is exciting and forward-looking. It kind of taps into the way society is today. We always have to do that when trying to work out how the covenant will work into the future. However, it seems that this will disadvantage people and remove something valuable in service life. We must be very careful about that.

I am concerned about mental health in the armed forces. I wrote a report a little while ago called “Fighting Fit: a mental health plan for servicemen and veterans”, which the Government, to their great credit, implemented pretty much in full, but what I missed was the level of alcohol abuse in the armed forces. Some would say that that is up to the individual and has nothing to do with combat. I would say that the culture in our armed forces—I have seen this over many years—is one of encouraging the abuse of alcohol. We have a duty under the covenant to ensure that we deal with this, but I fear that we are not doing so at the moment. Some 65% of our military are at higher risk for their excess drinking.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): This has been an excellent debate with much consensus. I speak as someone who is proud to be the wife of an armed forces veteran from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. Alcohol difficulties in the Army also reflect mental health issues. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that alcohol is often a suppressant for underlying mental health issues?

Dr Murrison: Yes, the hon. Lady is absolutely right. If we accept that we have a culture in the armed forces that encourages the use of alcohol—possibly with some benefits, actually—we have a duty of care to people to ensure that we try to tackle it. We were told that we were going to have an alcohol working group and that it would report shortly. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister where we are with that group and when we can have its report and the action points arising from it.

I suspect that the advent of lawfare will be discussed at length by one of my hon. Friends in a moment. However, I would like to weigh in, because the issue has already been mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson), and I agree with his remarks. I am deeply concerned about this issue. I wrote to the Prime Minister in October and received a very satisfactory response, in which she made it clear that she takes this matter extremely seriously. I am pleased to note that we have an intention to derogate from the European convention on human rights in respect of future conflicts. Of course, had we done so several years ago, we would not be running into some of the difficulties that have been alluded to this afternoon.

The Iraq Historic Allegations Team must conclude its work by the end of 2019. I am pleased that the Government have committed to making sure that that happens, in so far as they are able to do so. I am also pleased that they will be giving support to those veterans who find themselves having their collar felt; it is entirely appropriate that we should do that. Will that also apply to Northern Ireland veterans—Operation Banner veterans—who have been issued with letters from the Ministry of Defence inviting them to unburden themselves? Many of these gentlemen are in their 60s or 70s, and it is a troubling experience for them. My advice to them, quite frankly, would be, “If you receive one of these, you should seek the advice of a solicitor.” It would be nice to know that the MOD agrees with that advice and that it will undertake to fund it.

Finally, I would like to give my observations on accommodation in relation to CarillionAmey. My sense is that, in recent months, things have improved. As somebody who represents a garrison town, I of course
get correspondence on this issue regularly from my military constituents, and it has tailed off recently. However, there is no denying the conclusion in the extremely good report from the Public Accounts Committee, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed contributed, that the "performance of CarillionAmey has been totally unacceptable and it is right that the Department is considering terminating the contract."

Those are strong words from a highly respected Committee of this House, and I would be interested to hear what the Minister is doing to rein in the worst excesses of a company that, frankly, has let the men and women of our armed forces and their families down.

3.47 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on bringing this debate to the Floor of the House. She is to be commended for that and for her commitment to the armed forces.

I am a great believer in the idea that the armed forces must be rooted in, and reflect, the society they serve and defend. I commend the hon.—and gallant—Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) for raising the issue of making sure that our armed forces reflect the society they serve by living in it and not just in bespoke military hubs.

In their domestic lives, service personnel have similar problems to the rest of society, but we must recognise that they also face unique challenges. The Minister will be aware that I have raised issues on the Floor of the House in relation to children, veterans and carers, as well as pre-deployment and the length of deployment.

However, that does not mean that challenges do not remain. In terms of the report and the general debate, I am astonished to see the difficulties that veterans still face in accessing medical care. While there have been obvious improvements, work remains to be done across the whole United Kingdom—for example, in ensuring a better transition into civilian life for veterans by ensuring that service GPs can share their expertise across the NHS, which we have discussed on the Floor of the House on many occasions. Critically, in Scotland and across the UK there are differing NHS structures. Local provision in Scotland is made through community planning partnerships, where a whole range of partners get around the table. The discussion of the impact of service life in community planning partnerships does not seem to be having any influence.

In housing, there are problems with CarillionAmey providing service accommodation that lives up to the understandably high standards of the Ministry of Defence. That fact has drawn the eye of the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, which indicates that much work remains to be done across the whole United Kingdom—for example, in ensuring that service GPs can share their expertise across the NHS, which we have discussed on the Floor of the House on many occasions. Critically, in Scotland and across the UK there are differing NHS structures. Local provision in Scotland is made through community planning partnerships, where a whole range of partners get around the table. The discussion of the impact of service life in community planning partnerships does not seem to be having any influence.

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I wonder whether the future accommodation model should learn from elements of the Scottish housing standard, on which the Ministry of Defence could at least reflect, in introducing a basic standard. The Ministry of Defence in Scotland is exempt from the national housing standard, which every social landlord had to meet by 2015.

That brings me to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), who mentioned social housing. Rather than blaming pregnant women, perhaps the best way to give people access to social housing is not only to build more of it, but to stop selling it.

This week’s Combat Stress report highlights some of the fundamental problems faced by veterans and underlines the fact that much work remains to be done. The opportunities grasped by many who enlist in our armed forces are unfortunately not shared by nearly enough people. Those of us who take an interest in armed forces and veterans affairs will not be satisfied until that attainment gap is closed. I agree with the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed about the corporate covenant. I am seeing that in small and medium-sized businesses in my constituency. Last week, I attended a Burns celebration in which the chamber of commerce—it covers not only West Dunbartonshire, but the whole of the old county of Dunbartonshire—led the charge to get businesses involved in that corporate approach.

It is one of my great hopes that the idea of the covenant can become embedded in the culture of the armed forces. The service rendered by those who join must be returned many times by not only this Government, but Governments of the devolved Administrations—and by the society that those people have served. I welcomed the Scottish Government’s commitment, which some of my hon. Friends have mentioned. Last year, the Scottish Government set out their ambitious agenda for veterans with “Renewing our Commitments”, in order to make Scotland the go-to destination for those who leave the services.

In conclusion, I reiterate my welcome for the report and my satisfaction in the ongoing work of the armed forces covenant to ensure that those who have served are given the support and opportunities that they deserve. Like most people in this House and in the country, I know from my own family experience—members of my family have been on the front line—the unique challenges faced by those who serve in the armed forces, and by their families. I am happy to say that they deserve our respect, our thanks and our ongoing support. In doing so, I do not forget the work that we in this House and those in the Ministry of Defence must still do to ensure that veterans receive more support than we are giving them at the moment.

3.52 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on securing this fantastic debate. I remember spending many great days and cold nights in her constituency on gunnery training exercises. Those are fond memories, mostly. I would also like to declare that my youngest son serves in the British Army, also as a gunner.

The armed forces covenant has had a positive impact in redefining the relationship between our civilian population, veterans and our armed forces. By enshrining it in law, we have provided our armed forces, both past and present, with a tangible agreement—almost a contract—between the people who serve, the politicians who make the decision, as we do often, to put them in harm’s way, and the rest of the population who benefit and are kept free by the service and sacrifice of our armed forces.
I was very proud during the last Parliament to serve on the Armed Forces Bill Committee, not only as a Member of Parliament who represents a constituency with a huge defence, MOD and military manufacturing capacity, but as a veteran and vice-president of the Stoke Gifford Royal British Legion branch. I put lots of pressure on local councils in Bristol and south Gloucestershire to sign the community covenant during the last Parliament, and I constantly keep up the pressure regarding its ongoing implementation.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): As one Royal British Legion vice-president to another, may I tell the hon. Gentleman that I very much take the point he is making? He will be aware, although the House may not, that every branch of the Royal British Legion and most branches of the Royal Naval Association have a welfare officer, who is very often the conduit or link between recently discharged servicemen and women, and the local authority, social housing providers and general providers of social aid and assistance. Does he agree that the Government could do more in the pre-discharge period to let servicemen and women know about the advantages of the Royal British Legion, which can do so much for them? In many cases, sadly, that offer is not taken up.

Jack Lopresti: The hon. Gentleman is of course absolutely right. There is a responsibility on our part as Members of Parliament to link up with service charities such as the Royal British Legion to make sure that they are aware of what we can do to help veterans in our own communities.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman support the Royal British Legion’s “Count them in” campaign, which calls on the next census to capture data on the armed forces community? That would help to improve the allocation of resources and services to this community, and I think the Government should support it.

Jack Lopresti: Of course I will support that. As I said, it is imperative on all of us to link up with local service charities and do whatever we can on all levels to help our veterans and their loved ones, families and dependants. I have done some work with a military charity called Alabaré, which does a lot on housing, and I helped to secure it considerable funding from the LIBOR fund to invest in veterans’ accommodation.

Overall, the covenant has definitely helped to improve the way in which our country treats those who have protected our way of life, or are still doing so, by serving in the armed forces. We must never forget the huge debt of gratitude we owe both those who are currently serving and veterans, as well as their families. Freedom is not free: we do not live in a free country by accident, as most people in this country fully appreciate and understand.

When members of the armed forces swear an oath of allegiance to the Crown, they enter into a covenant relationship with society—they swear to protect and serve us all—but, regrettably, this covenant has recently been shown to be one-sided. In the foreword to the armed forces covenant annual report, the Secretary of State for Defence says:

“We have a duty across society to recognise this dedication and sacrifice, by ensuring that the policies we make, and the services that we provide, treat our Service personnel, Veterans, and their families fairly, and ensure they suffer no disadvantage by comparison to the rest of society as a result of their service.”

As other hon. Members have mentioned in some detail, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) in particular, there is at least one aspect in which former service personnel are being disadvantaged by their service. I am talking about the ongoing, politically motivated witch hunt that is now taking place against former soldiers and service people who served in Northern Ireland during the troubles. Only last weekend, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland wrote in an article in The Daily Telegraph that there is an “imbalance” that has led to a “disproportionate” focus on criminal inquiries involving former soldiers. That is a clear admission of failure in relation to the armed forces covenant and of people being disadvantaged by their service.

I was interested to read the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in December that, in line with the Government’s commitment to the armed forces covenant, they plan, in order to stop service personnel and their families having to pursue lengthy and stressful claims in the courts,

“to provide better compensation…for injuries or death in combat equal to that which a court would be likely to award if it found negligence. As part of this reform, we intend to clarify in primary legislation the long-standing common law principle that the Government are not liable for damages as a result of injuries or deaths sustained in combat.”—[Official Report, 1 December 2016, Vol. 617, c. 53WS.]

The Secretary of State also said that that would address the so-called judicialisation of war. The Government are able to act, with primary legislation, to protect their own interests, but what is happening to our Northern Ireland veterans is also, in my opinion, a judicialisation of war.

Let me bring to the House’s attention one of the many ongoing cases in which the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland—incidentally, he is a former lawyer for Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams—is seeking to prosecute two surviving veterans who were part of an Army patrol that shot the known IRA terrorist John McCann. Sadly, one of the patrol has died in the intervening years. The soldiers were investigated fully at the time, and the fact that the length of time that has passed means there is a lack of forensic evidence and credible eye-witness testimony would in my view make the trial, in modern terms, untenable.

We need to bring in legislation quickly to provide a statute of limitations on all sides. That would help to draw a line under the terrible events of the troubles and bring the communities together. There would also be no further retrospective prosecutions of our service people. I want to make a point that I have previously made in the House: there is no moral equivalence whatsoever between terrorists and brave service people who were keeping the peace to protect all communities. Nine hundred and sixty one people were killed serving in the police, the police reserve, the Army, the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment—nearly a third of all people who lost their lives in the troubles. It is clear to me that on this issue the Government have broken the military covenant. Clearly, we are not protecting or supporting our veterans who volunteered to put themselves in harm’s way on our behalf. The Government are letting them down badly.
Nobody is suggesting that military justice and due process should not apply on operations. Our people operate under the highest possible standards and with very strict rules of engagement. They are a great force for good in the world, but where service personnel have been judged to have carried out their duties, often in extremely difficult circumstances and at great risk to themselves, their actions should not be second-guessed years later for the sake of political expediency, a form of appeasement and the weakness of some of our politicians.

This is not just about dealing with the past. This is about upholding the covenant and our country’s honour, so that the people serving today and those thinking of upholding the covenant and our country’s honour, will recognise what they have done and are doing, will feel the reassurance that, whatever awful situation we send them into, it will not result, 30 or 40 years down the line, in their lives being ruined by retrospective, politically motivated prosecutions.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I am afraid the time limit is dropping down to five minutes. I call Danny Kinahan.

4.1 pm

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti). I very much agree with his sentiments, and the soft way with which he put it, that we really must start looking after our armed forces, particularly those who served in Operation Banner.

The military covenant is a fantastic document and a great idea. I congratulate all involved in trying to put it into place. I apologise today for speaking mainly on Northern Irish issues. Before I do, I would like to congratulate the Minister, who often gives me the opportunity to talk through these issues with him. He was going to visit Northern Ireland, but has had to delay because of our election.

I want to congratulate in particular the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on the huge amount of work she does on this issue. She visited Northern Ireland, where she met victims suffering from appalling combat stress; she listened carefully to how they feel and the soft way in which he put it, that we really must start looking after our armed forces, particularly those who served in Operation Banner.

The military covenant is a fantastic document and a great idea. I congratulate all involved in trying to put it into place. I apologise today for speaking mainly on Northern Irish issues. Before I do, I would like to congratulate the Minister, who often gives me the opportunity to talk through these issues with him. He was going to visit Northern Ireland, but has had to delay because of our election.

I want to start with a story that was told to me many years ago, which always makes me think. Winston Churchill visited a Spitfire factory and the young, keen engineer told him, “We look at every aircraft when it comes back. We see where most of the holes are, and then we arm them and make them stronger.” Winston Churchill, quick as a flash, replied, “You are looking at the wrong aircraft. You are looking at the ones that come back.” What I am trying to get across is that we must all remember to think outside the box. We have the information in front of us about the 83% or 84%, but we have to make sure we consider the information we are currently not seeing. I believe there is a great deal we can learn from it.

We struggle in Northern Ireland because the structures are not properly in place. We heard from the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) about the difficulties in Northern Ireland. Working together, we now have someone on the reference group, but we need a non-political commissioner or champion who can work with all sides of the political spectrum in Northern Ireland and bring everyone together. As we know, one side in Northern Ireland sees all military and security forces as representing British imperialism. We have to show them the great work of our armed forces in the Mediterranean, picking up refugees fleeing Africa, and in dealing with Ebola. We need to show the mass of great work our armed services are doing.

In Northern Ireland, about 60,000 people served in the UDR and the security forces. I want to tell one more story. I was once valuing a painting near Dungannon. As I walked in, there was a photograph of the person I was meeting with all his colleagues in military uniforms. I said, “Gosh, you’re brave to have that photograph on display next to the door.” He took me out into the car park and pointed to about 20 houses nearby saying that in every single one of them the males had been shot by the IRA. That is the world they were living in. That is why people have mental difficulties. They never got a break. They did their duty, went back to work and lived with that threat.

That is why I have pushed so hard to make sure that we look after everyone. We need funding to help the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association to look after everyone, and we need to sort out who exactly is in charge of this in Northern Ireland. It is not the regular forces. The RFCA does most of it, but it needs resources. Councils do not have the support either. We have champions in every council, but they do not do housing or education; that is done up at Stormont, but it is not being delivered there because, as we have heard, the covenant is not seen as being in place in Northern Ireland. We had 197 shot in the UDR alone. We have to find a way of helping everyone. It needs someone to grit their teeth and look at how we make it work. If we look outside the box, I think we can get there.

I agree with everyone that we cannot have this witch hunt. I see myself as about as balanced as can be, but it is so biased.

Jack Lopresti: The hon. Gentleman and I both serve on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. In the last Parliament, we inquired into the implementation of the military covenant in Northern Ireland. Is it time we thought about another inquiry as an update on that?

Danny Kinahan: I very much agree. We should have an update. We also have to find a way of drawing a line, perhaps with a statute of limitations. We have to find some way of moving on in Northern Ireland, and part of that will mean looking after our armed services—not just the Army, Navy and Air Force, but the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the RUC, the prison officers and a whole mass of other people. As someone who lives in Northern Ireland, I want to end by thanking all those who have served there and secured peace. Let us make sure we keep it.

4.6 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The main point of the armed forces covenant is to ensure good morale in our armed forces. Maintenance of morale is the second most important principle of war and has been described as “a positive state of mind derived from inspired political and military leadership, a shared sense of purpose and values, well-being, perceptions of worth and group cohesion.”
It is thus at the heart of the armed forces covenant. Napoleon called morale the “sacred flame”. He went further, saying, “Morale is to the physical as three is to one”. When I was an instructor at Sandhurst, between 1979 and 1980, when some in the Chamber were not even born, I did not really understand that. [Interruption.] Hon. Members are wavering at me. I taught it, but I did not understand it. It means that if an army has high morale, the enemy thinks it has more forces. I did not understand that until I went to Bosnia.

Stephen Pound: As someone who was around in 1979, I must say that, while I hate to disagree with the hon. and gallant Gentleman, I do not think that the prime purpose of the covenant is to raise the morale of the troops. It is to repay a debt of honour we owe to servicemen and women. It is a debt of honour being repaid by the civilian society. It is not just about morale, surely.

Bob Stewart: I absolutely—and graciously—accept that point.

When I went to Bosnia, I learned this lesson. The three main opponents always came to me and said, “How many men and women do you have under your command?”, and I would say, “Lots. How many do you think?” They would say, “Between 3,000 and 4,000.” I had 800. Those men and women were acting like that because of their morale. We have the best armed forces in the world thanks to high morale and training. We give them everything we can, but we have the best armed forces in the world, and the armed forces covenant is going to make them even better.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Does my hon. and gallant Friend agree that what underpins the strong morale in the fighting elements of our armed forces is the confidence that when they come back into civilian life, they will be protected, nurtured and their sacrifice honoured?

Bob Stewart: I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for that very good intervention. The armed forces covenant will require constant care and attention. It is a responsive document that must interact with what is happening at the time, and hopefully, it will become even more effective.

Finally, to speak sharply, I want to complain to the Minister, who is sitting there complacently. There is not one regular unit of the Air Force, the Navy or the Army in my constituency of Beckenham, and that is disgraceful—sort it out!

4.10 pm

Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): I am not quite sure how to follow the last point made by the hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), but I will try.

It is a great privilege to speak in this debate on the covenant, not least because in October 2011, Blackpool was the first town in the north-west to show its commitment to the armed forces by signing the community covenant, which I have a copy of here. I pay tribute to the late Jim Houldsworth—a Conservative councillor, as it happens—who was instrumental in bringing the community covenant together in the town.

Blackpool has a strong relationship with the armed forces. Every year, to tie in with national Armed Forces Day—indeed, we had one of the first events this year—the town also holds an armed forces week, which this year will run from 19 to 25 June, with a range of events taking place. As far as I am aware, we are the only town that has a whole forces week. We have an active armed forces champion in Councillor Chris Ryan, who is responsible for spearheading plans to improve access to services. That action plan complements the armed forces community covenant for Blackpool.

We also have our own arboretum—the Fylde memorial arboretum and community woodland at Bispham—for which Councillor Ryan is setting up a friends group. I have been privileged over the last few years to have a couple of armed forces roundtable events with members of the local armed forces community. They have included people such as Sergeant Rick Clement—he is something of a legend in Blackpool, as a double amputee who served in Afghanistan and has raised tens of thousands of pounds for military charities—Lieutenant-Colonel Johnny Lighten from the north-west veterans committee and Stephen Greenwood from Blackpool Submariners.

I pay tribute to the fantastic speech that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) made in bringing this matter to the House’s attention. However, I agree with other hon. Members that this debate should be an annual fixture in Government time.

My time is limited, so I will focus on just a couple of issues, the first of which is the return to civilian life. At my armed forces roundtable this year, that issue was the subject of a strong discussion, because many personnel are now leaving the armed forces at a younger age, in many cases having experienced very traumatic circumstances. However, they do not always find that the skills or qualifications that they have gained in the Army are readily recognised in civvy street. The in-service education metrics section of the 2016 report states that “there continues to be low satisfaction with the training and education available in relation to gaining civilian accreditation and personal development” and cites various statistics.

I urge the Minister to look carefully at that issue and to liaise with his colleagues in the Department for Education. I speak not only as a local MP, but as the shadow Minister for schools and further education, and I am well aware of the lack of transferability. We are not doing justice to our troops and armed services if they leave with qualifications that cannot be easily understood in civvy street.

I will give an example from a roundtable this year. Lesley-Jane Holt from LifeWorks for the Royal British Legion spoke about how a lot of employers use automated software to scan through CVs, but pointed out that it does not always recognise the skills relating to the forces. I urge the Minister to address that. With the Government making changes in further education and skills, with apprenticeships coming through and with the new Institute for Apprenticeships and everything that goes with it, now is an apposite time to do so.

I conclude with a plea from another person who attended that session, Councillor Edward Nash from Fylde, which is next door to Blackpool. He sent me a note for today that says:

“Some thoughts on the Covenant: It is seen as increasingly ... London-based...All bids now go to London”
We used to have a regional panel and we should resuscitate it. He continues:


Who gets what out of it? I know that a great deal has been achieved, but as we have heard, a great deal more needs to continue to be achieved. It would be very useful if the Minister looked at these issues.

4.16 pm  
Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden). I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trleyvan) not just for securing the debate but for the tireless work that she does for the armed forces in this House and beyond.

From the long winter of the Crimean war to the bloody waters of Gallipoli, the history of my constituency’s Green Howards Regiment is a shining reminder that the story of British liberty is inseparable from that of our military. It is an enormous privilege to represent the almost 1,500 veterans, service personnel and their families based around Catterick Garrison and RAF Leeming, yet for many years, despite their heroism, my constituents have too often found themselves at the back of the queue for public services. There will always be more that we can do, but in housing, education and employment, I am proud to say that the armed forces covenant and the work of this Government have moved us closer than ever to ensuring that the world’s finest armed forces are never penalised for their service.

Let me begin briefly with housing. Before the covenant’s introduction, retiring service personnel in my constituency often found that they did not meet the residency requirement to be considered for council housing. As a direct consequence of this Government’s action, I am pleased to report that that is now largely a thing of the past. I pay enormous tribute to Richmondshire District Council for its tireless work in this regard. However, although military families are used to having their lives uprooted when orders of a new posting come in, they are too often also used to finding inadequate housing when they get there.

In the most recent armed forces attitude survey, only 29% of military families said that they were satisfied with the quality of maintenance in service family accommodation. CarillionAmey’s failures to live up to the standards set out by the MOD have been mentioned before, and they are a betrayal of both the taxpayer and our armed forces. I very much welcome plans to expand Catterick to a super-garrison, but I urge the Minister to ensure that discussions with the local council begin as soon as possible so that we can ensure that adequate school places are made available when the additional soldiers and their families arrive.

My final point is about spousal employment. Fifty per cent of military personnel already cite the impact on their partner’s career as making them more likely to leave the services. The reason is that the husbands and wives of Britain’s servicemen and women represent a deep reservoir of talent that all too often goes untapped. That is a problem not only for families but for our economy, which is missing out on some of our nation’s most able and resourceful citizens. The work done by charities such as Recruit for Spouses, and the Government’s ongoing spousal employment support trial, is crucial to rectifying the situation. I hope very much that such work continues, and that it will remain at the heart of our thinking about the armed forces covenant.

The soldiers, sailors and airmen of north Yorkshire do not expect the path that they have chosen to be an easy one. All they want to know is that when they take on that burden, their Government will do what they can to make it just a little lighter. The annual covenant report makes it clear that we still have work to do, but with six years of success behind us, it is equally clear to me that it is this Government who can make that a reality.

4.20 pm  
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I welcome the report, and I particularly welcome the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trleyvan), who has done so much for the armed forces in just a year and a half. It is extraordinary to think how much she has already achieved in such a brief period.

We have heard much about the burden of service, and I think it might be helpful for us to remind ourselves of the joy of it. The reason I joined the armed forces—it is the reason many of us joined—was that it is the most dynamic and demanding environments.

I cannot express to the House the joy that I experienced when conducting fighting patrols in Afghanistan and Iraq. It might sound absurd, but actually to spend days with men—in my case it was only men—who were like-minded, focused, determined in pursuit of a goal that they knew to be right in the service of a country that they knew to be honourable, and serving alongside men we knew to have integrity: what a rare experience that was. What an experience it was not to be clouded by mortgage fears or annoyed by the words of Whips, but simply to be free to do exactly what was right.

However, the experience was also hugely demanding. We were operating in very difficult circumstances, in heat and dust, sleeping little, often in danger—at risk of either improvised explosive devices or direct action—and also working alongside people from other nations. I speak
not only of the Americans with whom, obviously, we worked very closely, the Australians with whom I had the great joy of serving, or the Estonians, Danes and Czechs, all of whom were impressive and quirky in their own ways, but of Afghans and Iraqis—men of huge courage and great integrity who literally put their lives on the line for us and many of whom, sadly, did not live to tell the tale.

That experience was almost like a drug it was so powerful. It is so electric to be challenged in everything you do—physically, mentally, morally—for such a period. It is so demanding. It is exhausting and exhilarating all at the same time. That is why the covenant matters. The challenge of coming back is much greater than the challenge of simply going from an institution to a free civilian life. It is almost like kicking a habit. Living in such an environment that is so all-consuming and so demanding, but also so rewarding, gives you a purpose that very few things can match—even some of the things that we are doing now, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Jack Lopresti: In the light of my hon. Friend’s military service and the operational tours that he has done, may I ask whether he is comfortable with the way in which we have treated our interpreters and other locally employed civilians?

Tom Tugendhat: I have only a few minutes to speak, so if my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will not talk much about locally employed civilians, except to say that I am hugely pleased that this country has given refuge to a wonderful man who served as my interpreter for a brief period when I was working for the governor of Helmand. That man went through several explosions with me—literally alongside me. We managed to escape with our lives from several relatively closer calls than I think my parents would have liked to know about.

I mention my parents for a specific reason. While I was experiencing the exhilaration of combat and the joy of camaraderie, my family and my then girlfriend—my wife should not hear about that too much!—were left behind. Of course, for many of the folk I was serving with, their families were waiting anxiously, hoping that they would not get a knock on the door. That, again, is where the covenant comes in, because when my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) is talking about accommodation models, he is talking about not only the place where people live, but a community that supports them. We must not destroy the communities that support our armed forces who serve in battle—those around Aldershot, for example—where the families live together and understand the pressures everyone is under. Accommodation is not simply about a need for a house—a set of bricks—but about a need for a family of a different sort that reinforces those families who also serve as they sit and wait.

James Cleverly: I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for giving way. On the question of support networks, does he agree that the Government and broader society need to be particularly aware of the pressures on people like him who were members of the reserve forces and do not have that automatic wraparound structure as a result of the diverse and dispersed nature of their particular circumstances?

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. and gallant Friend speaks absolutely correctly. Of course, he will know this very well, having served himself and also being a reservist.

I want to skip quickly on to a second aspect of the covenant, which I am sorry to say was not mentioned in the report: the law. We have heard mention of the Northern Ireland cases and we have touched on the Iraq historical allegations cases. My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) has done an enormous amount of very impressive work on this. Sadly, for family reasons, he cannot be here today, but I am afraid that his work has demonstrated that our Government are not doing enough. We need to do more to protect those who have done the most for us, because what the covenant should be about is ensuring that those who have served—who have risked all and given all—can come back safe in the knowledge that they are safe, and that they are not going to be pursued by charlatans and liars like Phil Shiner, who has been struck off today by the Solicitors Regulatory Authority for his deceit, dishonesty and absolute treason to this country in pursuing fine, fine people. I am delighted that that has come to pass. If any man would wish to claim the faith that he does, he would do well to read his commandments: the eighth is:

“Thou shalt not bear false witness.”

I urge the Government to look very hard at the changes they are making with regard not only to future derogations from the European convention on human rights for operations, but also a statute of limitations, because it is not enough simply to support those who are vulnerable at home or to make sure their kids have schools to go to—important though these things are—if for the years after their service they are constantly looking over their shoulder, fearful of a knock on the door, because somebody who had tried and failed to kill them in combat is now using our own courts against them. That would not only leave them weaker, but leave them exposed. It would also leave the country exposed, and that is unacceptable.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I shall begin with a number of expressions of gratitude: gratitude to the Chair for allowing me to contribute at all when, because of another Defence Committee commitment, I could not attend as much of the debate as I should have; gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) for her splendid work on the armed forces covenant—she is relatively new to the House of Commons, but has taken to this place like a duck takes to water; gratitude to the Minister, who carries out his responsibilities with a great deal of conscientiousness, informed not least by his own frontline military service, for which the country has reason to be grateful; and gratitude to all hon. Members who have seen active service and have spoken so movingly today.

In particular, I single out my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), who has just spoken. He held the House in a vice-like grip and added an important piece of information that will affect my own remarks. I had not known that Mr Shiner, who I believe glories in the title of professor, had been struck off today. I was not going to say anything about him because I knew that he was facing ongoing proceedings, but I now feel it incumbent on me
to say that if people like that had been around in the aftermath of the second world war, and if our troops in that war had known that they would have to face the duplicity, the manoeuvrings and the outrages perpetrated on subsequent generations of soldiers by such people, they could not possibly have fought with the valour that they showed in defeating Nazism and fascism.

This country will be failed by its Government if we do not find a method of preventing what is a much more lethal version of the practice that used to be known in industrial relations terms as the "work to rule" from being applied every time a soldier has to pull a trigger in a deadly conflict. That would make the carrying out of the profession of arms absolutely impractical and impossible. The words that we have heard today, time and again, are "statute of limitations". The idea that anyone could come up with new and relevant evidence 40 or more years after crimes—if they were crimes—have been committed is frankly preposterous in the context of a military conflict. It is not going to happen. All that such a process will do is put people through a mental and emotional wringer for no purpose other than to demoralise the ability of the state to send troops into harm's way, or indeed to recruit troops in the knowledge that they will be sent into harm's way at the behest of the state. Not only will those troops have to face the violence of the enemy; they will also have to face the lies, distortions and blatant manipulations of a blind justice system after they have survived the dangers of combat. That is totally untenable and it has to stop.

A statute of limitations does not imply pardoning or guilt. It does not imply anything other than the realisation that if the settlement in Northern Ireland is to hold, it has to have fairness on all sides. We cannot have a situation in which one group of people are, if not amnestied, at least given a ceiling of a couple of years to any possible prison sentence, and are even enabled to hold positions of high authority in the political system, while the soldiers who were doing their job with integrity on behalf of the democratic Government are placed in harm's way and pursued to the ends of time.

Tom Tugendhat: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are other lawyers who might be included in the points he is making?

Dr Lewis: I would say that we have to find a system to ensure that what happened in Iraq is never allowed to happen again. At some stage, that might mean standing up to the provisions of international law, and if we were to do that, we would have to use the strongest possible case. What case could be stronger than the existence of a settlement in Northern Ireland in which one group of people were protected while the soldiers who represented the majority of the people were unprotected and left exposed indefinitely?

As I have only a few seconds left, I urge people to look at the website of the Defence Committee to see details of the hearing that we held on 17 January, at which the Minister was questioned on a whole raft of issues about the welfare of our service personnel. In particular, I should like to give a little comfort to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) and to assure him that, in the light of the comments that he and others have made, and of the issues that were raised in that meeting with the Minister, it is, shall we say, more than a little probable that we will be looking into the question of service accommodation in the not too distant future.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) and the Backbench Business Committee for arranging this debate. In these interesting political times, it is important that issues such as this are not allowed to fall by the wayside. Today's debate has been interesting and useful, with many considered and thoughtful contributions. I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) raised an important point about the pensions injustice for some war widows. I also pay tribute to the excellent contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) and for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows).

The SNP welcomes the publication of the report, and it is vital that we record our gratitude for the people who step forward and signal their willingness to put themselves in peril for the rest of us by joining the armed forces. That being the case, the least we can do is ensure that we drive this matter forward and establish which particular areas need concerted focus. I agree with other hon. Members that society is perhaps becoming more aware of the effects of military service on the mental and physical health of service personnel and veterans and also their families, an important issue that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw.

Like others, I am pleased that Scotland has a veterans commissioner, whose contribution is highly regarded, and it is a shame that that is not reflected more in the report. However, the report does highlight the work to engage with the Muslim community, with Nottingham's Karimia mosque signing the armed forces covenant in December 2016. At a time when we are sending so many wrong signals to the Muslim community, that is to be absolutely welcomed. It would be helpful if future reports provided a more detailed analysis of progress in extending that kind of engagement with the covenant.

Approximately 1,800 men and women complete their military service and settle in Scotland every year. They are very welcome, but the transition can be challenging. The majority of veterans do manage to transition successfully, but we must acknowledge the hurdles that come with that magnitude of change. This week’s Combat Stress report provided a timely reminder of that and of the work that still needs to be done. Among the report’s key findings was the clear link between residence in areas with higher risks of deprivation and mental health difficulties. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw made several valuable points on that topic, and I share her concern about the problems experienced by early service leavers in particular, 63% of whom live in the most deprived areas. In stark contrast, just 32% of those who served for 15 years or more live in the most deprived areas.

Nearly one in five veterans seeking support for mental health difficulties from Combat Stress was an early service leaver. They are shown to be most at risk of mental illness, with a suicide rate three times higher than their non-veteran counterparts. Members will have heard...
today about the Scottish Government’s commitment to make Scotland the destination of choice for service leavers, and that is important to us. The Scottish Veterans Commissioner’s employability report has a useful focus on transferrable skills and attributes and on removing barriers to employment. On early service leavers, he notes that almost half of Army recruits leave school with levels of literacy and numeracy equivalent to those of an 11 year-old. Unsurprisingly, he reflects that they may become the early service leavers of the future. He highlights the story of Derek Boyd, who left school and quickly joined the Royal Engineers “to keep himself out of jail.”

Although he left after just four years, he managed to get a carpentry qualification and used that to get into college, eventually graduating with a degree in building surveying.

The Scottish Government have put considerable work into healthcare, and I am pleased that colleagues highlighted the excellent work on Veterans First Point centres and mental health. Many hon. Members also pointed out the importance of priority opportunities for housing, such as the new veterans homes supported by the Scottish Government in local authority areas across Scotland.

When asked about the possibility of a post in the Ministry of Defence similar to the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, the Minister said that, while well-intentioned, it would duplicate existing provision. However, in a survey conducted by SSAFA, 70% of clients expressing a view felt that the armed forces covenant was not being taken seriously, so I wonder whether that could be considered further.

Of those who left the armed forces in 2014-15 and used the career transition partnership, 11% were unemployed and 10% were economically inactive up to six months after leaving service. That represents an almost doubling of the level of unemployment among former service personnel. When broken down by service, gender and ethnicity, the figures are particularly worrying: 13% of former members of the Army, and all female service leavers in some categories, were unemployed six months after leaving. Some 81% of white service leavers were in employment after six months compared with 73% of black and minority ethnic service leavers. None of that is good enough.

Of those in employment six months after leaving service, 23% were employed in skilled trade occupations, compared with 11% of the UK population, which clearly emphasises the value of supporting members of the armed forces to improve their skills and qualifications while in service.

The National Audit Office report on the MOD equipment plan for 2016 to 2026 concluded:

“The risks to the affordability of the...Equipment Plan are greater than at any point since reporting began in 2012.”

Some £1.5 billion of the required savings are to be provided from elsewhere in the defence budget, including through military and civilian pay restraint and savings from the running of the defence estate, which is already not a pretty picture in Scotland. That puts the pay of armed forces and civilian staff right in the frontline of meeting problems in the equipment budget, which is not acceptable.

The 2015 strategic defence and security review added £24.4 billion of new commitments to the MOD budget, including mechanised infantry vehicles, the Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and accelerating the purchases of the F-35 joint strike fighter. Those are welcome commitments, but they appear to have created the Government’s own version of the black hole that they frequently refer to having inherited from their predecessors.

After the Trident test malfunction, there is an obvious suggestion that the Government might refocus their defence spending on conventional defences, our military personnel and our veterans so that we can be sure they have the equipment they need, that appropriate support is provided for them and their families and that they receive a proper level of pay. Considering what we have heard from all the hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, surely that is what they deserve.

I conclude by echoing the sentiments of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and appealing to the Minister to work with the Foreign Office to bring the Chennai Six—my constituent Billy Irving and his colleagues, all military veterans—home from India and back to their families, where they belong.

4.41 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) on securing today’s debate and on her important work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the armed forces covenant.

The covenant sets out a series of commitments that we, as a nation, have made to our armed forces in recognition of their service, dedication and sacrifice. We make those commitments to the entire forces community—to forces families and veterans, as well as to those who are currently serving.

When we were in government, Labour did much to pave the way for the covenant, with the first military covenant being published in 2000. It was my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) who, as Health Secretary, ensured that for the first time veterans got priority treatment on the NHS. It is encouraging to see such enthusiastic recognition of the covenant by businesses and by community and religious groups.

The annual reports on the covenant are an important way of making sure that it is being honoured and applied properly, but we must never become complacent about the covenant, particularly at a time of swingeing cuts to council budgets and the health service. We must defend and extend the services available to the forces community as a result of the covenant. Moreover, we can always do more to ensure that the two vital principles that underlie the covenant—that our forces should have special consideration and suffer no disadvantage—are a reality for all in the forces community.

I particularly welcome the work that the Royal British Legion will lead to establish a veterans gateway—a single point of contact for the forces community consisting of a gateway contact centre with a direct phone number and website. In my conversations with forces charities and service users, it is clear that the gateway could be a real benefit to the forces community, particularly to
veterans who may not know exactly where to turn when seeking support or advice. Indeed Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities, describes it as “an extremely positive development which will be of great benefit to those in need.”

However, it is essential that the MOD does all it can to publicise the gateway, particularly to those who left the forces some time ago.

The report describes the many positive steps that have been taken by local authorities across England to deliver the covenant, such as Blackpool Council, where the armed forces champion, Labour councillor Chris Ryan, is responsible for consulting interested parties and for putting together and delivering an action plan. The purpose of an action plan is to address shortcomings and make improvements. Will the Minister tell us what monitoring and evaluation his Department does of action plans produced by local councils and health bodies? What discussions does he have with them about setting targets for improvement?

The report also lauds the impressive commitment of the devolved Governments of Scotland and Wales. The Labour Welsh Government have made particular strides to improve the support available to the forces community, including by investing £650,000 in specialist health services, to fund improvements in psychological therapies and develop a fast-track referral pathway to support injured service personnel in their return to fully deployable status.

So there is much in this report that I welcome, but it is clear from the observations of the external members of the Covenant Reference Group that there is still much more work to be done to ensure that the commitments made in the covenant are fully realised for all. The forces families federations express real concern about the current and future provision of housing for service members and their families. Indeed, the federations state that they have heard more complaints in the past 12 months than ever before about poorly maintained and substandard housing units. Such complaints were about, among other things: leaking roofs; no heating for months; and broken toilets left unrepaired. The federations issue a stark warning, saying that this situation represents a threat to recruitment and retention, as well as the morale of our service personnel, and is one for which they urge swift action.

However, we know that there have been serious questions about the maintenance of service housing for some time. In July, the Public Accounts Committee issued a damming judgment of both the MOD and CarillionAmey, concluding that they were “letting down service families by providing them with poor accommodation, and often leaving them for too long without basic living requirements.”

This issue goes right to the heart of the covenant and to the duties we owe to our armed forces. I therefore ask the Minister to spell out what action he will take over the next 12 months to ensure that this sorry situation does not continue.

There is also great uncertainty and worry about the proposed changes to forces housing that are being considered by the MOD: the so-called future accommodation model. The families federations report increasing nervousness among the forces, not least because they suspect that these plans have more to do with cost-cutting than improving provision for them. The Department must provide clear information to our armed forces about what could be very significant changes to forces accommodation, and the MOD must ensure that the views of our forces and their families are listened to and respected. If this is an opportunity to both modernise and improve housing provision, to provide flexibility, to facilitate home ownership and to recognise the realities of modern living, that is a good thing. But if, as I fear, this process is driven more by cost-cutting at the MOD, with fewer options for forces families and increasingly exposing them to exploitation by private landlords, that is something else entirely.

Another uncertainty apparent from this report concerns the Government’s decision to close 91 MOD sites across the UK, which will see cities such as York and Chester losing their barracks and will affect some 22,000 military personnel and nearly 5,000 civilian staff. Of course the requirements of the defence estate will change over time, and there is a need to modernise and restructure to reflect that, but the complete lack of detail provided by the MOD to those affected by these changes is unacceptable. In many cases, we have no idea of the timeframe for a base closure and, crucially, whether civilian staff will be able to commute to other sites in their vicinity or whether they will lose their jobs altogether.

I am concerned that one of the sites that has been earmarked for closure is the Defence Business Services site in Blackpool, which houses Veterans UK. All we are told in the Government’s publication is that the site will be replaced by a “Government Hub” in the north-west. If that ends up being beyond a reasonable commuting distance—for example, if it is in Manchester—we risk losing experienced staff who have an expertise in supporting our veterans community. The forces families federations have said that the many questions relating to programmes such as “A Better Defence Estate” mean that service personnel and their families are living in a period of increasing uncertainty. I therefore ask the Minister to try as hard as he can to provide our armed forces with the answers that they deserve.

As well as ensuring that the commitments contained in the covenant are being delivered effectively, we must also ensure that the covenant applies across Britain and that its application is not patchy or subject to a postcode lottery. Cobseo notes in the report that: “the delivery of the Covenant is very varied across the country with a clear need to ensure...that appropriate training is given to local authority staff to ensure that the policies are properly implemented.”

Research published last year by SSAFA found that just 16% of the veterans that it surveyed thought that the covenant was being implemented effectively. We also need the Government to look at monitoring and evaluation, and to develop strategies that ensure that service providers—health boards, local authorities and schools—are implementing the covenant effectively.

Central to this whole issue is the question of identifying our forces community to ensure that they can access the services they need. One starting point, highlighted in the best practice guide to the covenant, is the way in which some local authorities include a question on veterans on some of their forms to help them to collate data. I urge the Government to consider developing that into a standard format—for example, in the form of a question on GP registration forms.
The challenge is always to find ways to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the covenant in ways that are effective, but not too burdensome or bureaucratic. We should not forget, either, that many of our public bodies are under considerable strain as they face cuts and increased demands. The “Count them in” campaign has already been mentioned; will the Government make a firm commitment to that so that we have a better understanding of the nation’s profile and the needs and locations of our serving personnel?

Last year, the Government announced the new £10 million covenant fund. What evaluation has the Minister made of the use of that money and the measurable outcomes? How will that information influence the future use of the fund?

The armed forces covenant and the services it guarantees are a moral obligation on us all, as a society, to ensure that our forces are supported and honoured for their service. It is also crucial to retention and recruitment. It is therefore incumbent on us all to ensure that our forces community truly get the very best, because they deserve nothing less.

4.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): In the six minutes I have to respond to the debate—if I am to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) to wind up—I clearly will not be able to address many of the questions that have been raised. I shall therefore commit to write to Members after the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Her knowledge of this subject, as demonstrated in her speech, is second to none.

Before I outline some of the covenant’s key achievements, it might be useful to provide the House with some context. The notion of a special bond between the state and its armed forces is hardly new. Indeed, I was surprised that as early as 1593 the Elizabethans had introduced a statute ensuring disabled army veterans “should at their return be relieved and rewarded to the end that they may reap the fruit of their good deservings”.

That is something we should be doing today.

The term military covenant was coined back in 2000, as my hon. Friend said. I remember first hearing the term around the time I was serving in Kosovo. It was then little more than an informal understanding of the debt of service we owe to those who serve us. However, fears that the covenant was gradually being undermined led to its principles being enshrined in law in the Armed Forces Act 2011. Much of the progress over recent years has been highlighted in the debate, so I shall not dwell on that.

I shall focus in my speech on just three areas in which progress is most pronounced, but before I do so I wish to say a couple of words on the Northern Ireland legacy investigations, which have been raised by so many Members this afternoon. Although the Government firmly believe in upholding the rule of law, we are concerned that investigations into Northern Ireland’s past focus almost entirely on former police officers and soldiers. This is wrong, and does not reflect the fact that the overwhelming majority of those who served did so with great bravery and distinction. That is why the Defence Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary are working together to ensure that veterans are not unfairly treated or disproportionately investigated compared with others, in an effort to create a Stormont House agreement Bill.

We are acutely mindful of the burden that historical investigations can place on veterans and their families. When veterans face allegations arising from actions that they undertook as part of their duties, taxpayer-funded legal advice and representation is available for as long as is necessary. In addition to legal advice, the MOD will provide pastoral support, either directly through regimental associations, through Veterans UK, or in partnership with the veterans charities, depending on the individual needs and circumstances.

As I said, I shall touch briefly on three areas, starting with veterans’ health. It is only right that those who have sustained life-changing injuries in the service of our nation receive the best medical care, so we have worked with the NHS to ensure that recent veterans with complex amputation-related complications can now be referred, when necessary, to a dedicated clinic at the world-class Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre in Headley Court.

We are not just thinking of rehabilitation. The most seriously injured service personnel also need assistance in making the transition to civvy street, and through life, so we are working across the MOD and NHS to develop an integrated personal commissioning for veterans model. This fully joined-up system aims to bring the NHS, the MOD and the charitable sector together to provide services specifically tailored to an individual veteran’s needs. At the same time, NHS England’s new veterans trauma network, launched at the end of last year, offers a safety net for those with lifelong healthcare needs. Increasingly, we recognise that the scars of war are more than just skin deep, so the Government are also channelling £13 million from LIBOR to provide support for mental health in the armed forces community.

I, too, have recently met Sue Freeth, the chief executive of Combat Stress, to explore how we can work more closely with that organisation. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) for all the work that he has done, and I am delighted that we have now completed and implemented most of the recommendations in his report. Equally, I wish to focus on the preventive action that we can take with our serving personnel, which is why I am pleased that the trauma risk management system is now fully effective.

Clearly, there was a bone of contention between my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) and I on the matter of housing. I absolutely understand what he is trying to tell me. I feel somewhat at a disadvantage, because it appears almost as if he is sure what format the future accommodation model should take. I simply seize this opportunity to tell him once again, and to reassure him, that the reason we had our survey was to give us the evidence base for how to proceed.

We have yet to make any firm decisions about what format the accommodation model will take. It will evolve. It will be a complex process, and one size will not fit all. I want to dispel one myth: we will not somehow scrap all service family accommodation. I invite anybody who challenges that to come to Ludgershall, where we are about to award a contract to build new service family...
accommodation in Wiltshire. Off the top of my head, I think that we are talking about some 444 new homes. Why would we be building new service family accommodation if we will not be using it at all in the future?

It is absolutely right that, when we look at the accommodation needs of our service personnel, options should be available. We should recognise that young people, as the survey says, do not necessarily want to live in single-living accommodation. Why is it that more than 9,000 service personnel have now used our service Help to Buy scheme so that they can buy their own home and get into the private sector? It is all about delivering options and ensuring that our service personnel have those options. It is a complex model, and it is a controversial matter. Much of the problem is that we have not had the opportunity to communicate what the options will be in the future, and I am determined to address that.

I recognise that, having focused on that particular issue, I will probably have to conclude. To the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) I say that there is always a debate about where that line should be. I can tell the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) that I am very proud that some 95% of our new entrants are enrolled in apprenticeships. As for the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), I am more than happy to meet him to talk about Dale barracks.

4.57 pm

Mrs Trevelyan: I thank all colleagues who have spent their Thursday afternoon here in the Chamber rather than in Stoke-on-Trent or Copeland, and the Minister who has sat patiently listening to all of us as we share our praise and our criticism of the way in which the armed forces covenant is rolling out.

There must be something about Kent, because my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Sir Julian Brazier) and for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) are both passionate about housing. The fact that it is not just about the bricks is the critical point. I hope very much that the Minister and the Ministry of Defence will hear that message, because that is the families’ message to them. The model needs to be good and it needs to be 21st century, but it is not just about the bricks.

Many colleagues talked about the statute of limitations. I know that the Minister is working on that. If the outstanding work on the Iraq Historic Allegations Team of the hon. and gallant Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who could not be with us today, can change the Ministry’s mind and drive forward some really good improvements, I hope very much that colleagues who have spoken today can push forward that statute of limitations and find a legal framework that can work.

The key to all matters to do with the covenant—the work that has been done over the past few years is extensive and very positive—is that unless our attempts at recruitment and retention succeed, we will not have the armed forces we need to take up the challenges that the world around us demands. Every decision that the Ministry makes cannot only be on cost-savings grounds. Value for money is about not cost saving, but about getting the right investment for our armed forces to ensure that we look after them and their families as they serve, and then for the rest of their lives.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered the Armed Forces Covenant Report 2016.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier today, you may recall that the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union laid a copy of the White Paper before the House. I have my own copy with me. We have found that at least one chart in the document contains incorrect information. Chart 7.1 states that United Kingdom workers are entitled to 14 weeks of annual holiday, whereas the chart should state that they have 5.6 weeks paid holiday. The mistake has led to another error, as the chart claims that European Union minimum maternity leave entitlement is only 5.6 weeks, when it should be 14 weeks. The Scottish National party has corrected the chart for the United Kingdom Government. Perhaps the Minister would like a copy to save his blushes over what appears to have been only a desktop exercise today. Madam Deputy Speaker, would you please instruct me as to how this House can get the accurate, proper information to inform our already rushed debate on this rather important issue?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I think the hon. Gentleman has quite successfully just done so himself. I am sure that the Treasury Benches will have heard what he said and will take action.
Colostomy Irrigation

*Motion made and Question proposed.* That this House do now adjourn.—(Heather Wheeler.)

5.1 pm

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): When I secured this debate, I had not realised that it would be so close to World Cancer Day, which is on Saturday. Given the close connection between my subject and cancer, I could not have chosen a more appropriate date.

I begin by paying tribute to the colostomy nurses at the Royal Shrewsbury hospital, particularly Tracy Lunt, my personal stoma nurse, who helped me through a difficult time in my life and who encouraged me and introduced me to colostomy irrigation 14 years ago. I also thank colostomy nurse, Julie Powell, who telephoned me late one evening this week to help me to prepare after hearing that I had secured the debate. Colostomy nurses are special people, drawn to an unglamorous job that involves helping and encouraging people at the most difficult time in their lives. I imagine the subject of this debate is not often the subject of debate in Parliament. Madam Deputy Speaker, you have been an MP for longer than I have and may remember another occasion, but I do not. As far as I know, this may be the first time that this subject has appeared on the Order Paper.

I had best begin with some explanation of why the subject is of such importance to me and to many people—we do not know how many people because the subject is not talked about much. It is difficult to know how many people are irrigators, how many could be irrigators or how many would be if encouraged and helped by a sympathetic introduction process. At this point, I should introduce the background to my interest, which derives from bowel cancer. Colostomy irrigation has given me the freedom to live a full and active life. I will mention bowel cancer quite a lot because of its close connection with colostomy irrigation.

I am an ostomate—a person with a colostomy. I have owned my colostomy for almost 15 years, since undergoing an abdominoperineal resection to remove a cancerous tumour in 2002. I did not want a colostomy, but the alternative at the time was a far less attractive prospect. It was perhaps the most traumatic event in my life. I was uncertain about the future or, indeed, whether I even had a future at all. It certainly gave me a good understanding of how others feel in the same situation. I consider myself to have been extraordinarily lucky in that I made a full recovery.

One of the key reasons for my good luck and full recovery was that my cancerous colorectal tumour was diagnosed early in its development, before the disease had spread to my liver and elsewhere, when full recovery would be much less certain. Unsurprisingly, I have been a champion of early diagnosis ever since, and played a role in promoting bowel cancer screening programmes in Wales, when they were introduced a few years ago. The campaigning charity, Beating Bowl Cancer, is currently leading a campaign to reduce the age at which screening is offered from 60 to 50, as it is in Scotland. Instinctively, I support early screening, but realise that it serves no real purpose unless accompanied by the availability of sufficient endoscopy capacity.

Colorectal cancer, or bowel cancer, as it is commonly known, is one of the most common forms of cancer, with 110 new cases diagnosed every day. It is a traumatic shock for many when the tumour is first diagnosed, but the cancer is completely curable if caught early enough. It is possible to recover and do some fairly crazy things. For example, after recovery, I initiated the establishment of the Welsh parliamentary rugby team. In passing, I should say that, rather shamefully, our first game versus the Lords and Commons parliamentary team degenerated into a full-scale brawl, which received much coverage in the national media, and that is when I first met the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), a Labour MP. I went training with the late, great All Black Jonah Lomu, who had also suffered life-threatening illnesses, in preparation for that game. My friends, of course, think it was even crazier to seek election as a Member of Parliament.

The final introductory point I want to make concerns the title I have chosen for this debate. Until recently, I used the term “colonic irrigation”, like most people, but it is too often associated in the public mind with a lifestyle choice available in health and massage centres—a practice I have never really taken much interest in—so now use the term “colostomy irrigation”, which has no such associations, and which accurately describes the process.

My speech has three main purposes. First, I want to explain what colostomy irrigation actually involves—what it is. Secondly, I want to explain why I decided to become an irrigator. Thirdly, I want to explain why I am seeking to raise the profile and awareness of colostomy irrigation, which I have been doing for 14 years. This Adjournment debate is the best platform to raise awareness that I have ever secured.

First, on the actual process, I am constantly surprised by how little is known about it. Even people suffering illnesses such as colitis or bowel cancer, who face the prospect of a permanent colostomy, seem to know little about the procedure. A colleague MP with a background in the clinical profession approached me today and said that not even all colostomy nurses know about it or encourage it. It seems not to be thought suitable for polite conversation; the human mind seems to go into “block” mode if the subject crops up.

However, the process is very simple. All it involves is hanging what is in effect a polythene bag, containing 1,000 to 1,500 ml of warm water, on some convenient hook—I usually use the bathroom curtain rail. One of the problems with smart modern hotels is that there are often no convenient hooks. Luckily, I am a farmer by background, so I am quite practical and naturally given to improvisation, and a coat hanger can be quite a handy hook. The water is then allowed to run by gravity, via a polythene tube, into that part of the lower bowel that my brilliant consultant surgeon left me with. It is possible to recover and do some fairly crazy things. Unsurprisingly, I have been a champion of early diagnosis ever since, and played a role in promoting bowel cancer screening programmes in Wales, when they were introduced a few years ago. The campaigning charity, Beating Bowl Cancer, is currently leading a campaign to reduce the age at which screening is offered from 60 to 50, as it is in Scotland. Instinctively, I support early screening, but realise that it serves no real purpose unless accompanied by the availability of sufficient endoscopy capacity. Colostomy irrigation, which derives from bowel cancer. Colostomy irrigation, which I have been doing for 14 years. This process involves helping and encouraging people at the most difficult time in their lives. I imagine the subject of this debate is not often the subject of debate in Parliament. Madam Deputy Speaker, you have been an MP for longer than I have and may remember another occasion, but I do not. As far as I know, this may be the first time that this subject has appeared on the Order Paper.
not possible. There are additional bits of equipment, such as commercially available water pumps, that replace simple gravity, but my experience is that they are not usually needed.

There is another point of interest here—certainly to me and, I think, to the Minister. I am told that while a very small percentage of ostomates in the UK irrigate—less than 5%—a very high percentage do so in the US. That is thought to be because all the equipment associated with wearing a colostomy bag is free in the UK but has to be paid for in the US—1,000 ml of water comes free.

Secondly, why do I irrigate myself? When I am asked, I give the same answer as when I am asked why I voted to leave in the EU referendum on 23 June—it could one day become a pub quiz question: what is the connection between the EU referendum and colostomy irrigation?—and that answer is to take back control. I wanted to take back control of my own body and not allow my colostomy to rule my life, which it could well have done. I did not want to have to wear a colostomy bag. I wanted to continue my public life without being concerned about an “active” colostomy at inconvenient times. I can irrigate when and where it is convenient for me to do so. I take the decisions, not my colostomy. I have—as, indeed, have all the other ostomates who irrigate—genuinely taken back control.

Thirdly, I turn to the main reason why I am raising the issue in this debate. Having experienced the extra freedom, self-confidence and control that colostomy irrigation gives me, I want to encourage other ostomates to think about doing the same. I must emphasise that it does not work for every ostomate, and, in any case, it is a matter of choice. It is not a question of what one should do; it depends on what one can do and what one wants to do. All I want to do is to suggest to ostomates who have never thought about irrigation to consider it. There will be a few uncertain days to begin with while the body familiarises itself with the process, but, with the guidance and encouragement of their stoma nurses, they too may find the freedom and control that colostomy irrigation brings.

The background to every colostomy is some form of clinical need, involving fear, trauma, great uncertainty, great need for relief from pain or even simply a desire to stay alive. World Cancer Day is on Saturday, and I am really grateful that I have had the chance to play a small part in making life better for at least some of those who are suffering from the implications of bowel cancer.

5.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) on his excellent speech. I want to congratulate him on three more things: first, on securing the debate two days before World Cancer Day; secondly, on rightly saying that this is the first time that we have had a debate on this subject in this place—it is good that we are doing so— and, thirdly, on talking so passionately about his personal story in such a matter of fact way, if I may use that term. He spoke candidly and clearly about a subject that sometimes carries with it a stigma, or that is a taboo.

I have been looking after the whole area of cancer for the past six months. It strikes me that when people come into the system, we are as good as anywhere in the world at treating them and dealing with the illness. Unfortunately, one problem we have is that too many people come into our system too late. As a result, first diagnosis is very important.

One of my hon. Friend’s points was that there are some 6 million people in this country with bowel incontinence issues. Of course, the majority of them are nothing like as serious as the story we heard this afternoon. Similar stories may result from bowel cancer, and perhaps also from other types, such as cervical cancer. The choice of whether to use irrigation or another technique is a personal one. There are pros and cons to each, and I will try to set them out. Before I do, perhaps I should talk a little bit about what the Government need to do, and what they are doing, regarding the prevention, screening and treatment of bowel cancer. Obviously, if we were more successful at those, we would reduce the incidence of the disease and the need for the techniques that we have heard about.

The Government’s approach is informed by the cancer strategy, which came out about 18 months ago. It included 96 recommendations, all of which were accepted. It has been fully funded, and its implementation is now being led by Cally Palmer and Bruce Keogh from NHS England. We are finding that survival rates are increasing—we know that they are increasing quite sharply for most cancer types—but there is probably still a gap between us and the best in the EU. We are determined to close that gap, and although we are doing so, there is still work to do.

Of the parts of the cancer strategy that relate most to this debate, I want to talk about screening and about living with cancer and beyond—we have heard a story about doing so over the past 14 years. I also want to talk about one of the things that I think will be most important in improving cancer awareness and outcomes: the whole area of transparency.

One of my hon. Friend’s points was that there are staffing issues in this area, particularly in relation to bowel cancer. He said that we do not have enough endoscopists—that is true. The Government are committed to training a further 200 by 2020. Indeed, we have not been able to do some of the things on screening that we want because of those staff shortages, but we are addressing that problem very firmly.

The current screening test is an FOB, or faecal occult blood test, which is in the process of being replaced by the FIT—faecal immunochemical test—from 2018. A contractor/supplier has been appointed. The expectation is that that will lead to a sharp increase in the incidence of screening, the numbers of people coming forward for screening and the efficacy of that screening, which is very important.

In parallel, we have introduced a bowel scope screening process for males and females at or around their 55th birthday. This one-off test involves a full endoscopy, in consequence of which polyps are removed. Whether or not they are benign, that process sharply reduces the incidence and risk of future bowel cancer, which is also
very important. In the interests of full disclosure, let me say that I have also gone through the procedure. It was not anything like my hon. Friend’s, but I nevertheless went through it successfully. The process is a very important part of this fight.

The second aspect of the strategy is living with and beyond cancer. When I gave a presentation to the all-party group on ovarian cancer, I was struck that a lady whom I met afterwards said that she had received a terminal diagnosis for that type of cancer, but was not receiving support. That is obviously not where we want to be. The Government’s intention is that, by 2020, everybody who has a cancer diagnosis will have an individually designed package, with a cancer nurse specialist assigned to them. We are undertaking that programme in conjunction with Macmillan. It is important because cancer is increasingly curable, so we must increasingly put in place softer packages, as it were, to help people afterwards.

The final area I want to touch on is transparency. One of the frustrations is something that I often reflect on after talking to colleagues about the NHS and its effectiveness. Many of them are very concerned—almost certainly rightly—about the bricks and mortar of their NHS establishments, because they are very visible. Changes in configuration also concern them and their electors. I have fewer conversations with colleagues who are concerned about cancer outcomes in their areas. Those statistics are now published, so we know which are the best clinical commissioning groups, which are the worst and which are average.

One way in which we will increase the overall standard and quality of outcomes is through dialogue—with Members and the public more generally to act on the pressure points—about the performance of CCGs. I would argue that whether a Member’s CCG is doing one of the best or one of the worst jobs in the country might be more important to their community than whether the accident and emergency department is open for 24 or 18 hours. However, we do not always have such dialogues in this place.

On innovations in treatment for bowel cancer, keyhole surgery is making a big difference to outcomes. There are very clever people doing very clever things, which are leading to better outcomes and successful operations.

For many, however, a colostomy is needed. Broadly speaking, there is a choice of techniques: the irrigation technique that we have heard about this afternoon; or an appliance, which is typically a bag. There are pros and cons of each, but, as my hon. Friend said, the appliance route is chosen 20 times more frequently than irrigation. This must be a personal choice, and NICE guidelines state that choices should be explained, but that is an extreme difference. As my hon. Friend said, the difference is far greater than that in the United States. It might well be that there is not enough awareness, so this debate has been one way to address that.

A recent paper by Sir Norman Williams, the senior clinical adviser to the Secretary of State for Health, set out the benefits of irrigation: there is no need for an appliance; the individual has control over timing; there is some evidence that fewer drugs are required, with a consequent increase in general wellbeing; and an individual is able to have a more varied diet. Those benefits suit many people. The technique might not be suitable for people with heart or kidney diseases or Crohn’s disease, and some might find that the 45 to 60-minute process is too onerous. In addition, I think I am right to say that the best results from this technique tend to come if the process is carried out at roughly the same time every day, which might not suit everybody.

The NICE guidelines are very clear: both techniques should be offered by the clinician or stoma nurse. The choice should be based on facts and personal preference. Whichever technique is selected by the patient, the nurse is responsible for teaching the process and supporting the patient until they are up and running, because it is extremely important to get it right.

I again congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and raising awareness of the issue. He has talked frankly about a process that has been a massive help for many people in their day-to-day lives.

Question put and agreed to.

5.23 pm

House adjourned.
Kevin Foster: I beg to move, That the clause be now negatived.

Kevin Foster: (Torbay) (Con): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163), and negatived.

Parking Places (Variation of Charges) Bill
Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

RESTRICTION OF VARIATION

“The provisions at sections 1 and 2 do not apply where a local authority make, or propose to make, an order to increase parking charges in off-street parking places and designated parking places.” —(Kevin Foster.)

Kevin Foster: My new clause is intended to probe the views of the House of Commons about the impact on the local authority of an order to increase parking charges.

Kevin Foster: This new clause would disapply the provisions of the Bill when a local authority proposes to increase parking charges for off-street or on-street parking.

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.34 am

Kevin Foster: I beg to move, That the clause be now read a Second time.

I welcome the broad thrust of the Bill, not least in the context of my time in local government. When we wanted to do something to support retailers at Christmas or some other event, we found that altering parking charges in a local authority car park or other location required a formal consultation, although the likelihood of someone writing to us to say “I would like to park my car” was virtually nil. When I was both the cabinet member for economic regeneration and the deputy leader of a council, we were spending thousands of pounds to achieve next to nothing. In some cases, we would find that we were not able to do what we wanted to do.

My new clause is intended to probe the views of the Bill’s promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), and those of my hon. Friend the Minister, with whom, when we occupied our respective posts in adjoining local authorities, I had exchanges for many years on everything from regeneration plans to council tax. It is a pleasure to see him in the Chamber today, and I look forward to hearing his comments later.

The current consultation procedures are intended to protect motorists and town centres from higher charges, but I wanted to make it clear beyond doubt that the Bill’s aim was to make it easier to reduce parking charges rather than making it easier to increase them. The Bill will certainly be helpful to Torbay. Each year, we have winter charges and standard charges. Standard charges apply throughout the summer and are slightly higher than the discounted winter rates, because in winter large car parks near a beach are unlikely to be particularly full. We do have some hardy swimmers, though, and there is usually a large event every Boxing day in both Torquay and Paignton. I see the Minister nodding: he is welcome to join us for a nice refreshing dip on a Boxing day morning. The requirement is to get one’s hair wet, to show that one has really gone into the water.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): My hon. Friend has brought to the House a wealth of experience of the council in his constituency. May I ask him how the new clause would work in practice?

Kevin Foster: In practice, it would work in the same way as the Bill, but it makes it absolutely clear that the Bill deals only with circumstances in which car parking charges are being lowered temporarily, and that there is no prospect of orders, for instance, to increase them. Local newspapers have strongly defended the requirement for formal notifications and consultations, and rightly so, but the new clause is intended to make clear that that will apply only when parking charges are not being increased.

Wendy Morton: Is my hon. Friend saying that he does not think councils should be able to raise parking charges if they need to do so?

Kevin Foster: No. I think it is clear that if a local authority decided that raising charges was appropriate, it would be able to do so under the existing procedures, although consultation would be necessary, and, obviously, the authority would be answerable to its electors. Any authority considering increasing car parking charges must carefully consider the overall impact, not just whether it will get a couple of thousand pounds extra from a car park. The Local Government Finance Bill Committee this week heard evidence—the Minister was present—from the Federation of Small Businesses about the impact that increasing car park charges can have on town centres and on businesses. Local authorities will in future have 100% retention of business rates, and if a town centre is not regenerating and does not have people shopping in it, that will hit the bottom line as much as not getting an extra 10p from each car that parks in the car park.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about giving councils the flexibility to lower prices in order to stimulate high streets, yet areas that are highly stimulated by an event—a celebration of Shakespeare’s 400th birthday, perhaps, this year—might wish to direct drivers to a park-and-ride, for instance, to avoid an absolute blockage in the town centre. Many of us have great events in our towns. May we have a temporary uplift, deterring people from parking in the town centre while an event is going on, and reduce it afterwards? This amendment sounds a little heavy-handed, if my hon. Friend does not mind my saying so.

Kevin Foster: I do not think my hon. Friend’s intervention is heavy-handed at all; it is right that we discuss probing amendments to Bills robustly on the Floor of the House.
Kevin Foster: There is already some provision in this regard. My own authority, Torbay, held the Torbay airshow last year. It was clear that one of its car parks would be very congested, so to avoid undue congestion it closed the car park for the day of the airshow but arranged for it to be booked via a separate means. The solution met the need on the day, but if it was put in place more widely and challenged there would be a question about whether it was the right way to proceed. It was just a fix for the day.

If a council is going to look to take money out of large events in the manner suggested—for a market day-style event—it should go through a proper consultation process. One way of ensuring that large crowds do not come to events is for people to attend, park in a car park and feel they have been ripped off for parking; traffic congestion reduces the following year, because no one comes back. There is clearly a balance to be struck. It is great to have events that draw people into town centres. I am the Member for Torquay and Paignton, and most days of the week my town centre has problems with lots of traffic congestion: that is quite a pleasant problem to deal with, compared with the issues of the decline of the town centre that we have seen over the last 30 to 40 years.

Kevin Foster: I completely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) is not present, as I think he would confirm that the town council in Stratford-on-Avon owns the car parks, rather than the district council, and, given the popularity of Stratford as a visitor destination, almost funds its operations—legitimately—through its car park ownership.

Kevin Foster: No, councils can make a reasonable surplus from their car parking and contribute it to their bottom line. It is a shame that my hon. Friend the Member for Torquay and Paignton (Douglas Carswell) is not present, as I think he would confirm that the town council in Stratford-on-Avon owns the car parks, rather than the district council, and, given the popularity of Stratford as a visitor destination, almost funds its operations—legitimately—through its car park ownership.

Kevin Foster: I completely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi). There is clearly a balance to be struck. There is a balance to be struck.

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how they travel to work. If their annual charges go up—or season tickets or daily prices—that will hit their income, effectively taxing it via the back door. I completely agree with my hon. Friend on that. Some councils seem to view parking as a cash cow, and we need to make it clear that while there is no problem with making a reasonable return, we do not want councils to engage in the rip-off behaviour that we see from some private sector operators. At the end of the day, a council has a wider duty to its whole area, not just to what it thinks it can get away with when making money from parking.

Overall, the Bill is welcome. As I touched on in response to an earlier intervention, having two systems makes sense: one for lowering charges and a completely different one for putting them up. Over the past few years, the Government have looked to strengthen the fairness of the enforcement of parking charges.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way.

Kevin Foster: I will give way in a moment.

I can think of an example from my constituency. Crossways car park in Paignton is a privately run car park in the town centre. It looks cheap on the outside, but people discover a rather nasty surprise when they go in: the ridiculously strict enforcement of the private sector operator. I will perhaps say more about that in another debate, but people receiving £100 fines for minor infractions is starting to have quite an impact. The House has rightly moved to ensure that local authorities cannot use extreme enforcement and to get rid of cowboy clammers, but I want the law to be structured to protect motorists, which is why my new clause is about making it clear that the new system should be used only to decrease the price of parking. My hon. Friend has been waiting patiently, so I will now give way.

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is clearly extremely well versed in such matters, so I want him to help me fully understand his new clause. The Bill proposes to make it easier for councils to decrease parking charges, and my hon. Friend wants to ensure that it is not so easy for councils to increase parking charges, but my understanding is that that is also the thrust of the Bill, as councils would have to consult before increasing charges. Will he explain why he feels that the Bill does not achieve what he is trying to achieve with his new clause?

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. To be clear, I absolutely welcome the thrust of the Bill, as I have said on a couple of occasions, and making it easier to reduce car parking charges by having two separate systems. The Bill removes the need for formal adverts in local newspapers and reduces the length of consultation periods when prices are being reduced, but I tabled the new clause to probe whether that is the Bill’s definitive intention. I do not note any specific wording stating that the Bill is purely about decreasing parking charges. I accept that that is absolutely the intention of my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth, and I look forward to the Minister confirming that that is the Government’s intention, but I felt that it was appropriate to explore the matter further. I had hoped to see specific mention made of reducing charges, and I will consider withdrawing my new clause based on the commentary I hear today, but it is right to explore whether the Bill is purely about decreasing car parking charges.

A decrease in charges could perhaps be used to encourage people to attend special events. Classic examples of when many councils may decide to use such measures are Armistice Day or Remembrance Day. Many councils have a policy of not enforcing standard parking charges on certain days of the year, but that is legally a bit messy. People should pay in theory but may see a sign saying, “We are not enforcing the rules today.” The Bill would allow that sort of thing and allow discounts on particular days or for particular events. The other classic examples are Christmas day and Boxing day. Both are easily included in orders about off-street parking, but that is more difficult with moveable feasts. I fully accept that councils should not draw up exhaustive lists of every single event or every day on which they may want to take 50p off car parking or make it free for an hour or two. As I have said, I welcome the thrust of the Bill, but I want it to be clear that it is only about creating a system to make it easier to reduce, not increase, car parking charges.

The Bill is worthwhile and I am delighted to see it making progress. It is about reducing burdens, reducing bureaucracy and ensuring that money is not spent on pointless consultations—something that I will mention in the not too distant future when discussing my Bill—but I want its intention to be clear. That is why I tabled the new clause, which I hope will provide the basis for some debate, and I look forward to hearing the Minister’s comments. Again, I stress that I absolutely welcome the Bill, making it easier to reduce car parking charges for particular events, but that is not explicit in the Bill.

Our legislation and debates should be clear. Someone sat in the Gallery or watching at home should be able to understand our exact intention from reading the Bill and when we make provisions. If I go down the Dog and Duck tonight and say, “Someone is thinking of making provisions about something under legislation,” the response would be, “What on earth are you talking about?” not, “Oh yes. They’re talking about offering a discount deal in the car park the next time there is an event.” That is why it is appropriate to explore the Bill in more depth on the Floor of the House and to suggest this new clause. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s reply and to deciding whether to press the new clause to a vote.

Wendy Morton: I want to say a few words about my hon. Friend’s new clause. I can see the sentiment behind it, because he is drawing attention to the Bill’s title: Car Parking (Variation of Charges). I appreciate that that is the jargon and legalese of this place, but to a member of the public, a taxpayer or a constituent, “Variation of Charges” does not make it 100% clear whether the Bill is about prices going up or down, so I now start to see why my hon. Friend tabled his new clause. That said, I read it for a while and tried to understand where it would fit in the Bill, which is why I asked at the start of the debate how it would work in practice. Quite frankly, I could not see its point—[Interruption.] I suppose I must apologise to my hon. Friend. He made a good argument, but I am not going to agree with him on this occasion.
Kevin Foster: I totally accept the intention of this noble and worthwhile Bill, but it is not made absolutely explicit to someone who picks up the Bill or reads it on the Parliament website that it is about variation down, not variation up. That was the point of tabling the new clause.

Wendy Morton: That was the point that I was endeavouring to get across. It is about the wording. My hon. Friend referred to speaking to constituents at the Dog and Duck. I do not think we have a Dog and Duck in Aldridge-Brownhills—if I am wrong, I am sure that somebody will soon tell me—but we do have many other good watering holes. When we get an opportunity as Members of Parliament to ensure that our constituents fully understand the legislation that we are taking through this place, that can only be a good thing. I hope that my hon. Friend will not press the new clause to a vote, because I know how I will be voting. I will be speaking on Third Reading because my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) has promoted a good, straightforward Bill that will help constituencies, constituents and local authorities right across the country. I am looking forward to listening and contributing further over the course of this morning’s debate.

10 am

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), I have a slight problem with the intention behind this new clause because it strikes me as a bit of a blunt tool, as I will explain. In my constituency there is The Dog at Norton. I am not sure whether I have a Dog and Duck, but Bury St Edmunds is the home of Greene King and I have the Dog and Partridge. I have quite a lot of pubs, and I am racking my brain.

In Bury St Edmunds I have a vibrant town that bucks the trend, and in that I see a problem with the bluntness of this amendment. The amendment would be perfect in Stowmarket, Needham Market and my other market towns, where we must do everything we can to increase the vibrancy of the high street—we need that flexibility—but I assume that the whole point of the Bill is to give us flexibility. It strikes me that the amendment is trying to do what we do so well in this House, which is to pin our arm behind our back and write legislation that does not do what we first intended and is less flexible than we want.

Kevin Foster: I respect my hon. Friend’s comments about the strength of Bury St Edmunds, but in other parts of the country, and certainly in England, we have councils that view their town centre as a bit of a cash cow, which is really hurting the economy. That is why we need to be clear and make sure that a council’s arm is behind its back. This is about reducing parking charges, not varying them upwards.

Jo Churchill: Surely my hon. Friend takes my point that local councils are, in the main, the people who should be deciding this. We have a very confused landscape. In Stratford-on-Avon, as he mentioned, the town council owns the car park. In two-tier authorities, the county council often owns car parks in towns that do not have the ability to flex the charges and use the money for their locality, as happens in ours. In such a situation, variation might happen, but because somebody else is setting the rules, it is not driven by the people in the locality who want the outcomes that he seeks.

I would welcome the creation of local accountability that gives people within borough councils or district councils in two-tier authorities the ability to set the rates and collect the revenue. At the moment, it is a longwinded process, in that it takes two years to apply for various changes in legislation, and so on. In Bury St Edmunds, a town of 40,000 people, there were 550 long-stay car park uses and 1.387 million short-stay car park uses last year.

We have problems in the medieval grid, and I was pleased to see the masterplan come out this week. It says that we will have a policy of using varying procedures to stop the off-street parking that blights so many people’s lives, particularly in the medieval quarter of the town. We must provide solutions and give local councils the ability to set the right solutions, and the masterplan encourages a blend of “pedestrian first” measures to restore and keep the medieval grid for pedestrians, tourists, shoppers and residents. The small grid, which is not only beautiful but historic, needs attention to make sure that it is not blighted by parking.

What concerns me is that, with this amendment, we might be using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) said, the amendment seeks to do what is already in the Bill.

Kevin Foster: There are already provisions for local authorities to increase parking charges if they wish to do so, and my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) said that councils have done that. All I am seeking to do with the amendment is to limit the new powers in the Bill to reducing parking charges. The existing powers to increase car park prices via the normal consultation processes will still be there.

Jo Churchill: Fine, but that takes me back to my earlier point, which is that that is already in the Bill. Are we not just adding a bit of jam to the cake?

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): This has already been a passionate debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) on moving this probing amendment. I hope I can convince him and my other hon. Friends, many of whom are here today, that he does not need to press it.

No amendments were moved in Committee on Wednesday, so the Bill was reported to the House unamended. This new clause is a somewhat late entry in the race.

Kevin Foster: I was not a member of the Committee, so I could not move an amendment at that stage. I am therefore raising the issue on Report. I am just clarifying the situation for those who are not familiar with the procedure of the House.
David Tredinnick: I am in error because I should clearly have asked my hon. Friend to join the Committee. He would have made a major contribution. One of the privileges of introducing a private Member’s Bill is that one has some influence over the membership of the Committee, and it is good to see my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who served on the Committee, sitting behind the Treasury Bench. The Committee examined the Bill with some care.

At the end of Second Reading, I said: “I can say in all honesty that this modest two-clause Bill will improve the quality of life in every city and town in this country. I am...grateful for the Government’s support.”—[Official Report, 25 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 1195.]

I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), who is my neighbour across the A5, Watling Street. No doubt he will have some remarks to make. As the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), will know, the Labour party supported the Bill in Committee, and I hope that we continue to have his support today.

This is a simple Bill. In fact, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope), who is not known as a great friend of private Members’ legislation, whispered in my ear one day—being a very educated man and a classical scholar, perhaps—that this is a de minimis Bill, which I interpreted as meaning that there is very little in it. I have to tell you, Mr Speaker, and my hon. Friends that that was the point of this Bill. I was No. 5 on the list, and, having decided to run with this issue, I felt it had to be a simple Bill that appealed to all parts of the House. I did not want it to attract controversy and encourage colleagues to speak for a very long time and perhaps impede its progress.

You may recall, Mr Speaker, that, in an impromptu remark on Second Reading, I described this as a Santa Claus Bill, as we were in the run-up to Christmas. The first and perhaps most important provision of this Bill is that it allows councils to reduce parking charges without giving 21 days’ notice in their local newspaper or in the media. It is increasingly important that councils look at clause 1 he will see that this Bill is about varying the charges down, and not up, which is so important that we are absolutely clear that this Bill is about varying the charges down, and not up, which would inhibit the success of those towns?

David Tredinnick: I am glad that my hon. Friend has intervened. He represents Torbay, which is a very beautiful seaside town. In fact, years ago I knew his Conservative predecessor who was also passionately concerned about the town. He was known as Spy 13 because of his other job, which was writing spy novels. I wish him well if he is tuning into this debate.

May I say to my hon. Friend that he is doing absolutely the right thing for his constituency of Torbay where parking is clearly critical? I can assure him that if he looks at clause 1 he will see that this Bill is about enabling councils to reduce charges. It means that, in the future, they will not have to go to the expense of publishing notices in local newspapers to reduce charges, and it will give them a degree of flexibility, which is really important.

10.15 am

Jo Churchill: Is that not, in a nutshell, why we do not need to press this new clause? We are talking about flexibility and the fact that in Stowmarket councils can charge £1 for two hours, and that in Bury St Edmunds councils reduce their fees on a Tuesday afternoon. This is about local solutions to local issues to stimulate the high street.

David Tredinnick: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been a great champion not only on the matter of parking charges, but on the cause of cancer. I am very pleased to serve with her as an officer on the all-party cancer group.

For clarity, I will make it absolutely clear what these two clauses do. Clause 1 provides government with a power to make regulations that simplify the procedure...
for lowering parking charges. At present, councils must give 21 days’ notification in the press, and place signage in the car parks—something to which I have not yet referred—if they want to lower their charges. The private sector, however, can take a business decision to lower them without going through that process. This clause would simplify the requirement and give councils the flexibility to reduce their charges, thereby putting local authorities on an even footing with the private sector. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay has not picked up on that point, but he might like to do so now. I am sure that he would have mentioned it had he thought of it.

Kevin Foster: To be fair, I do accept the very valid points that my hon. Friend makes. Private sector operators can literally change the signs overnight if they wish to change the prices in a car park, whereas a council has to go through very lengthy procedures. Does he agree with me, though, that, at the end of the day councils are meant to be bodies that are charged with delivering the public good in an area? A company or a corporation is, to put it bluntly, looking to make as much money as it can from the asset it owns.

David Tredinnick: My hon. Friend helpfully leads me into an area that I wish to discuss in a moment, which is the impact of pricing on car parking charges generally. Let me just make this further point to him and to the House: it is equally important that councils should consider the effect of increased parking charges on the high street. To that end, the clause makes provision for a consultation requirement so that councils take on board the views of local businesses and residents when they are looking to increase parking charges on an existing traffic order. They must already consult when a traffic order is set up, but it is proportionate to expect them to consult if they are raising charges during the life of the traffic order. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay that he should not fear that this Bill—the de minimis Bill, to quote my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick)—is the end. We will see an improvement in traffic movements generally, and if we are to have that, we need an improvement in how we manage the people who are moving around. When the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 was passed, nobody thought there would be the fluctuations in the patterns of shopping that we see now. We are in a whole new landscape. The world has speeded up—it is completely different since the advent of mobile phones, such as iPhones, and all the electronic media.

Together, clauses 1 and 2 offer a real opportunity for councils to take the views of their local communities into account, while giving them flexibilities where decreases to parking charges can better support the goal of having thriving town centres.

It is important that I mention the support I have received from various organisations. I had some very helpful briefing materials from an organisation that is engaged in and very concerned about parking. My hon. Friends should be aware that the value of UK retail sales in 2015 was £339 billion. That will provide jobs for 3.3 million employees in 2017 in approximately 287,000 outlets. Increasingly, though, the high street has been exposed to intense competition, including the rise of online shopping and increasing use of out-of-town retailers because of the ease with which consumers can use those options.

The point about online shopping is incredibly important. We have seen all the stories in the press about its impact on major stores and how difficult it is for them to fight back. As my hon. Friends from the Midlands know, we have there these huge warehouses and distribution centres, particularly where the M1 and the M6 join, and there is also the M69. The middle of England is the ideal place for such centres. In fact, the geographical middle of England is in my constituency, and the Roman centre of England, where the Fosse Way crosses Watling Street, is just outside. That is really important.

Hon. Friends may want to expand on the important point that parking charges are a barrier to regeneration.

Craig Whittaker: On my hon. Friend’s point about online retail, a 2011 report called “Re-Think! Parking on the High Street” highlighted the fact that small towns and villages were charging away above the UK
average for parking, putting them at a disadvantage. Does he agree it is important that town and borough councils have the flexibility to react very quickly in light of the threat from online retail?

David Tredinnick: I do agree. I shall discuss the impact the Bill will have throughout the country later in my speech, along with some other figures. First, I shall indulge my hon. Friend by referring to the Portas review, which showed clearly that car parking charges were the biggest barrier to the regeneration of our town centres. That is perhaps no surprise when we consider the fact that the average hourly parking rate in London is £8.44, which is 18% more than the minimum wage. That is a staggering figure.

The “Re-Think! Parking on the High Street” report clearly states that footfall affects town centre performance, with those towns that have higher footfall generating a higher level of spend. If nothing is done, the high street will remain under threat from out-of-town and online retail facilities, where lack of, or expensive, parking is not an issue.

Kevin Foster: My hon. Friend just referred to London having extremely expensive parking charges, but it obviously still has thriving business centres around places such as Oxford Street. Does he agree that London’s economy operates very differently from the rest of the country? Anything like those charges in any other town would have devastated the shopping centres and high street businesses.

David Tredinnick: I accept that London is a special case and, of course, my hon. Friend and I do not represent London, but I thought it was instructive to make the point that the charges here are so high.

To follow up on the remarks by my hon. Friend, the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), it is important to look at how the provisions will operate in practice. For greater accuracy, I asked the Commons Library to provide some figures on the scale of natural settlements—known as built-up areas to most of us—in the country. According to the 2011 census, we have in our country 56 cities, 696 towns with a population of 5,000 or more, and 1,590 villages with a population of between 1,000 and 5,000. Each one of those settlements could be affected by the Bill’s provisions. Pride is a dangerous word in parliamentary life—we can sometimes get too proud—but I am absolutely delighted to have been able to introduce a Bill that does not just affect a particular constituency matter but has a national impact. This Bill is going to have huge ramifications for business.

Mr Marcus Jones indicated assent.

David Tredinnick: I am very pleased to see my hon. Friend the Minister nodding.

Wendy Morton: On the broad point about business and regeneration—perhaps my hon. Friend will touch on this in his speech—by giving councils the flexibility to reduce their car parking charges when they deem it necessary for a specific event or whatever, the Bill can play a vital part in regeneration. Although councils would not get the income from car parking charges, not only would they not have to cover the costs associated with advertising the reduction in charges, but they could get extra income from increasing the vibrancy of the high street, because the increased non-domestic rate collections would go back into the council.

David Tredinnick: My hon. Friend, ever eloquent, has struck a rich seam there. I am not going to mine it, but no doubt she can come back to that point.

For greater clarity, Mr Speaker, I should say that the statistics I just gave were for the cities, towns and villages in England.

Mr Speaker: Ah!

David Tredinnick: The Bill actually affects Wales, but it will not be implemented there and I do not have the statistics for Wales.

Something that has not been mentioned in any of the proceedings so far is what I call unusual events. I shall cite two exceptional events and suggest that the Bill might be useful in those circumstances. I have always been really happy to represent the constituency of Bosworth, which is where English history changed on 22 August 1485, when the last of the Yorkist Plantagenets died—

The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty’s Treasury (David Evennett): King Richard.

David Tredinnick: Indeed; King Richard died in horrid circumstances, leaving Henry Tudor to be crowned Henry VII. In the run-up to the 2015 election, Richard’s mortal remains were discovered in a car park in Leicester. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] Interestingly, the exact position where he was found—my hon. Friend might like to hear this—was under a parking bay with an “R” on it, which one might say stood for “Reserved”, but it actually turned out to stand for “Rex”, Latin for king—Richard Rex, King of England.

10.30 am

Just before the 2015 general election, Richard’s mortal remains were taken back to Bosworth Field, where he was killed in action just over 500 years earlier. One of the judgments that the local police had to make was how to respond to an event that had received not just county coverage but country and worldwide coverage. The question was just how many people would turn up. I was invited to attend not only the proceedings at Bosworth Field and the point of the coffin’s departure but the events afterwards in Market Bosworth. I took the view that, even with a police escort and given the narrow lanes, there was no way that I could attend more than one event. I simply could not possibly get to them all. I arrived at the battlefield two hours early, because I had absolutely no idea how long it would take me to get there. In fact, we had a marquee, which was about six times the size of the Chamber, absolutely packed with journalists from all over the world. There were many thousands of people, and the roads were clogged.

The reason why it was an incredibly emotional experience—perhaps the most emotional that I have ever had as a Member of Parliament—to see the coffin arrive was that the field was in dead silence. And a very special day it was, but the point is that if the Bill is enacted—if it gets its Third Reading, goes to the other place and comes back approved and becomes law—a council in such a situation might want at a stroke to
change its parking regulations on the day. Its charges might be quite ridiculous and it might need to process people quickly, so the Bill will help there.

The other event that I want to refer to involved completely the opposite situation for traffic: the solar eclipse that took place on 11 August 1999.

Kevin Foster: Does my hon. Friend agree that if special events are about communities coming together and bringing in a surge of trade and that if local authorities view them as an opportunity, bluntly, to turn their car parks into a bit of a cash cow and rip people off, we could see an effect similar to what happened with the solar eclipse in 1999 in Cornwall: where places increased prices, people just did not come?

David Tredinnick: I have a good recollection of those events, and the Bill is not about raising charges; it is about lowering charges and raising consultation levels. That is the soundbite; that is what the Bill is all about. That is why I ask my hon. Friend to withdraw his new clause.

My hon. Friend talks about private car park owners who wanted to ratchet up charges in Cornwall. My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), who is not here today, has had her own issues with car parking. My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), who also is not here, has had such issues and held a successful debate on them in Westminster Hall the other day. There was so much in the newspapers and so much media hype about what would happen and the pandemonium that would be caused by the huge number of people who would go to Cornwall to watch the eclipse, which totally blocked out the light of the sun for about a minute, that nobody actually turned up. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay will recall, the numbers were way down and quite the reverse of what was expected happened. Councils might therefore make provision to reduce charges, but then suddenly realise that there is no need to do so at all, rather than waiting for 21 days and losing revenue.

In that situation, the opposite applied.

I shall conclude my remarks fairly soon, but I want first to refer to what the Federation of Small Businesses told me yesterday. Apart from generously congratulating me on negotiating the narrows of the rivers to get to this point with a private Member’s Bill, it says that it is wholly supportive of the measures in the Bill, that it will be an additional tool for the Government to support local small businesses and ensure that they and their customers can park, and that is why it is very welcome. The FSB’s research shows that seven in 10 small firms think that parking is a priority for the future of independent shops. It says that independent retailers in town centres are the engines that help to make the UK’s local communities what they are. In its report, “Going the extra mile”, it found that small businesses are overwhelmingly reliant on roads, with nine in 10 firms—about 89%—placing a high value on the network. With so many small businesses relying on the road network, it argues for greater investment. Well, that is predictable. Its final point is that consultation with businesses is required before local authorities increase the cost of parking. That is exactly what clause 2 will provide.

Jo Churchill: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is particularly pertinent in rural communities and small market towns, where a lot of the trade has to come in from villages and so on, and that we need to aim for accessibility and the ability to control prices to facilitate businesses, which we want to survive because there is nothing sadder than a dying high street?

David Tredinnick: One is always looking for help in this place, and my hon. Friend almost makes my closing remarks for me. We are talking about a simple three-clause Bill that has been reported by a Committee without amendment, that seeks to allow councils to reduce parking charges without consultation but that insists on consultation if they want to increase charges.

Before I sit down, I should like to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay that he has proposed a helpful new clause. He clearly feels passionately about the issue, as it impacts his town, and he is right to come to the Chamber and get us to scrutinise it in some detail, but I hope that I have been able to give him the reassurance that he requires. I look to my hon. Friend the Minister to flesh out any points that I have not made and give the Government’s approval. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay and will resume my seat.

Mr Marcus Jones: I welcome the opportunity to comment on the new clause and the important points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster). My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), who is my constituency neighbour, has already set out in significant detail his views on the new clause. Although the intentions expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay are good, as they generally are, and in the best interests of constituents, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth was right to speak against the new clause. I shall set out the Government’s view on why we do not think that agreeing to it is a good idea.

The Bill will create the power to make regulations to simplify the procedures local authorities must follow if they want to lower their parking charges. It will introduce a consultation requirement if local authorities want to increase parking charges. Parking provision plays an important role in allowing people to access high streets and town centres. Town centres continue to play an essential role in the lives of communities, and parking charges can be an important factor when people choose which ones to visit. As some out-of-town shopping malls provide free parking, councils need to think carefully about the level and range of parking available. Parking charges will no doubt play an important role in people’s choices. The Government are committed to promoting town centres and high streets as thriving places at the heart of communities.

I strongly believe that it is right and proper for local authorities to consult their local communities and town centre businesses when proposing to increase charges. I stress that this is not about the Government trying to dictate to local authorities how to conduct their parking policies. We are asking councils, in a localist way, to take into account the views of local communities before increasing charges. I have a good example from my constituency. The local district council has not listened to the views of local people and has increased car parking charges. As a result, its car parking income has dropped by £350,000. That shows why it is important to consult local people and listen carefully to what they say because the views of local people and business owners are quite
often the views of the very people who use and depend on those car parks for their livelihoods.

Kevin Foster: It is disappointing to hear that Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council does not have the sort of pro-business and pro-growth leadership that it had between 2008 and 2010. Will the Minister reassure me that if this Bill becomes law, the Government will not make it easier to increase parking charges without consultation, and that the measures are purely about making it easier to vary charges downwards so that authorities do not have consultations asking people, “Do you want to pay less”?

Mr Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. I reassure him that, following the implementation of the Bill, a council—whether in Torbay, Nuneaton or elsewhere—would certainly have to consult local people before taking the decision to increase charges.

I also reassure my hon. Friend that the provisions will not be implemented on the day the Bill receives Royal Assent. We want to ensure that there is some balance, and that the powers created are practical and proportionate.

To ensure that the measures work in practice, we will consult local authorities, the Local Government Association, the British Parking Association and other interested organisations to ensure that their important views are taken into account before the regulations are made and laid. Furthermore, parliamentary colleagues will have an opportunity to consider any regulations in the normal procedures for secondary legislation. My Department will undertake a new burdens assessment to establish the administrative effect on local authorities of the duty to consult. The Bill will strengthen local democracy by giving people and businesses a voice in decisions on car parking charges that have an impact on the vitality of a town centre.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): On that point, is this the most practical way for consulting local business, particularly when a town has a business improvement district? Halesowen, part of which I represent, is going through the process of becoming a business improvement district. Does the Minister agree that that would be an appropriate forum for local businesses to express their views about parking charges and the impact on town centres?

Mr Jones: As ever, my hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. I am glad to hear about the business improvement district in Halesowen. I am glad to say that businesses in my constituency of Nuneaton are trying to do the same thing. Business improvement districts are excellent vehicles for local businesses to be able to express their views on such issues. The local authority, taking into account the measures in the Bill, will be able to use those forums as important consultees before increasing car parking charges.

10.45 am

Wendy Morton: I welcome the news that the Minister’s Department will be consulting on the matter of consultation and seeking views, and I understand that that may take a little time. Is he able at this stage to give us any indication as to the timescale for the other part of the Bill—the ability to lower car parking charges? Will that measure be in place before Christmas, given that it has been called the Santa Claus Bill?

Mr Jones: We have heard a great deal about Santa. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Member for Gosworth bought the Santa decoration that he came across in the House of Commons shop. Perhaps he did on the basis that, once this Santa Claus Bill passes through the House, he will be able to put it on his tree next year; he said that he did not want to tempt fate by doing so this year. I hope that we are not tempting fate today. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) makes a good point. It is certainly our intention to ensure that the measures for reducing parking charges can be brought forward to enable the situation she mentions.

Craig Whittaker: Although I appreciate that there has been much talk about town centre car parking, does the Minister agree that one of the biggest areas of contention for residents and local people—the Bill will, without question, help with this—is around our local hospitals, where there are huge parking problems? The facility to allow a consultation with local people will ensure that we get some good results and some proper strategies.

Mr Jones: Consultation is always important. The two issues are interlinked. Many hospitals are situated in and around town centres, and that can cause all sorts of pressures. The measures in the Bill would have a beneficial effect if the local authorities used them positively. If authorities decide to lower charges, the number of people using local authority car parks may increase, which would then take pressure off other car parks.

Many residents live around town centres. If parking charges are not proportionate, people quite often park in the streets around a town centre and avoid using the car parks because it is quite easy to walk into the centre of town. That exacerbates problems for many people living in such areas. By definition, a town centre is a historic place so properties around it usually date from quite a while back—the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century—when nobody had a car. Those streets were not built for cars, so there is a lot of competition for parking among the residents alone. The last thing they want are councils that hike up parking charges without consultation, which would put more pressure on their streets and the parking arrangements in them. It is an important part of the Bill that we put in place a situation whereby councils consult.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the Minister confirm that the regulations will also cover coach parking? Coach parking charges were introduced in one of my market towns, Helmsley. That reduced the number of tourist coaches coming to the town, which is a renowned market town and a tourist destination. We then ran a campaign, and the local authority decided to remove the charges, which has helped tremendously to attract new visitors to the town. I would be interested to hear the Minister’s thoughts on whether coach parking charges are also covered.

Mr Jones: As I was sitting down, I glanced up and noticed that I have cleared the Public Gallery, which is an achievement in itself.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Not for the first time.
Mr Jones: It is always good to be part of the legislative process when the hon. Gentleman is on the Opposition Front Bench.

Helmsley is an interesting example. It was the winner of the 2015 Great British High Street competition—a competition I thought at the time would put paid to my ministerial career. Helmsley was in the final with Chipping Norton, which was in the constituency of the former Prime Minister, David Cameron. When Helmsley beat Chipping Norton in the final, I thought my life would not be worth living, but I am glad to say the former Prime Minister did not hold it against me.

Helmsley is an important example because it has a significant number of visitors, and provision has to be put in place for coaches and buses to park. Buses parked in a bus station is possibly a different situation, and I will probably have to come back to my hon. Friend about it. However, many events happen in places such as Helmsley, and local traders might be very heartened if the local authority used the Bill’s provisions to reduce its car parking charges.

In conclusion, good communication between local authorities and the public is absolutely vital for a healthy democracy. That extends to local authorities being clear about their decision-making process. That means the public knowing why decisions are taken. Such decisions affect individuals and their communities and—this is not overstating the matter—can have a profound effect on the lives and jobs of many, many people.

Kevin Foster: I thank the Minister, and particularly the Member in charge of the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), for their comments in response to the new clause. As I said, I moved it to be clear about the purpose of the Bill and what procedures will be created under it in relation to local authorities and what they can do.

I fully accept that it is right that there is flexibility, and the full drive of the Bill is to make it easier to vary parking charges downwards. Therefore, having heard the extensive reassurances provided by the Member in charge, which were particularly persuasive—he succeeded in his goal—and the reassurances from the Minister, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Third Reading

10.55 am

David Tredinnick: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Third time.

It is a special moment for me to bring a Bill to Third Reading in the House of Commons. I had three criteria for my private Member’s Bill. First, I wanted it to be sufficiently uncontroversial to pass through all stages in the two Houses of Parliament. I have sat through seven Parliaments in this House and seen many Bills bite the dust on a Friday, and I did not want to join that club. That is why I kept the Bill to two clauses.

Secondly, I wanted to have a national impact. In selecting a Bill, I did not want something that was parochial. I wanted something that would make a difference across the country. Thirdly, I wanted something that would improve the lives of our constituents. To use the old-fashioned language, our duty is to improve the condition of the people—that is what they used to say in the 19th century. The modern translation is that our job is to make people’s lives better—that is why we are sent here.

If I am called a second time, I might offer a few words of thanks, but at this point I will just say how delighted I am that colleagues have allowed this Bill to reach its Third Reading.

10.57 am

Andy Slaughter: It is a pleasure to be here for the Opposition to respond to the Bill. I wish the hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) success with it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) said on Second Reading, it has our support. Although it is modest in size, I am sure it will do what the hon. Gentleman says and bring pleasure around the country.

It is also a pleasure to be opposite the Minister for the second week running, but I would just say this to the promoter of the Bill: check the new burdens money, and make sure it is all there at the appropriate time. Having said that, I do not—unlike last week, when we spent five hours on the concluding stages of the Homelessness Reduction Bill—want to prolong the debate.

I will just make two short observations. When the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) was making his interesting and somewhat lengthy interventions earlier, he said two things that I mildly disagreed with and that the Minister may wish to comment on. One was that local authorities can fill their boots with parking charges and use the money for whatever they like. The facility to charge money under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 was tested in the case of Attfield and Barnet, and the conclusion of the learned judge, Mrs Justice Lang, was that

“the 1984 Act is not a fiscal measure and does not authorise the authority to use its powers to charge local residents for parking in order to raise surplus revenue for other transport purposes funded by the General Fund.”

So although there are a variety of things connected to parking and other road traffic and transport matters that local authorities can use the funds for, I do not think that parking charges can simply be used as a revenue-raising measure.

Mr Marcus Jones: Let me just try to help the hon. Gentleman and bring a little clarity. He is right in what he says about on-street ticket revenue, but there are currently no restrictions on how ticket revenue from off-street car parking is spent by a local authority.

Andy Slaughter: I am grateful to the Minister. I was interested to see that the Bill deals with both on-street and off-street parking.

The hon. Member for Torbay said that he cannot envisage circumstances in which he would get letters from people asking for parking charges to go up. That may well be true as regards council-owned car parks and off-street parking, but it is often the case with on-street parking that is shared between residents and non-residents who wish to park there and pay and display, when charging is for the purposes of regulating access between residents and users of the visitors’ scheme, and residents ask for parking enforcement and for...
certain levels of charging. I do not think that that goes to the heart of this Bill. I understand that its intention is to give flexibility to local authorities and to encourage them more towards lowering rather than raising charges. I do not think any of us are going to disagree with that. I make these points merely because these matters are often fraught for councils and for Members of Parliament. I hope that, on the whole, councils try to do a decent job in pleasing everybody. If they do not, they tend to get voted out.

Having made those rather pettifogging remarks, I will not prolong my comments. The promoter of the Bill said that he wants it to make life better for people around the country, and I am sure that it will do that. I am also aware that slightly further down the list of private Members’ Bills—until this Bill and the next Bill came out of Committee, it would have been the first to be discussed—is the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on reducing child poverty. If I may humbly say so, from my own perspective as a Member with a great deal of child poverty in my constituency, I wish that we could get on to that Bill and give it a Second Reading, because that would make life even better for our constituents around the country.

Craig Whittaker: I am extremely pleased to be able to contribute to this debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) for bringing his private Member’s Bill to this House for what is now its Third Reading.

The Bill seeks to make provision for the procedure to be followed by local authorities when varying the charges to be paid for off-street parking and parking on designated highways. It amends provisions within the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. In order to consider the merits of the Bill, it is initially necessary to consider the existing powers that local authorities have with regard to parking, and how they differ from the existing regulation. Sections 41 and 42 of the Road Traffic Act 1991 awarded new powers to local authorities to vary car parking charges at designated on-street parking places and in off-street car parks. The discussions on the provisions that would become the 1991 Act were fairly limited, and the only debate came on Report in the Lords, when the then Government introduced a new clause on off-street car parks. The then Transport Minister, Lord Brabazon of Tara, said that the provision “applies to variation of charges at off-street parking places. Local authorities making orders prescribing charges at off-street parking places will, in future, be able to vary those charges subsequently by the simpler public notice procedure—to be prescribed by 978 regulations made by the Secretary of State and subject to the negative resolution procedure—instead of having to make a new parking places order.”—[Official Report, House of Lords, 10 June 1991; Vol. 529, c. 977.]

The powers that were provided through the 1991 Act are contained in sections 35C and 46A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended. The current procedures regarding the ability of local authorities to amend parking charges are stipulated also through regulation 25 of the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedures) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996—specifically, SI 1996/2489. When seeking either to increase or decrease charges, these regulations require local authorities to do following. First, they have to publish a notice of variation at least once in a newspaper that circulates within the area where the charges are to be altered at least 21 days before the proposed changes are due to come into effect. The relevant notice must also specify the date when it is due to come into force. It must stipulate which parking places the notice relates to, and outline the alterations to the charges that will take effect for each parking place. Finally, the local authority must take steps to ensure that copies of the notice are displayed in the affected areas and that these remain in a legible condition until the date when the changes come into effect.

Through amending the existing powers of the Secretary of State at sections 35C and 46A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the Bill revisits the current regulations and seeks to reduce the bureaucratic burden placed on local authorities that are seeking to reduce their parking charges. Furthermore, the Bill allows for a new condition that means that local authorities will need to consult if they are looking to increase their parking charges under an existing traffic order. The intention behind the Bill is fairly clear. It seeks to give councils more flexibility to innovate with regard to the parking strategies and to make it easier for them to reduce car parking charges if they are looking to increase their parking charges under an existing traffic order. The intention behind the Bill is fairly clear. It seeks to give councils more flexibility to innovate with regard to the parking strategies and to make it easier for them to reduce car parking charges in order to react to particular circumstances or events, many of which we have already heard about today.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth rightly pointed out, parking policies have the potential to enhance the economic viability of our high streets, and the benefits to town centres and communities who strike the correct balance with regard to parking charges can be considerable. Before entering this House, I worked in the retail industry for 30 years, during which time I witnessed at first hand the impact that parking strategies can have on the high street. The independent retailers, traders and small businesses that are the lifeblood of our town centres rely on a balanced parking policy that promotes the regular turnover of parking spaces, manages traffic flow successfully, and ensures that the level of charges is reasonable and proportionate in relation to the retail offer that is available to consumers. My own local authority, Calderdale, has sought to introduce a range of additional charges over recent years, and has miserably failed to strike such a balance—a point I will return to shortly.

Before I do so, it is worth exploring the link between town centre prosperity and car parking provision in more detail. Of course, a plethora of different factors influences the comparative success of a town centre. It is therefore incredibly difficult to evidence a clear link between parking policies and the success of town centres. In 2013, a number of organisations, including the Association of Town and City Management, the British Parking Association, Springboard Research Ltd and Parking Data and Research International collaboratively produced a report entitled, “Re-Think! Parking on the High Street: Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres.” The report explored what evidence could be collated and what could be learned about the relationship between car parking provision and town centre success. Through analysing a range of data using primary indicators—that is, the factors that are judged to have the largest impact on the health of a town centre—the report provides some preliminary evidence.
that suggests important trends and provides a solid foundation for more comprehensive research.

Due to the wide range of variable factors at play, the report was tightly drawn to focus on a number of specific influences. For example, instead of considering all durations of parking, the report expressly focuses on the first two hours. It was felt that by doing so, it would cover those who had parked to go shopping and eliminate other parking habits—such as commuter parking—from the data. The variables considered included the cost of parking and the quality of spaces. Of the many indicators of town centre performance, the report measured the two key statistics of footfall and spend. Finally, the towns included were carefully selected to provide a representative sample of the town centre landscape across the UK. The report included towns in each region, spanning the entire retail hierarchy from major city to district centre level.

Because of the precise methodology and the fact that the variables chosen reflected only part of this wide and complex picture, we must naturally be cautious about the report’s findings. However, it does suggest some interesting trends. First, parking operators are making available parking provision that equates to the levels of footfall in the location. Secondly, there is no clear relationship between the car parking charges set by owners or operators and the quality of a location’s offer. Some mid-range and smaller town centres may be overcharging. Finally, the mid-range and smaller centres that charge more than the national average in relation to their offer suffered a higher-than-average decline in footfall in 2011, the year in which the data were collected.

Although we must acknowledge that the report does not constitute conclusive evidence that the cost of parking has a tangible influence on town centre prosperity, it opens up an avenue for further research and conforms to the anecdotal or common-sense opinion about the likelihood of such a link. Although the report’s suggestion that town centres with higher-than-average parking costs experienced an average decline in footfall in 2011 will hardly come as a surprise, further research is required before it can be categorically stated that any such link exists. Furthermore, the scale of the detrimental impact that higher costs may have on high streets and consumer habits is unknown and requires further investigation. Each town centre is unique and exposed to widely differing external factors, so something that is true in one context may not be true in another, but the initial trend suggested by the report should act as a wake-up call for local authorities.

That point leads me on to the record of my local authority, Calderdale Council, which has a rather chequered history when it comes to parking charges. On Second Reading a few months ago, I challenged the notion that local authorities do not use car parking charges to generate additional revenue. Although I cannot comment on the choices that other local authorities have made in the last few years, I can say a few words about Calderdale’s unflattering record in that regard.

In 2012, the cabinet of Calderdale Council approved a raft of additional car parking charges. The title of the cabinet committee paper was “The Parking Income Generation Study”. [Hon. Members: “Disgraceful!”] Indeed. The first line of the report made explicitly clear the council’s intention to “generate additional revenue from parking.”

The proposals included a wide range of additional charges in areas in which parking had previously been free, with the aim of generating an additional £841,000 per annum. Although some of the measures outlined in the report were a genuine attempt to manage existing parking and traffic difficulties, including long-standing problems around Calderdale Royal hospital, many related to areas in which there were no identifiable problems with parking or traffic management. Such measures included the introduction of evening parking charges in previously free car parks in small market towns in my constituency, such as Brighouse, Todmorden, Ripponden and West Vale.

As Members know, local authorities are permitted to spend parking income only on certain things. The relevant legislation is section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, which states:

“A local authority shall keep an account of their income and expenditure in respect of parking places for which they are the local authority”.

Subsections (4) and (5), which set out what a surplus may be spent on, are particularly relevant. If a council has used money from the general fund to plug a deficit in parking operations, a surplus may be used to pay back that money. It may be spent on meeting all or part of the cost of the provision and maintenance by the local authority of off-street parking accommodation.

If a local authority believes that the provision of further off-street parking accommodation is unnecessary or undesirable, a surplus may be used for the following purposes: to meet costs incurred, whether by the local authority or by some other person, in the provision of public transport services; for highway or road improvement projects in the area; to meet the costs incurred by a London authority in the maintenance of roads; for environmental improvement in the local authority area; or, in the case of such local authorities as may be prescribed, for any other purposes for which the authority may lawfully incur expenditure around parking.

Of course, some of the charges implemented by local authorities fit more comfortably than others within the remit of section 55 of 1984 Act. In the examples from my local authority that I gave a few months ago, it could be argued that although the measures to address parking problems around a busy hospital fall within both the letter and the spirit of the law, the proposals for cashing in on the lucrative market of evening parking charges in a busy town centre are more questionable and rather difficult to justify.

Local authorities such as Calderdale, will, I suspect, continue to try to defend their parking charge increases, however tenuous the link with the legislative guidelines and any genuine desire to improve the traffic management and parking situation in their area. The judgement in 2013 in the case of Attfield v. London Borough of Barnet, which the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) has mentioned, clarified the position of local authorities that seek to use their powers to charge local residents for parking explicitly to raise surplus revenue for other transport purposes funded by the general fund. Mrs Justice Lang said that a council
David Attfield, who brought the case against Barnet, admitted that he was able to win the case because the council was open about the fact that it was increasing charges to provide additional revenue. Calderdale Council’s cabinet committee paper, to which I alluded earlier, was equally explicit about the overt intention to raise charges to provide additional revenue. I suspect that had the proposal been formally challenged in the courts, an outcome similar to the verdict in Attfield v Barnet would have been reached. Residents and community groups, not to mention opposition councillors on local authorities across the country, may wish to pay particular attention to the ways in which local authorities attempt to justify such increases in the future, because I am sure that Barnet Council is not unique in seeking to use motorists as cash cows.

In the absence of further legal challenges to local authority practices, it is up to residents and councillors to hold local politicians to account. The additional charges approved in Calderdale in 2012 formally took effect in 2014. Within months, the discontent of local residents and businesses adversely affected by the charges prompted opposition councillors to trigger a vote of no confidence in the ruling Labour cabinet administration. The vote was carried, and within weeks of the new parking meters being installed, they were removed again on the orders of the new Conservative-led administration; that was just one example of local democracy in action. However, such is the finely balanced political landscape of Calderdale Council that, just a few years later, the same Labour cabinet is again in control and seeking to reimpose many of the same additional parking charges.

The latest proposals for additional charges hit several towns in my constituency, including Brighouse, where the local business group, the Brighouse Business Initiative, has worked incredibly hard to reinvigorate the town centre and to increase footfall. The efforts of Brighouse traders have seen the town centre flourish, and several farmers markets are run every year that bring people in from across the country.

To the dismay of traders, residents and local councillors, the council seek to impose on-street parking charges in the town centre, despite wide acknowledgement that there are currently no problems with the flow of traffic, nor with the turnover of parking spaces for consumers. Saying that the local business community is furious would be an understatement. Traders are rightly concerned about the damaging effect that the proposals could have on their businesses and livelihoods. Despite making their feelings known to the council, local Labour politicians seem content to proceed with their plans regardless of the scale of any opposition.

The Bill provides for local authorities to consult interested parties if they are seeking to increase the cost of parking charges to ensure that the impacts on towns are fully considered. That can only be a positive step forward. Local businesses, residents and councillors understand their local businesses and communities. They are able to recognise which measures will work and how their local high-street economy can be properly managed. It is only right that they are consulted on any potential increases in charges and that detailed consideration is given to the impacts of such proposals on their town centres.

I appreciate that many local authorities already engage in thorough consultation with their communities on such issues, and I applaud them for doing so. However, I assure Members that that does not happen everywhere, so I wholeheartedly welcome the provisions in the Bill to ensure that local communities are involved in the decision-making process. I am sure that local communities such as Brighouse will strongly welcome the measure and the opportunities that it presents to them to ensure that their views are considered.

On Second Reading, the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), raised questions about how the consultation process might work. He was entirely correct to say that further detail on the consultation process is required, and I trust that the Minister will elaborate on that point later.

As well as making provision for consulting local communities, the Bill seeks to make it quicker and easier for local authorities to lower their parking charges to promote the economic viability of town centres. Specifically, it provides for a reduction in charges without the need for the current 21 days’ notice. That reform will provide local authorities with the flexibility to react more quickly to changes and with the ability to innovate in providing additional support to town centres.

Many market towns in my constituency, such as Todmorden, Hebden Bridge and Elland, are still getting back on their feet following the devastating floods on Boxing day in 2015. I note that despite the flooding, Hebden Bridge won the small market town category of the Great British High Street awards last year, so well done to the town. However, many businesses the towns struggled in the months immediately after the floods when footfall on the high street was significantly reduced. The proposals would have allowed the local authority the flexibility of deciding quickly how car-parking charges in those towns could have been used as a tool to support local businesses. That could have involved free parking on certain days or a limited reduction in charges.

Wendy Morton: To pick up the point about flexibility and a local authority being able to reduce car-parking charges in response to a situation such as the flooding, does my hon. Friend agree that another advantage of doing so would be for volunteers who come from outside the communities to help them through a very difficult patch? One of my local councillors had a collection of materials to help in that situation. He went up there, and it would have been a great gesture for the council to be able to make.

Craig Whittaker: A massive point about the floods was the great outpouring of support for our communities from the whole of the UK—we had not tens, dozens or hundreds of volunteers, but thousands and thousands of people coming to the Calder Valley, as no doubt other areas did as well. People came from Cornwall and even from overseas to help. There were firemen and other people bringing food, mops, buckets and cleaning materials. People were out helping, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right that giving something back to them—for example, free car parking—would have been a gesture,
though an incredibly small one compared with the huge support they gave us as communities at that awful time.

As I was saying, ideas such as parking on certain days or a limited reduction in charges could have been considered and implemented with minimal fuss under the powers awarded to local authorities through the Bill. Such measures would have provided traders in the towns with a real boost at the very time they were struggling to attract football—excuse me, footfall; we do not particularly want football, because we do not have a football pitch—back to the high street and to get back on their feet.

It is now over 12 months since flooding hit the Calder Valley, and the effects are still being felt by many businesses. Elland bridge, which is one of the main gateways to the town centre of Elland, was destroyed by the floods and remains closed to traffic, in effect cutting Elland in half, which is similar to what we have seen in such places as Tadcaster. Traders and small businesses in Elland have struggled with significantly lower levels of footfall over the past year, not least as a consequence of the closure of the bridge. Under the Bill the local authority could have sought to introduce an imaginative strategy to bring people to the town. This would have provided a huge lift to the traders and the community, and it would have been a clear signal that the town was open for business.

It is absolutely vital that councils have the flexibility to reduce or suspend charges at short notice to stimulate the high street. That may be done in relation to exceptional circumstances such as those that I alluded to, or it might be done to support a community event or festival—for example, charges could be reduced in the run-up to Christmas. Furthermore, the provisions would allow councils to experiment and innovate. In many towns there is a significant difference between the levels of occupation in different car parks and on-street parking bays in the same locality. The Bill would allow councils to develop temporary incentives to increase the awareness of under-utilised assets and to see which parking strategies best suit particular areas in a town.

Requiring 21 days’ notice and the announcement to be published in a local newspaper and posted in the appropriate area is both overly bureaucratic and totally unnecessary in this day and age. When the council is competing with the private sector, as it is in many areas, this puts them at a significant competitive disadvantage, as private firms can currently vary charges as they see fit.

Kevin Foster: Does my hon. Friend agree that it could be right to have some restrictions to make things slightly more difficult for councils? That might help to deal with the sort of rapacious behaviour he described from his council when the Labour party is in charge of it.

Craig Whittaker: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. I referred earlier to having spent 30 years in retail, and I know that when there is a proper parking strategy in place, it benefits everybody. I remember that when I was a general manager for Wilkinson home and garden stores in its development store in Bury in Lancashire—I hope that will not be held against me, as I represent Yorkshire—the council put a proper strategy in place at the car park next to Wilkinson’s, and our business increased by 15%, which was a significant uplift. My hon. Friend is right that by getting the strategy right and ensuring that we have a proper open and honest debate about what can benefit all parts of a town, whether the high street or the area around a hospital, we can make a huge and vital difference not just to businesses but to residents and people coming into the town.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): It seems to me that the hon. Gentleman is being more than a bit partisan. Is he aware that it is often Conservative-controlled councils that make the most money from parking? I have just looked at The Independent from December 2015, which said that Westminster council had made an astonishing £46.4 million that year.

Craig Whittaker: I think I said earlier that it is welcome when councils do things well, but sadly there are far too many that do not. My experience is of a Labour-controlled council in Calderdale, which has openly admitted that it uses parking as a cash cow, as did Barnet Council, which was taken to court. I was not being particularly partisan; I was merely pointing out that Calderdale is a Labour-controlled council that has been open and honest enough to say that it has used parking as a cash cow.

Kevin Foster: My hon. Friend will recall that I intervened on the Bill’s promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), on Report earlier today, saying that trying to compare central London with the rest of the country is patently ridiculous. The reason why Westminster council makes a lot of money out of parking is that it is in the very centre of London.

Craig Whittaker: As always, my hon. Friend makes a valid point. The strategies that councils have in place in the centre of London, Manchester, Birmingham or Leeds will be entirely different from those in some of my smaller local villages, such as West Vale, Ripponden, Hebden Bridge, Todmorden and Brighouse.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend’s experiences contrast with mine of my local Conservative council, Hambleton—this is not a political point, but it reflects a pro-business culture in that council. One of our market towns, Thirsk, has introduced a scheme whereby the first hour is free in the market square car park. That has increased the turnover of shoppers and parkers, which he mentioned at the beginning of his speech.

Craig Whittaker: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. For a retailer, it is vital that a local resident can pop down to the town centre to get a pint of milk or a loaf of bread—the essentials that we need for daily living—with absolute ease. An excellent car parking strategy would allow them do that as easily and quickly as possible.

High streets and town centres continue to play a fundamental role in the lives of our communities, and parking is one of the factors most able to shape their success. If local authorities can strike the correct balance, a successful parking strategy can bring in visitors. I mentioned the Brighouse Business Initiative, which runs farmers markets in our area. Every year, it runs a massive 1940s weekend, which brings in about 200,000 additional
people. Such initiatives in town centres can bring in the footfall, and car parking plays a vital role in that. It can help to reinvigorate a town centre.

Sadly, if the local council gets it wrong, a town centre can experience an all too different result. When local authorities seek to support the high street by reducing charges, the Bill will facilitate that and give them the flexibility to do so. If they adopt a different approach and seek to raise charges, it will ensure that local people and businesses are properly consulted and that the impact on it is fully considered before any changes are made. The Bill has the potential to have a lasting and positive impact on our town centres, and I wholeheartedly support the intention behind it. I welcome the fact that both the Government and the Opposition have suggested that they will support it, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth for bringing it before the House.

My final point is a message to the Minister. He might have a great knack of emptying the Public Gallery, but if he looks up he will see that it is now almost full.

11.35 am

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on achieving his goal of a measure that is incredibly simple but makes a lot of common sense. The importance of the Bill should not be underestimated, though. Over the past five years, Derby City Council has made about £20 million from parking charges and fines, but instead of that money just being focused on parking, the Bill will enable us to consider what we should be doing with it for the city and its regeneration, so that we can make it easier for people to come in and use our city wisely.

The aim behind the Bill, rightly, is to provide flexibility. Trying to get people coming into our cities more often is particularly important. The Great British High Street awards have been mentioned, and the cathedral quarter in Derby won the high street of the year award last year. We are very proud of that. The way we did that is not to be underestimated, because we had the challenge of a new centre that had been built 10 years ago, offering parking and shopping in one place, which had taken business away from other parts of the city. Now, we are working on regenerating two other parts of the city, and parking plays a significant part in that. I want to encourage flexibility for councils so that they can have cheaper parking in certain areas one Saturday a month, for instance, or free parking at night or for an hour in the morning, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) mentioned. The Bill provides a great opportunity for such things to be considered.

The work of the business improvement district in Derby, which I have spoken about before, should not be underestimated. It has the challenge of getting people who would normally prefer convenience shopping to take advantage of places outside the shopping centre. One way in which it can do that is by providing reasonable and convenient parking. People will then think of those areas as somewhere for destination shopping, where they can park readily in the knowledge that the cost will be reasonable, get out of their car and do their shopping. We can help small businesses by doing that and encourage a two-centre shopping experience rather than the one-centre experience that seemed dominant at one point.

In Derby, we take great advantage of the use of events. For instance, we have the Derby Festé, which is really well attended, with people performing in the streets, and Christmas markets and farmers markets. With those events, we are trying to regenerate an area of Derby for people to enjoy and seek entertainment. Clearly, these events need a parking offer to make attendance more attractive. Otherwise, people tend to park at the shopping centre and then not leave to visit other places for their entertainment. The Bill is a great opportunity to respond to local need.

We must encourage people to walk between destinations. The cheaper offer at shopping centres means that people tend to park and then stay there. With a cheaper offer outside the centres, say in the cathedral quarter or St Peters quarter, people might park there and then explore other parts of our great city, including the Market Hall, where they can experience the delights of the Derby pylet, which I can recommend to hon. Members. For those who do not know—[Interruption.] Yes, it’s a flattened crumpet.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), I was in retail for over 30 years. The value of retail to our economy is not to be underestimated. The Federation of Small Businesses has highlighted that parking charges are one of the main factors discouraging shoppers from visiting traditional high streets. It is important that we regenerate our traditional high streets, including the independent retailers, and get people using them again, and variable parking charges could definitely encourage that.

As mentioned, there is an issue with online shopping. We have to make it as easy and attractive as possible for people to visit our high streets and cities, instead of shopping online and having the items delivered to their door. Derby—like many other city centres, I suspect—is trying to boost not just its daytime economy but its night-time economy. It would be lovely to see people walking along our high streets, taking in some café culture, and enjoying the richness of our cathedral city.

During my time as an MP, I have taken part in small business Saturday each year and done short shifts in some of our local shops. We must do everything we can to get people into these shops. If they can park easily, we can get them through the doors, and then they will see the unique and interesting offer.

Jo Churchill: Does my hon. Friend agree that the small independent trader adds to the richness of our high streets, which is what small business Saturday is all about? In these shops, one often finds an offer not necessarily found on the internet and also gets that personal service, which is worth having. We must encourage anything that can be used as leverage to attract people into our towns or cities.

Amanda Solloway: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. As I mentioned, Derby has just won the Great British High Street award, partly because of the unique offer in places such as Sadler Gate, in the cathedral quarter, where a group of designers have got together to offer goods, all individually designed, and are taking it in turn to sell those products in their shop. It is very
innovative and inspirational and draws people in because it is not something found in the shopping centre. That is good way forward.

The private sector has an important part to play.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** On the private sector, it is important that local authorities consult the private sector, yet in York, where I first located the head office of our business, the council sold off lots of car parks and then raised the charges in the remaining ones. That destroyed a lot of the independent retailers in the city because, at the same time, it was giving consent for out-of-town shopping centres, of which there are four around York, and then benefited from the huge section 106 contributions flowing back into its coffers. It is anti-business in terms of the important independent retailers in our town and city centres.

**Amanda Solloway:** I agree absolutely. Having been not only in retail for over 30 years, but an avid shopper for over 30 years, I have often visited York, and it is a shame. Shopping centres have their place, but we need to work in partnership to ensure two offers. As I mentioned, these two things are very different—they are almost two defined destinations: one a shopping centre, the other independent retailers with a very different offer.

By giving councils such as Derby the freedom to set parking charges more flexibly, we can enable local knowledge and understanding to have an impact to meet local demand. It is also important that the local authority consults on increasing the parking charges. There needs to be an opportunity to consider whether the increase is correct, and local people and businesses need to be consulted on whether it is appropriate. I acknowledge that the council could still then raise the charges if it chose to, but it is important that people have the opportunity to have that discussion. It means that there would not be any surprises. Businesses and consumers would at least know that the charges were going up and could take note.

I fully support this incredibly sensible Bill. I cannot emphasise enough the need to support these retailers and independent retailers and to encourage entrepreneurship, and parking is such a simple, effective way of encouraging people into our city centres to see the offer available. The Bill is long overdue. In fact, I am surprised it has not been brought forward before because it will give them the flexibility to do so. I know from my own constituency the problems local businesses are facing. Halesowen, Old Hill, Cradley Heath and Blackheath have important high streets within my constituency, with a wide variety of shops, places of worship, local services and entertainment venues popular among local people. However, when I visit any of my local high streets, parking is nearly always the No. 1 concern of local shoppers and business owners.

The Halesowen chamber of trade and local councillors in Halesowen have long campaigned for reduced charges, and, where appropriate, free parking on our local high streets. Conservative councillors have secured an important trial period of two hours of free parking to boost local footfall. If that is successful, I hope it will be extended to all council-owned car parks. The Bill will prove useful to Dudley and Sandwell councils in my constituency, because it will give them the flexibility that will allow them to implement the move more quickly and efficiently. Local residents will have to wait until April for it to come into effect, and local businesses are frustrated at the time that it is taking to get the initiative going.

The chamber of trade is taking steps to increase footfall around the town, considering ideas for more activities, organising celebration events, and consulting local business on what they need to help them to succeed. I congratulate the chamber on the hard work that it has done to establish the first business improvement district in the Dudley borough, and I hope that it will thought out business plan will be approved next week.

Traders’ groups throughout the country organise special promotional days to create more interest and increase the number of visitors, but many of them are frustrated by the unnecessary bureaucracy that they face when working with local councils to set promotional parking incentives. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), many Members will be supporting their local high streets on small business Saturday. We should be using campaigns like that to help our local shopkeepers.

Last week I visited a new business in Halesowen high street, the English Rose Tea Room, owned by the inspirational Gemma. She has fulfilled a lifelong dream of owning a business, and has not allowed the challenges of autism to hold her back. We should be doing everything we can to help to create a business and shopper-friendly environment so that businesses like Gemma’s grow and thrive, and the barriers to success are removed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth mentioned, the Federation of Small Businesses has commented that high parking charges—along with other issues, such as changes in the way people shop—discourage shoppers from visiting traditional high streets. The impact on the high street is most seriously felt by small retailers in smaller town centres, and they agree that making it easier to reduce car parking charges will go some way towards alleviating the pressure, but unfortunately, as other Members have pointed out, many local authorities are planning to hike the charges even further. Last year the Local Government Information Unit think-tank produced a report which suggested that nine out of 10 councils will increase charges for on and off-street parking, despite the enormous amounts of money that had already been raised nationally. That, in my opinion, is a short-sighted measure. It does not
address the problems facing our high streets, and it is just a quick method of finding more ways to make money out of local motorists.

I think it important for councils that decide to increase parking charges to engage properly with local people and businesses. It is only right for there to be proper consultation on measures that could have an adverse impact on local residents. The Bill requires local authorities to consult interested parties, such as local traders’ groups, if they are seeking to increase charges, and I welcome that. It is essential for those who work, live and rely on our high streets to feel that they have the opportunity to make their case and that their views will be properly considered.

Craig Whittaker: There are local business initiatives in Brighouse and Hebden Bridge in my constituency, and businesses work tirelessly to organise events to boost the footfall in the town centre. Consultations should involve a high level of input from business organisations and traders, because they know exactly what goes on.

James Morris: As I said earlier, the Halesowen chamber of trade has done a huge amount of work to increase footfall in the town, and it should be at the front and centre of consultation on the proposed parking charges regime. As my hon. Friend says, those voices in our constituencies need to be heard.

The Bill will not necessarily prohibit any increase in charges. Occasionally it may be necessary to increase them if overhead costs are rising as well, especially in car parks that require access to machines and staff. The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that the impacts on towns are fully considered, not to prevent increases.

On-street parking is often subject to the same level of increases as off-street, although the costs of providing parking spaces are nowhere near the same. As other Members have pointed out, that can make local residents feel that they are a cash cow enabling local authorities to plug a financial hole. A balance needs to be struck. This is not a one-size-fits-all situation, but the Bill will make it quicker and easier for local authorities to do the right thing. It will also give local authorities the flexibility to incentivise the use of car parks which are currently underused. Spaces that they are paying to maintain are sitting idle, which does not benefit either local authorities or shopping centres. Empty car parks can become a magnet for antisocial behaviour and crime. It is important for local authorities to be able to respond to declining numbers quickly, and in the best interests of the local area.

Jo Churchill: My hon. Friend makes a salient point. Car parks that have fallen into disrepair, or are hardly used, can indeed become centres for antisocial behaviour, which means that there is a double disincentive for people to visit towns.

James Morris: I entirely agree. We must not allow that to happen. Making car parks full and making them places where people want to go is critical to town centre regeneration and the creation of a good retail environment.

I also welcome the Government’s move to look at further reforms to the local government transparency code to ensure that motorists can see at first hand a complete breakdown of the parking charges that their councils impose and how much they raise. There has been a suspicion among drivers that parking charges and penalties are being used to increase the money that local authorities can spend. Local authorities have no legal powers to set parking charges at a higher level than that needed to achieve the objective of relieving or preventing traffic congestion, and this Bill will make local authorities more mindful of this fact.

In the 2013-14 financial year, councils received just under £739 million from on-street parking and £599 million from off-street parking. The income received varies widely from council to council. The Broads, for example, did not receive any income for parking, whereas Cambridgeshire County Council received over £3 million from on-street parking. In total, councils in England made net profits of £660 million and £343 million from penalty charge notices. My own local authorities, which cover Halesowen and Rowley Regis, have recorded nearly £500,000 between them in profit from parking charges. Local people want, and deserve, to have faith that this money is being used properly.

Under the last Labour Government, revenue from parking increased from £608 million in 1997 to £1.3 billion by 2010. Such parking enforcement has undermined local high streets and I am grateful to the Government, who have since made many efforts to rein in these over-zealous and unfair rules.

In recent years, I have supported the Government’s action on tackling higher parking charges and aggressive parking enforcement which have caused considerable distress for thousands of motorists. I congratulate the Government on the measures they have introduced to stop parking charges being used as a stealth tax, including introducing new grace periods and stopping the industrialisation of CCTV spy cars. Therefore, I believe it is in the best interests of my constituents, and those of local businesses and high streets, that this Bill, very ably introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth, be enacted.

The link between parking charges and the health of British high streets cannot be underestimated. These changes will make it easier for local authorities to lower their charges to promote economic vitality in our town centres, and, importantly, ensure that if an increase is to be considered, the right steps are taken to make sure that it is properly considered. I believe that these are the right measures to help our local high streets, bring assurance to motorists and inject a much-needed incentive to revive town centres and high streets in my constituency and across the country.

12.1 pm

Kevin Hollinrake: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on introducing this important Bill. For as long as I represent the constituencies of Thirsk and Malton, I will be a champion of small independent businesses. Everything we do in terms of regulation, taxation and infrastructure should consider the needs of small businesses. We need to create a level playing field with large businesses that we absolutely need to encourage the success of the small independent retailer and business. Small independent businesses account for about 50% of our private sector-employed workforce and about 50% of our private sector turnover, so they are hugely important.
I must draw the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. Our estate agent business has about 190 small, independent outlets around the UK in various high streets and market towns. We do not particularly rely any more on footfall, so that is not a big issue for us in terms of car parking and people coming to town or city centres, but it is a big issue for the general health of our towns, villages and cities in helping to ensure that we have a vibrant and healthy sector in our high streets and town centres.

We started our business in 1992, and it grew and we became the market leader in our town of York, which is where our first business started. We thought, “This is going quite well. We’re doing okay here. Our business is starting to prosper.” Three or four years later, however, another very good independent started up in York city centre, and started to take market share off us. We had to look very carefully at the business we were operating and what we were doing, and we started to work harder again. It made us focus on what had made us successful in the first place.

That is a small illustration of the importance of small independent businesses. It is not just about the fact that they are at the heart of communities and about the fact that they provide better service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) said; it is also about their dynamics and the commercial realities of business. Small businesses hold big business to account. Wherever we have a big business monopoly—big businesses tend to monopolise the big out-of-town shopping centres—quality is often not as good. An extreme example of that is BT, which is a private sector monopoly, and we all get letters and complaints from constituents about the lack of quality from private sector monopolies, so we need a balance. This nation quite rightly has many good big businesses—my business aspires to be a big business—but we must ensure that the small independent business sector is vibrant. That is why this Bill is so important.

I have experience of some really bad local government car parking policies, and I referred earlier to the policy in York, where we started our first business. York is not in my constituency, but it is just down the road and many of my constituents work in York or have businesses there—our head office is still in York. The city council had a policy of selling off important city-centre car parks, which created revenue for the council and generated section 106 contributions from the developers of those car parks, but that led to more demand for and pressure on the remaining car parks and the charges were increased. It costs £2 an hour to park in the centre of York—a ridiculous figure that deters people from going into the centre. At the same time, the council granted planning consent for out-of-town shopping centres with free parking, and there are four such centres around York—a town of 200,000 residents. Local businesses were not consulted about that. In the conversations that did happen, there was panic from some independent retailers in the centre of York, but the council pushed ahead anyway, much to the detriment of those city-centre retailers.

There are some more positive examples in my constituency. Hambleton District Council has an innovative policy in some of its towns, such as Thirsk, where the council allows people to park for an hour in the market square. People get a ticket from the machine and stick it in the window, but they do not have to pay anything at all for an hour’s free parking. We can pay 60p and park for two hours. That has created shopper turnover in the town centre, which is exactly what businesses want. They want people to come in and shop in that short shopping cycle. It is easy for people to go for lunch or just shop for a short period without having to go home and get their money to put in the machine—unless they want to pay to park for longer.

Jo Churchill: The situation is similar in my constituency, which is also near to a larger town—Cambridge in my case. The circumstances in the larger towns are different from those in small, rural environments around small market towns. We want to generate throughput so that traders can survive and so local people, who may be unable to shop without getting in their car, have the same choice as those who live near a town.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a good point and I could not agree more. We are looking for a symbiotic relationship between the local authority and businesses. There already is a close relationship. The local authority benefits from the success of businesses—retail or otherwise—in its town, but that conversation is sometimes not as comprehensive as it needs to be. The relationship sometimes lacks understanding. The provisions of this Bill about consultation when there is a change to car parking charges and the ability to lower car parking charges without going through a detailed process are why it is so important that we take the Bill through.

My town of Malton is another good example. Unusually, most of the shops, houses and car parks in the centre are owned by a family estate, the Fitzwilliam estate. It is in the estate’s interest for the centre to be a vibrant commercial environment, so, as well as investing heavily in the town and in improving the shops, it gave two hours of free parking in the town centre car parks. That has developed the fantastically vibrant commercial activity we see in Malton.

Malton has been tremendously successful and very clever. A guy called Tom Naylor-Leyland set out to develop a brand around Malton, which he calls Yorkshire’s food capital. The Malton food festival is a fantastic weekend, and hon. Members must consider coming—it is a wonderful weekend to attend. It is vibrant, with music and a beer festival. There is some of Yorkshire’s finest food, and Yorkshire is the finest place for food, as Members can tell. The food festival has been a wonderful success story, and the town has regenerated on the back of it. It has to be seen to be believed. There is a symbiotic relationship between the car park owners, the town centre owners and the businesses, with a deep understanding between the three.

A lot of coach parties come to see the wonders of Helmsley, a fantastic market town. Richard III, the last king of the house of York, had a connection with Helmsley castle, as well as with Richmond castle. As the Minister said earlier, Helmsley was successful in the British high street awards, winning best market town on the back of the fantastic efforts of the town’s traders and local authority. Coach parking charges were introduced in one of its car parks, which deterred coaches carrying 50 tourists from coming to the town. Local people went
Mr Marcus Jones: Does my hon. Friend think that local authorities that take the wrong approach are likely to cook their goose?

Kevin Hollinrake: That is a very good point. It has been a fantastic debate. We have talked about some of the foul consequences of not having good parking policies in local towns. We did mention the Dog and Duck earlier—our local pub is called the Durham Ox. Members may ask, “Durham? In Yorkshire? Why is that?” It is because it has a connection with the Neville family, which is also linked to Richard III. It was a staging post on the way from Durham cathedral to York Minster.

In conclusion, what we need is a level playing field. We must always look after the interests of small business. We should not, in this House, worship at the altar of big business. We should absolutely put small business and independent retailers at the heart of everything we do. I absolutely support the provisions in this Bill, because that is exactly what it does.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I remind Members that the Bill is quite narrow? Even though all the contributions are very enjoyable, it would be nice sometimes just to mention car parking charges. I call Helen Whately.

12.15 pm

Helen Whately: I shall do my best to focus on the content of the Bill. I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on bringing in this brief but important Bill, which, as other Members have said, could be of such benefit to our constituents. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) who has talked about the many benefits of the Bill. Although I will try to stick to the topic, I will follow his example in ensuring that I do not duck the issues that need to be raised.

I am very lucky to represent a constituency that is peppered with historic towns and villages. In particular, there is the historic market town of Faversham and the villages of Lenham and Headcorn. I mention those not because the other villages are not worthwhile and worth visiting, but because those three all have car parks. The car parks are very important, as they allow residents to access the shops and services in each of those centres. Despite the pressures and the appeal of out-of-town shopping, supermarkets and the internet, those centres are doing pretty well.

Just last year, Faversham was a rising star award winner in the Great British High Street awards. I take great pleasure in regularly shopping in the town. There are lots of small shops that provide goods and services that can be quite hard to find. If someone goes to the supermarket or an out-of-town store, they are unlikely, for instance, to be able to get their pictures framed. In town, they can get a fabulous selection of flowers in the florist—an appropriate bunch can be made up for them to take to an event. A yarn shop has recently opened, serving the boom in knitting, sewing and crafts. There are new shops opening in the town as well as many historic sites to visit.

These towns and villages are managing despite the pressures that they are under, but it is not easy. Sadly, Faversham had to say goodbye to its sweetshop just a couple of weeks ago. It was a lovely feature of the town, as all its sweets looked so attractive. That has now fallen foul of the pressures we have been discussing, as well as our attempts to live healthier lives. Perhaps the children of Faversham are not eating so many sweets now. I know that my son will miss going to that shop when we cycle into town; it has been a destination for us.

I value our towns and village centres enormously, as I know many of my constituents do. It is not just about the shops that we can visit, but the way in which these centres serve as a community meeting place. People in the market square, or in the marketplace in Faversham, will often bump into somebody they have not seen for a while. For me, it is a great way to catch up with constituents and councillors. I almost always meet several people as I go through Faversham. My husband knows not to expect me back at the time I have said, as I will inevitably meet several people and have long conversations as I go through.

Kevin Foster: Does my hon. Friend agree that one way of keeping town centres vibrant and strong and, as she says, centres of the community is to ensure that car parking prices vary depending on the events that are going on and to encourage people to go into the town? Prices should also be competitive.

Helen Whately: That is exactly why I am discussing the value of town and village centres and their importance to the community. Car parking charges can help towns and villages to play exactly that role.

As I was saying, chance meetings in the town or villages centre are a valuable part of keeping communities strong. We need our communities to get stronger again, so chance meetings are really important. I would not deny that large out-of-town shopping centres have an important role to play. Some of my constituents will go to the Bluewater centre when they want to get clothes or do a big shop. It is not in my constituency, so I am not a regular visitor there, but I know it has a role to play. Nevertheless, it is not the place where people are going
to bump into somebody they have not seen for a while, or at least they are not so likely to.

It is difficult for our towns and villages to compete with destination shopping sites and with the internet, and parking charges are a factor in that. Other Members have referred to the Federation of Small Businesses, the Portas review and several other sources that say that car parking charges are a significant factor in people deciding where they are going to shop. In a rural area, as much as we want to encourage people to use other modes of transport, the reality is that the car is how most people need to travel, so parking charges are a factor in most people's shopping decisions.

For the sake of our towns and villages, many of us would like to see car parking charges that are as low as possible. Nevertheless, having discussed this with some of my local councillors, I do understand that it is not as simple as just putting charges down to the lowest possible level, or getting rid of them altogether. The revenue needed to maintain car parks is an element. Also, if there is a station near the town centre, we do not want the town centre car park to be used for all-day station parking. There is a risk that were car parking charges to be completely got rid of, such a car park would just be used for station parking and there would be no footfall from people coming and going because they would not be able to use the car park to get to the shops. It is therefore important for there to be flexibility in the level of parking charges.

It is also important for a council to be able to experiment and find out what works. Critically, as the Bill would allow, we must enable councils to reduce car parking charges at certain times and for special events. If there is a station in the town, it may be impossible to have very low parking charges all the time, but the charges could be reduced for specific events. Faversham is a fantastic town for special events. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton mentioned the food festival in Malton in his constituency; well, Faversham has a food festival and a separate beer festival—we do not have to have them on the same day! Actually, it is known as the Faversham Hop festival; I shall be called out if people think I have been calling it the beer festival. Incidentally, a lot of people come to that particular festival by train; hon. Members may understand why.

We have a food festival, and also a hat festival. We have a nautical festival, because Faversham is nautical town as well as a beer town, a transport festival, and markets on the first and third Saturdays of the month. There are many events to come to in Faversham, and those could be days for the council to drop car parking charges. Or, the council might experiment with dropping the charges on days when the town is quieter as a way to bring people into the town when no event is taking place. The point is that the Bill is about giving councils more flexibility so that they can make changes and test what works to bring more footfall into the town. That is why I am delighted to support the Bill.

It is worth emphasising, however, that increasing car parking charges is another matter. Such increases should be based on with some rigour, because they are a concern for residents and businesses. Given how parking charges affect people's decisions, increasing them could clearly be a concern for businesses and some might worry that they would be put out of business, so it is absolutely right that there should be consultation if car parking charges are to increase.

I checked with my local councils what their thoughts were about the Bill. I was in touch with Councillor David Burton, the chair of the transportation committee of Maidstone Borough Council, which is one of the two councils that my constituency overlaps with, and he said that he was happy with the Bill and that it will place no extra burdens on local councils. I thought that that was a good thing to hear. He flags up how he thinks that the excellent modern transport Bill will be valuable. He emphasises that councils will have to move quickly to keep up with the pace of change.

I certainly welcome the fact that my local councils have been good at introducing payments by smart phone for car parking charges—a method that is helpful, when thinking of flexibility, in enabling people to pay as they leave or to top up easily while they are parked. It is important that councils use such things to help to support local towns and villages and the shops in them.

To conclude, I very much support town and village centres and want to see them thriving. I am therefore delighted to support the Bill.

Wendy Morton: I rise to support the Bill again today, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on all his work in getting it thus far. I am sure from the comments that we have heard today that all Members wish it a speedy passage through the House, because we understand the benefits that it will bring to our constituents and constituencies.

I believe that the Bill really will make a difference right across the country, as my hon. Friend has said. He used the phrase “we come into politics to make a difference”, and the Bill can make a difference to very many people in such a small and very simple way. Its aim is essentially to make it easier for local authorities to lower their parking charges to promote the economic vitality of town centres, by allowing local authorities to react more quickly to market changes, putting them on an even footing with the private sector and promoting parking flexibility, about which we have heard so much today, by allowing them to provide free or discounted parking at short notice to support town centre events.

The Bill is intended to make provision for local authorities to consult interested parties if they seek to increase the cost of parking charges, and to ensure that the impacts on towns are considered. It was described earlier as the Santa Claus Bill, but this Bill is not just for Christmas; I believe that it is for all year round.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), who is no longer in her place, asked why we have not sought to change the law before. It seems crazy that if local authorities want to offer free parking in the weeks up to Christmas or on Thursdays for late-night shopping or for special events, it will cost them to do so because of the requirement to issue all the necessary advertisements. That seems hardly an incentive for local authorities to go down that route. In fact, it is almost a barrier to their making those changes.
In today’s economic climate, we hear a lot about the rise of internet shopping and out-of-town shopping centres. They all have their roles to play, but it strikes me that the Bill offers a simple and cost-effective way to enable councils to effect change. It is not about saying that they must lower all car parking charges, although there is many a day when we would all like that. It is about giving councils the flexibility to lower car parking charges when they feel that that decision is in the interests of the local community and takes into account the community’s needs. The Bill is a tool in the toolbox of local authorities.

Councils can win from the reduction in advertising costs. Residents can win because it will save them money. Crucially, retailers and local high streets can win as well. I understand that car parking revenue is important to local authorities, and I have mentioned the need to strike a balance. Local authorities may gain extra revenue overall from reducing car parking charges—for an event, for example—and from businesses, because if a town centre is thriving, income may be gained from business rates. The Bill is about local authorities being able to react quickly and support local events, businesses and residents.

My constituency of Aldridge-Brownhills is fortunate, as we do have some free parking, particularly in Aldridge village centre. I am a firm believer that free parking encourages people to shop locally, which is something that hon. Members on both sides of the House often mention and encourage residents to do. People pop into the local shops, do their banking and pop into the post office. If they are in Aldridge, they probably have a cup of coffee at Simply Delicious or at Sweet. People spend that little bit more time in the town centre, which adds to the vibrancy of the place.

The Bill is about cutting bureaucracy, which is something that Conservative Members often talk about. Put very simply, it is a no-nonsense common sense Bill, and I will support it.

12.32 pm

Jo Churchill: It is my pleasure also to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) on bringing forward what is—unusually in this place—a simple Bill with a simple aim that affects a great number of people.

I welcome the fact that it is easier for local councils to sort out their car parking, but I want to speak a little bit about enabling them to have a sense of place. That is a really important factor, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) alluded, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), who said that we should not be looking for a one-size-fits-all solution. A sense of place is about local authorities understanding their locality, including businesses, residents and the people who visit the town. Our towns are changing, which is why local authorities need flexibility.

In the town of Bury St Edmunds, residents live near businesses and tourist attractions, and a vast number of tourists visit. As I mentioned earlier, we have getting towards 2 million short-stay parking slots each year in a town of some 42,000. That shows the popularity of the town, but it also shows that we need to have local flexibility and accountability. A very different situation exists down the A14 in Stowmarket, which is also in my constituency. Stowmarket has less of a vibrant town centre, so the local authority will need to apply different measures to accommodate its businesses and stimulate a vibrant economy that is right for the town. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) said, the provision is about building communities. It is about people having the time to go into town centres and actually enjoy where they live.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the different types of town in her constituency. Is not the point of the Bill to require local authorities to work alongside businesses in order to develop the right strategies—for parking or other things—so that businesses can make the best of their opportunities, no matter which conurbation they are in?

Jo Churchill: Absolutely—I could not agree more. Bury St Edmunds has a 6% retail occupancy rate, which, as my hon. Friend will know, is very low—in fact, it is 50% of the national average. Bury St Edmunds won the award for the best Christmas fair anywhere in the country this year. It has a plethora of things we can enjoy. It has its own cathedral. Tonight, I hope to attend a performance of “Northanger Abbey” at the Theatre Royal, which is one of the only regency theatres in the country. All of that is fantastic, but there are also great things in Stowmarket and Needham Market. However, these places are different, and we need to understand how the Bill can address that.

There is one thing I would like to ask the Minister, and perhaps he can write to me if today is not the time to tease it out. In my area, I have a county council, a borough council, a district council and three town councils. Very often, it is only the fact that those councils work well together that facilitates solutions, despite the complexity involved in different authorities owning different car parks. For example, when Stowmarket Town Council wished to have a cheaper parking rate of £1 for two hours, that was facilitated through collaboration with the district council. Sometimes in these multiple tiers, we have a complexity that even a simple instrument such as this Bill may not address. There might be a little more work to do to deal with areas where things are not as simple as in a unitary authority or a metropolitan authority so that those areas can have conversations that facilitate changes to their local environment—to their car parking—more quickly than is possible at the moment.

That is particularly pertinent in places such as Bury, where we have the contra-problem to a lot of towns: we often do not have enough car parking spaces. It would be really good if these places could drive issues such as the funding of multi-storey car parks, which would allow us to have more parking so that our town centres are not sclerotic. When our town centres are blocked—hopefully, that is what the Bill will address—it is my residents who suffer. When people park somewhere in the town without thinking, residents cannot access their houses. Permits are good, but they stop people parking for business, and that is what I mean about this issue being about the whole environment.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I agree with the hon. Lady. I think there are still issues with the Bill. Does she
think, like me, that it should perhaps not have had its Third Reading today and that we should have spent longer in Committee ironing out some of these issues?

Jo Churchill: No, I do not. The beauty of this Bill is its simplicity, and that is why I would like it to go through today. However, as with most things in this place, we live in a fast-moving environment, where things constantly change around us.

My point to the Minister is that, where we have a complexity of local government, with different authorities having responsibility for car parking, we should perhaps look to address that as we go forward.

Kevin Foster: Does my hon. Friend recall, like me, that the Bill had its Report stage earlier today? That would have been an opportunity for anyone who had objections to the wording of the Bill to make some changes, and I suggested a new clause myself.

Jo Churchill: Indeed. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. A plethora of people have spoken to the Bill today, but there has been somewhat of a dearth of Opposition Members not only saying what benefits a simple Bill such as this could bring but challenging it, as it would be appropriate to.

Andy Slaughter: I am listening to the hon. Lady. Lady, and I think she is pushing her luck. A lot of Opposition Members are very, very angry about the fact that the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) is being talked out by her and her friends on the Government Back Benches today. If she wants to do that, she can play games, but will she please not criticise us?

Jo Churchill: It was merely, I felt, a statement of fact.

While we are considering this Bill, it is, as others have said, incumbent on us to look at where we are going in future. My town council in Bury St Edmunds, in order to help ameliorate some of the problems around the car parking situation, has usefully recruited a police community support officer, Emily Howell, to regain control over the civil parking enforcement from the police, because that is a problem in the town. She has single-handedly authorised over 100 civil parking orders in her first few weeks, including, amusingly—or not—for the leader of the council, who recruited her. She is delivering greater monitoring powers to local councils in exercising local parking management. I hope that this Bill will add to that as we move forward.

12.42 pm

Mr Marcus Jones: I am pleased to speak in support of the Bill’s Third Reading. I congratulate my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), who is introducing this Bill in his 30th year in the House. I wish him well in getting it through Third Reading unopposed and through the other place unamended. I understand that it is his first private Member’s Bill. As somebody who, not too long ago, was on the Back Benches, I was never fortunate enough during that time to secure a private Member’s Bill, generally because I never appeared far enough up the ballot. I never had the chance to bring forward such important legislation, so I do congratulate him.

As I indicated on Second Reading, parking remains a very familiar issue. My ministerial postbag remains very busy with the numerous missives that I receive on parking, and Royal Mail continues to enjoy the rewards. In the three months since we started this process in November, I have continued to receive a significant level of correspondence.

High streets and town centres are essential parts of the fabric of our lives, and they are the social core of our communities. Affordable parking that enables people to access town centres is critical to the continued growth of our high streets. The previous Government recognised that fact in a number of reforms of council-owned parking facilities. The previous Government made it mandatory for local authorities to give 10-minute grace periods in all on-street and off-street parking bays. That gives consumers in town centres greater flexibility and allows them to complete their business in the town without having to worry about feeding the meter.

The use of CCTV camera cars as revenue-generating devices by local authorities has been a cause for concern. That is why the Conservative-led coalition Government banned councils from sending car parking tickets through the post, to give individuals a degree of certainty that if they get a ticket, they will know about it on the day.

Alongside the Bill, we are looking to improve transparency. The Government believe in town hall transparency, and they believe that transparency is the foundation of local accountability. It is the key that allows people to access the tools they need to hold their benefit. The Bill will be very beneficial in dealing with some of the issues that I used to encounter when I was in local government. I will not go through a whole list of the festivals and events that happen in Torbay—I covered some of that on Report—but I do think this will be a valuable opportunity in that regard.

The key thing that I would like to hear from the Minister is how, assuming this Bill is successful in the other place, the Department for Communities and Local Government will work with councils to make sure that its provisions are used. The point that I sometimes make in debates on Fridays and at other times is that legislation is not just something we do for the fun of it—it will actually have an impact. What interest and assessment has he already had from authorities that will look to use this power? What will he do to promote it once these provisions are brought into effect? I will be interested to hear his comments about how this work will be taken forward. This Bill is in the right form and perfectly acceptable, and it should receive its Third Reading today.
local council to account. Since 2010, transparency at town halls has improved greatly. The Conservative-led coalition Government changed the rules on attending town hall meetings to enable the press and public to attend, report and film proceedings. We have also changed the rules on the information that local authorities must make public, because transparency is good for the health of democracy.

In 2011, the Government issued the code of recommended practice for local authorities on data transparency to place more power in citizens’ hands, to increase democratic accountability and to make it easier for people to contribute to local decision making and shape local public services. The scope and content of the 2011 code was reviewed in 2012, and my Department consulted on a proposed update. As a result of the consultation, the Government published a revised local government transparency code in October 2014 and further updated it in February 2015. Since October 2014, compliance with part 2 of the code has been mandatory. The code requires certain authorities to publish certain information, which includes information about parking.

We encourage local authorities to produce an annual report about their enforcement activities within six months of the end of each financial year. The report should cover financial, statistical and other data reflecting the revenues received from car parking operations. The Department for Transport requires those data to help it to develop parking policy. There is a concern that the data being supplied are not as comprehensive as they should be, and most local authorities do not feel obligated to provide them. Accordingly, when we consulted last year about updates to the transparency code, we proposed that the requirements to publish data relating to local authorities’ parking accounts be expanded to include greater detail about parking charges.

We also propose that local authorities publish statistics about their enforcement of parking restrictions. Specifically, we propose that local authorities be required to provide data on total income and expenditure on the parking account kept under section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, and on off-street parking charges and penalty charges, which are not covered by section 55 of the 1984 Act; that point was raised by several hon. Members. We propose that local authorities be required to provide a breakdown of income from on-street parking charges, on-street penalty charges, off-street parking charges and off-street penalty charges.

The responses to the proposal were enlightening, but not altogether surprising. They confirmed that parking data are of great interest to the public, and why would it not altogether surprising. They confirmed that parking charges and off-street penalty charges.

From my involvement in the Great British High Street competition in 2015, I learnt about the real passion that still exists in this country for high streets and town centres. However, although it is necessary for councils to be flexible in respect of parking charges to support their town centres, it is important to recognise that charging levels are often a significant concern for town centre businesses. The Government therefore think that it is fit and proper that councils are responsive to local concern before seeking to increase charges. My hon. Friend’s Bill provides for a consultation requirement if councils want to raise charges on an existing traffic order. It is sensible that this reform balances the needs of the local authority to set a fair pricing policy that rightly takes into account local people’s views.

In conclusion, I appreciate the points that have been made today. I am grateful for the way in which the House has handled the Bill and I thank the many colleagues who have made significant contributions. As I said when we started to consider the Bill, it represents a small but needed reform to help to deliver a more effective parking model that supports our great British high streets and town centres. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his Bill having made it this far, and I hope that it ultimately becomes an Act of Parliament.

12.52 pm

David Tredinnick: Madam Deputy Speaker, I welcome you to your place. I thank all colleagues who have contributed to the debate today, and I wish the Bill well on its travels to the House of Lords. I point out to our noble lords and ladies that the Bill passed through the Commons unamended; there were no amendments in Committee, but there were discussions and agreement with the Opposition.

I say to the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who has just expressed concerns, that there were opportunities to load the Bill with a lot more material. However, it was kept very narrow because, from my long experience of Fridays in the House, I knew that it would not proceed unless that was the case. To continue with an earlier play on words, I hope that the noble Lords will get their ducks in a row, but I hope that they will not add to them. We have quite enough here.

It would be instructive for councils up and down the land to study this debate. There have been some wonderful contributions; I will pick up two or three points that have come up. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) spoke with experience of starting and expanding a small business. His point about the power of offering one hour’s free parking, then charging an additional 60p per hour, was very persuasive, and many councils up and down the land should take note.

My hon. Friends the Members for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) mentioned festivals, and hon. Members focused on the importance of having special events that draw people into towns. We need flexibility in parking charges for those events.

I thank the members of the Public Bill Committee for their help, along with the other Members I have already thanked today. I thank the two Ministers who have spoken on the Bill—my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, who spoke in Committee,
and my neighbour the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend Mr Jones, who has spoken today. As I have said, I have also had the support of the Opposition. I thank my hon. Friend for allowing me access to some of his officials—I know it is not normal to thank officials, but I thank Phillip Dunkley and Thomas Adams for their assistance in ensuring that I was properly briefed.

It is with great happiness and surprise that I find myself having taken through the House a private Member's Bill that can affect every town, city and large village in the country. I hope that it will proceed through the House of Lords.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.
We heard much on Second Reading about the benefits of community radio and how it can get into the hard-to-reach communities that Members of all parties are all too familiar with. I seek reassurance about that. Where a small-scale radio multiplex service is run on a commercial basis, there is a high risk that charges to small-scale and community radio content providers could remain excessive, and that opportunities for those radio operators to reduce costs through the sale of spare capacity could be lost, which would be a shame.

A commercially operated, small-scale radio multiplex operator might be inclined to populate available capacity with content from providers prepared to pay the highest rate, rather than content of the greatest public value. For example, content providers with low fixed costs, such as those providing semi-automated—predominantly music—services, might be better placed to afford the high costs of transmission than content providers that invest in original local content, including speech and local journalism. Such community stations go to the heart of our communities.

I pm
My amendment 2 proposes that small-scale radio multiplex services be required to operate for public and community benefit, rather than for commercial reasons, in order to favour existing community radio providers or consortia of small-scale local and community media, so that they might come together and operate the multiplex. This would not preclude a small-scale local commercial radio service from playing a lead role in establishing a not-for-profit vehicle to hold the multiplex licence or from operating it on such a basis that local radio services, including small-scale commercial radio services, can be provided with free or low-cost carriage and surpluses generated invested in local content production.

This is such a forward-looking and important Bill. I just want to be sure that we reach out to those parts of the community that benefit from community radio.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I was going to make a speech echoing the hon. Lady’s comments, as I wholeheartedly agree with the principles she is espousing, but I will not now, in the hope that we can get to the Bill in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis).

Wendy Morton: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She can be reassured. I was just about to sit down. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay and the Minister can give us the reassurances we are looking for and that I will be able to withdraw my amendment.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I rise to speak briefly to my amendment 3. I was here for Second Reading so for me this is episode 2. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), I wish to probe further the provisions as they affect community radio, the importance of which I have spoken about before. The amendment states:

“The Secretary of State must not make an order under this section in relation to small-scale radio multiplex services except where the order includes conditions to provide for capacity on small-scale radio multiplex to be reserved for broadcasting services of a description set out in an order under section 262.”

In layman’s language, I want to know that there will be enough space in the system for community radio. Ofcom did some trialling, and, according to the pie chart it produced, existing local commercial radio made up 9.2% of content, existing local community stations made up 18.3% and new formats made up a staggering 72.5%. That shows a real appetite for community stations. The Bill has to take this into account to ensure adequate provision. There is evidently a thirst for radio serving the local community.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): The same report said not only that there was an appetite for community radio but that it was technically possible and economically sustainable.

Jo Churchill: I thank my hon. Friend for adding weight to my desire to probe further and to ensure that local community radio can take its place, rightfully and vibrantly, at the centre of the community. Ofcom, which trialled this, is also keen to deliver the provision.

The purpose of the amendment is to establish what access there will be to multiplexes specifically. Forces radio is hugely important to a certain sector of the community. Universities run radio stations that reach out to the student cohorts. Churches and cathedrals have their own stations. However, there are also new forms of media—groups and enterprises that want to reach out to and inform their local communities. They all have minimal budgets, and most have charitable status. If they cannot secure the space that will give them access to a cohort of listeners, what is the point? Surely we can ring-fence a little bit of that space for the people who need it.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I urge my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) not to press their amendments.

I understand the purpose of amendment 1, and I also noted the comments of the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown). I realise that the amendment is intended to ensure that the views of local communities can be heard when a licence application is made. However, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills will consider withdrawing it, given that the aim of the Bill is to create a lighter-touch regulatory regime for the smallest radio stations.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The Bill is indeed about small commercial stations, and about the ability of community groups to broadcast. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must not allow the multiplexes to be dominated by large media companies, so that we do not end up with monopolies or people holding several licences?

Kevin Foster: I shall deal with the point in some detail when I speak about amendment 3. However, I agree that the thrust of the Bill is to enable community stations to go on to DAB. Theoretically they are already able to do so, but at present the scale is so large that very few operators of community stations have that opportunity. The example of London is often given. London’s local area is London, so community station operators wishing to operate in a particular part of it would find it extremely difficult to do so, because they would have to pay the costs of transmission to London. The sponsor’s
message about an MOT for a car in Croydon is unlikely to be very relevant to someone living in Barking and Dagenham.

As I said in Committee, the Bill should be seen as the first stage of a three-stage process. It provides a legal framework for Government action. Without it, the DAB community sector simply will not exist, and the 10 trials will disappear. It also provides for a very limited ability to amend primary legislation through the affirmative procedure for specific purposes. That reflects what was done with community radio in 2004 and with local television in 2012, in strikingly similar circumstances and for strikingly similar purposes. I know that Members rightly wish to be careful about provisions of that kind, but I think that this provision makes sense, given its striking similarity to parliamentary precedent. The second stage will be the orders that will be necessary to create the detailed structure, which will be subject to detailed consultation. The third and final stage will be the issuing of licences by Ofcom to the individual multiplex operators.

Amendment 1 asks for public consultation. In fact, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Digital and Culture confirmed on Second Reading that the Government would initiate a full consultation on the details of how the new licensing scheme for small-scale digital radio multiplexes should operate. That consultation will enable the Government to take account of the different views expressed by community and commercial radio operators, and provide appropriate protections to ensure that licences offered by Ofcom are taken up and the position of community stations wanting DAB carriage are protected.

Wendy Morton: I am not expecting a timeframe to be set today, but may I stress the importance of ensuring that the consultation process is long enough to allow community radio operators to feed in their views?

Kevin Foster: My understanding is that the Government will have a suitable timescale to allow all to contribute. It is also worth saying that groups like the Community Media Association are already well aware of this Bill and its provisions, and I suspect that many operators, in particular community stations, will be starting to think about the contributions they will wish to make to the consultation.

My hon. Friend is welcome to intervene again if I am wrong, but I assume that her amendment is to ensure that the consultation requirement will apply to orders made under the Bill, rather than requiring a statutory consultation on each individual licence issued under those orders.

Wendy Morton: Yes, I confirm that.

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. Friend, for her intervention. I therefore hope Members will accept that if every order under this Act were required by statute to be subject to a full public consultation, that would strike at the heart of the intention behind this Bill. The intention is to create a regulatory framework that can be flexible and adaptable within a defined area and time limit. It may therefore not always be appropriate for every order made using this power to be preceded by a full public consultation. The Government do need to have the flexibility to act quickly to correct deficiencies or make minor and technical changes without having to wait for the conclusion of a consultation—a consultation that could make very little sense to all but a very small number of those involved in the technical side of digital radio.

The technology is moving on significantly. Obviously, internet stations, which are not regulated at all, are able to broadcast with no licence as such, but, with technology moving on and new technologies developing, things can become even more simple, and it is right that the Government have the ability to reflect that, but more serious changes would need to be the subject of consultation. However, if statutorily we say that any order under this power needs to have a consultation, that could be inhibiting or, as I have touched on in previous debates in the House, could lead to consultations that very few people will wish to engage with, or feel there is anything meaningful to be said, as effectively they are about technical details.

My understanding is that once the initial consultation on the new regime is complete, the Government will set out the detailed licensing and regulatory arrangements in an order, which will in turn be subject to debate by both Houses of Parliament before coming into effect. There is also parallel work for the Government to do with Ofcom on other detailed arrangements relating to the functioning of the new licensing regime. I hope that gives my hon. Friend the explanation she needs as to what consultation will happen, and she will agree to withdraw her amendment.

Turning to my hon. Friend’s second amendment, I fully appreciate the sentiment behind it—touched on in the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake)—particularly given the passion of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills for promoting legislation that benefits charities, although I hope that for the reasons I am about to set out she will also agree to withdraw this amendment.

Under the Bill, proposed new section 258A(4)(c) already enables the Secretary of State to “require small-scale radio multiplex services to be provided on a non-commercial basis.”

This gives an opportunity for a requirement to be placed in a licence, where appropriate, that it must seek to provide a basic infrastructure to an area, rather than be done on a profit-making basis.

As I mentioned on Second Reading, we must be clear that a multiplex is about providing the infrastructure for small-scale DAB operations; it is not the individual services we would tune into, although of course inherently we need the infrastructure for those services to exist. This means that part of the objective behind the amendment is already provided for in the Bill. It would not be the right approach to definitively require through this Bill that small-scale multiplexes be provided on a non-commercial basis in every instance, because this issue will be subject to the consultation.

I believe there are likely to be opposing views in the future consultation as to whether services on the multiplex should include those being run on a commercial basis, and I would not want to prejudge the consultation by closing off this option in the Bill. I would also state that while it is not a specific aim of the Bill, any future move
to have a totally digital broadcast system for radio would require an option being provided to small-scale commercial stations to move on to DAB. The current system of national and local multiplexes does not do that, as evidenced by the lack of growth of genuinely local stations going on to existing multiplexes.

The evidence from the 10 trials indicates nearly 70 unique radio services being provided, and the breakdown of them by Niocast Digital—also quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds—showed that 18.3% were existing community stations, 9.2% were existing commercial stations and 72.5% were new formats. I hope this will give significant comfort to my hon. Friend. The Member for Aldridge-Brownhills that community stations are getting on to DAB when this kind of structure is in place, as we have seen with the trial schemes, and as I would envisage being the case under the Bill’s provisions.

Again, as mentioned earlier, the detail of how the new licensing regime should operate will be subject to full consultation and the detailed arrangements will be set out in an order. In turn, that will be subject to debate in both Houses of Parliament, again providing an opportunity for Members to ensure that community radio objectives are included.

1.15 pm

The Government will need to receive views on commercial involvement in small-scale multiplexes, such as on the number of licences a person or organisation can hold, which was mentioned in amendment 4, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton but not selected. I recognise that these important issues were raised by the Community Media Association, and, to his credit, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) gave voice to them during Committee, rightly seeking several reassurances. I accept all that, but it is right that the Government maintain an open mind and I urge Members to resist amendment 2. If we agree to amendments 1 and 2 now, there will be no opportunity to debate or change things at a later date. One reason why we are discussing this Bill is that the previous legislation is now too inflexible for an era in which technology has moved on significantly.

I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds will consider not pressing amendment 3. I totally appreciate the intention behind reserving space for community stations and, given her strong work in the Ministry of Defence, I suspect that that may be partly motivated by the superb work done by the British Forces Broadcasting Service in several bases around the UK. It would be natural for such stations to be able to migrate on to DAB if they choose. Indeed, I want to be clear that this is about choice. It will not be compulsory for anyone to use a small-scale DAB multiplex instead of a traditional community FM licence. However, if we were going for an all-digital solution, we would need to provide a practical opportunity for licensees to migrate. The problem with amendment 3 is that it would require the Government to adopt a policy position by statute and would effectively preclude the consultation that will examine the necessity of reserving specific capacity for community stations. As the Member in charge of this Bill, I want it to allow maximum flexibility in creating the new regulatory regime that will follow.

Members must bear in mind that there are literally hundreds of potential locations for small-scale multiplexes, some of which may not be viable with specifically reserved space. Alternatively, other operations may make reserved space unnecessary in the case of a particular multiplex. I want Ofcom to be able to license small-scale multiplexes to operate on conditions that are appropriate for the particular localities that they will cover. I also would not want a provision that creates a radio version of a parliamentary train service: a small bit of capacity kept just to meet a statutory requirement, not to deliver a real goal. Ultimately, that issue will be the subject of a full consultation that will follow this Bill becoming law, but we can see evidence from the 10 existing trials of what will happen when the suggested system in the Bill is set up and community stations start coming on. It is worth bearing in mind that the whole impetus behind the small-scale trial that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport initiated in December 2013 was about ensuring that small, community stations and commercial stations have a digital option. If the strong shift to digital radio continues, that option needs to be practical.

The biggest change in the past few years, and certainly since the previous legislation, has been the expansion of DAB into car radios. Not that long ago, few cars—perhaps only the most expensive vehicles—had a DAB radio installed, but quite a number of cars now have one. When drivers switch to digital radio, they will find a selection of stations, including the national radio stations and almost certainly the syndicated regional stations, but some commercial radio stations that are actually not that small, such as Breeze FM in my constituency, are not on DAB. That will lead to people either migrating to consolidated media services, reducing choice and diversity, or sticking with FM. I suspect, however, that there will be a move in the long run to want to consider when radio could be switched over.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a good point about small community radio stations that are on FM, rather than DAB. Vale Radio in my constituency has exactly that problem. It covers the Vale of York and the Vale of Pickering, but it cannot currently get on DAB because of the costs and the licensing regime. The Bill is intended to help such organisations.

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the whole purpose of the Bill, and we can discuss the current regulatory system further on Third Reading. If the Bill does not survive today, or if it gets talked out, the national and local multiplexes will continue, which is fine for the largest radio operators because it suits their needs. The small community radio stations would take the hit and ultimately have fewer users. There would be less choice and diversity, and we would have a regulatory system that just does not reflect advancing technology.

I made the point on Second Reading that in the 1960s the outcome of an outdated attitude to broadcasting regulation was ships sitting just off our shores. The reality of not passing the Bill would be more community radio stations moving on to the internet. If we wanted to, my hon. Friend and I could set up an internet radio station in our office and start broadcasting. I am not sure how many people would want to listen—I see some nods of assent—but that is how technology is moving.

We can broadcast over the internet, but it does not have the ease of access of traditional radio broadcasting mediums. Yes, it is there and, yes, it is growing—the
Kevin Foster: tech-savvy probably have apps on their phones so that they can listen—but it is not as easy as carrying around a simple, portable digital radio that is possibly smaller than a laptop, an iPad or a smartphone. That is why it is so important that we look to progress and look to pass the Bill unamended. There needs to be flexibility for the future. I would not want to set up restrictions in the Bill for well-intentioned reasons and find that, in a year or two’s time, we are stunting growth and development in a rapidly moving technology.

Let me be blunt. If we told our forefathers 30 or 40 years ago that a radio broadcasting system could be run off a laptop this big, they would have sat there in amazement. A broadcasting station then was a large room with a whacking great tower on it.

Jo Churchill: They might also have asked what a laptop is.

Kevin Foster: Yes, and that is the way technology is moving on. The Bill needs to be flexible, but it also needs to be adaptable because there are so many different locations. The Bill does not replicate the BBC’s guarantee of carriage on local and national multiplexes. The guarantee was relevant for the time and for the scale of those operations. I am loth to set a specific requirement in every single licence to guarantee community access, but it is almost certain that Ofcom, when looking at licence applications, will want to consider how it keeps diversity on a particular multiplex or how it gives opportunity. The evidence is that community radio stations have benefited fairly well from the small-scale trials. If we start to have a reservation or price controls—that is another thing we could consider—Parliament would get into odd arguments about exactly where we set those price controls in particular areas. The nature of small-scale multiplexes means that there will be lots more of them, which will inevitably bring down some broadcast costs.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Foster: Briefly, but I will then make some progress towards a conclusion.

Kevin Hollinrake: There has to be an incentive for multiplex owners to invest in technology and equipment. Does this require significant investment? What rate of return can they expect? Obviously we need to create an incentive for such equipment to be established.

Kevin Foster: The Bill gives permission for some of these multiplexes to be run not for profit, effectively as community multiplexes, and there is some evidence that other operators—I gave the example of a university or a local authority—might wish to provide the infrastructure. I make it clear that we do not want to get into the game of local authorities running radio stations—that is not a council’s job. We could run the infrastructure under this licence for not-for-profit purposes, but a commercial station that makes a profit could be carried. The key issue is that, at the moment, someone can go from running an internet radio station in their bedroom to running a small-scale FM operation, and then build up their business and their listeners to become a more significant company. Under current regulations, someone wanting to go on to the digital system in some areas needs to be turning over £1 million a year to be able to pay the broadcast fees as part of that turnover. That is why this Bill is so important.

I am conscious of time, so I will wind up. I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills to withdraw her amendment for the reasons that I have outlined. I also urge the Community Media Association and groups such as RadioCentre, which have been active in contacting Members, which I welcome, to work with the Government through the consultation to produce the best outcome that can deliver the objectives that I have outlined. This Bill is about opening up an opportunity, giving community stations a chance to go digital and helping stimulate creativity as we have seen in the 10 trial areas. I will say more on Third Reading, but, for now, I hope that my hon. Friend has received the assurance that she needs and will withdraw her amendment.

Wendy Morton: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his explanation. He has gone a long way to reassure me by explaining the work of the trials. I see this as the start of the process. For that reason and for the need to keep this Bill flexible, I will, with the leave of the House, withdraw my amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Third Reading

1.26 pm

Kevin Foster: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions today and those who served on the Bill Committee. I do not intend to detain the House hugely on Third Reading, but I do want to set out the wider purposes of this Bill and why I believe that it is right that it now receives its final approval from this House today.

The whole purpose of the Bill is to tackle the hole that exists in the broadcasting legislation. There are three levels of radio: national, regional/larger local, and community. At the moment, three of them exist on the analogue frequencies, and two on the digital frequencies. That is why it is now important to create an opportunity for community stations to go on to digital.

I am very clear that this Bill is not about forcing any station to go on to a digital platform if they wish to stay on the analogue platform. Obviously, during the passage of this Bill through the House, we have had comments about future moves to have a switchover in the same way that we had with television some years ago, but that is not the intention of this Bill and those requirements are not in this Bill.

I also want to be clear that we do need to keep flexibility in this Bill to allow the hundreds of different circumstances to be taken into account during the issue of individual licences. It would clearly be rather bizarre to say—we do not do this in any other community licence—that what might be an appropriate restriction in terms of a community licence to cover, say, Croydon, which is almost the size of Coventry but which is an individual community in London, should be the same as the requirement as that in, say, Whitehaven in Cumbria, which was the very first place to switch over to digital TV. Clearly, it would not be appropriate to put in the
same sort of restrictions in that community that we might think would be sensible and reasonable for a large suburban part of London.

It is also worth noting the demand that exists. One point that has been made a few times during the passage of this Bill is whether there is a demand for such legislation. It is all very well to sit here and legislate and say that we should have it, but we must consider whether there is the demand. What we see from the 10 small-scale trials is that the system is simple to operate, that there is a demand and that new choices are created.

Craig Whittaker: On the digital technology that my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) mentioned earlier, we really struggle with reception in Calder Valley, so for community and small radio stations to go digital, surely we have to have the technology in place first.

Kevin Foster: My hon. Friend is right. The thing is, the technology exists for small-scale broadcasting and, bluntly, if the transition equipment is popped on to the top of a tall building, it takes out the cost of maintaining a large radio mast, as we might think of in a traditional broadcasting system. The technology exists, but the ability to license it properly does not.

As this was mentioned on Second Reading, I should be clear that if we do not get on and legislate, the trial stations in the 10 areas will ultimately end up closing. A trial system is not an appropriate way to regulate broadcasting in the long term. Yes, that system was used to create the 10 trial areas—I think we all supported the trial and, certainly according to the feedback from the MPs in those areas, it has gone down very well—but that cannot go on forever and must be brought to an end.

Lyn Brown: I completely and utterly agree with that sentiment.

Kevin Foster: I thank the hon. Lady for that statement. Sometimes in this Chamber we exchange comments that are not quite so supportive of each other’s ideas or suggestions, so that intervention is absolutely welcome. I am sure that the many diverse communities in east London are, in reality, not going to go on to a London-wide multiplex—they just cannot do that—but the Bill will mean that they can get small-scale licences and provide competition to larger-scale operations, as well as unique services and individual choice.

Lyn Brown: Which is why I am so supportive of it.

Kevin Foster: I am absolutely delighted to hear how supportive of the Bill the hon. Lady is. I am pleased to say to her that I suspect we will be moving on to the Third Reading vote in the not-too-distant future; I hope she will be shouting a nice loud “Aye” in her usual style.

Lyn Brown: I will indeed.

Kevin Foster: It is important to explore, briefly, some of the issues that were picked up by the Community Media Association and explored a bit in Committee, particularly the issue of whether someone could own more than one small-scale multiplex and the suggestion mentioned by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). If we restricted it so that organisations could have only one, there could be some bizarre outcomes in, for example, areas where more than one multiplex would be needed to cover a small community. I suspect that a restriction to one in London might be sensible, but if the British Forces Broadcasting Service was restricted to one, would that be done on the basis of its individual stations or the idea that it is one organisation? It would clearly be sensible to allow the BFBS to own several small-scale radio multiplexes at particular military bases throughout the country, and to restrict it to one would be strange.

I suspect that, were we to put in such a statutory restriction, we could see bizarre things happen, such as a community operation having individual licence holders and trying to structure things to allow them to get around the restriction. It is appropriate that we consider—particularly as part of the consultation, although I would be interested to hear the Minister’s thoughts as well—how we can prevent the provisions from being used by large-scale operators to avoid the national and local multiplex systems. Were the Bill too strict, though, we would end up with some really quite bizarre outcomes that were never intended. That is why the Bill as it is, unamended, is right. I hope that when it heads to the other place their lordships will recognise that there is a specific reason why we have not put that restriction into the Bill. If we ever decide to go for a digital switchover in future, we need to provide an option for companies that are not large-scale media conglomerates but have more than one station. I therefore hope that Members will support the Bill’s Third Reading.

As I said on Second Reading, I looked for the list of community radio stations that would be given their first real chance to go on to DAB by the Bill. There are so many of them and there is such wide diversity, in communities that in some cases probably struggle to get their voice heard. I therefore hope that they will see the Bill receiving its Third Reading today as encouragement to continue what they are doing and as a real positive for the future. That is why I am proud to have brought this Bill to the Floor of the House and proud to have got it through the Bill Committee, and I hope that the House will agree to give it its Third Reading and send it on its way.

1.34 pm

Jo Churchill: I shall be short and very pithy to give my fellow Members a chance to speak and so that we can move the business on. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) for giving an expansive reason why he did not think my amendment would provide any greater clarity. I have followed the Bill with interest, and I should like to think that there is space for community radio to have its full place and to allow British forces radio, as he said, and certain ethnic music stations to have their places within their communities to give them their voices. There is an enthusiasm for small and independent commercial stations to broadcast on DAB, and I hope that cost will not stop them doing so. I hope that my hon. Friend’s Bill will enable such broadcasting to happen, and he has my support.

1.35 pm

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I rise to support the Bill on Third Reading and to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay
I very much support it. Contribution to the modernisation of digital radio, and experience. I think we would all agree that the Broadcasting Bill through to Third Reading. It is an important larger radio stations and that they can be used for the ensure that the new multiplex sites will not be abused by licences in national or local radio multiplex services radio stations, such as the BBC, that have existing market and bring the benefits to which I alluded earlier. The Bill will allow smaller radio stations to take full advantage of the growth in the sector. I have already cited the example of Black Country Radio. It will bring growth and prosperity to small radio stations, and that will in turn benefit local communities. The aim of the Bill, as ably articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay, is to create a system of radio multiplexes: national multiplexes for UK-wide transmission; local radio multiplexes for county level transmission; and small-scale radio multiplexes for sub-county level transmission. This three-tier system with a lighter touch regulatory framework will open up the market and bring the benefits to which I alluded earlier regarding the deregulation of the industry. The Bill includes a provision that excludes larger radio stations, such as the BBC, that have existing licences in national or local radio multiplex services from holding a small-scale multiplex licence, helping to ensure that the new multiplex sites will not be abused by larger radio stations and that they can be used for the purpose for which they were intended—to let smaller radio stations benefit from using the DAB format. Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on steering the Bill through to Third Reading. It is an important modernisation of the existing licensing regime that will take into account the different needs of local radio stations, facilitating the creation of a richer market and providing the consumer with a better broadcasting experience. I think we would all agree that the Broadcasting Act 1996 has failed to keep pace with recent technological developments and market changes. The Bill is an important contribution to the modernisation of digital radio, and I very much support it.

Kevin Foster: I will keep this intervention fairly short because I am conscious that the Front Benchers will wish to say something. Perhaps I can reassure my hon. Friend. If he looks at clause 1(4)(b), he will see that Ofcom would be able to “make provision as to eligibility to hold a small-scale radio multiplex licence, including provision disqualifying persons who have an interest in a national or local radio multiplex service”.

Kevin Hollinrake: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) on bringing the legislation forward, and on his deep understanding of some of the technologies that lie behind the fantastic evolution in our broadcasting abilities. I very much support the Bill, particularly as my hon. Friend said that it will create more competition for commercial operators in a marketplace that can be dominated by quite large national chains, even though they may present themselves as local operators. Small commercial operators competing for revenue and advertising with larger stations or networks can only be good for the opportunities of local people, businesspeople and community operators.

Vale Radio in my constituency is an excellent community operator with a deep understanding of the local area. It is run by local people, who regularly do slots such as “A day in the life of an MP”. In fact, they came to Westminster only last year to see what happens in a typical MP’s day. That local connection is incredibly important. Of course, these smaller operators need more affordable access, which is what the Bill is about. It will break down the larger DAB areas into chunks that are about 60% smaller than typical schemes available now. That inevitably means better, cheaper accessibility with bandwidth and spectrum put aside specifically for small commercial operators and community stations.

As my hon. Friends have mentioned, the equipment, including the multiplexes themselves, can be provided for not-for-profit operators, which again will mean better access at a lower cost that is more suitable for community operators. Community operators may be niche channels, but they very much relate to the local area with the content and local insights of their programmes. There is clearly demand for such channels and for this spectrum. I believe that there are 444 small commercial stations or community operators that would like to get on to DAB, but have no access at the moment. DAB is a growing part of the broadcasting market. Some 45% of consumers today listen on digital, and that figure will grow to 50% by the end of the year. Digital radio is certainly significant in providing access to the market, and it is how people will listen to radio in the future.

I would like to question my hon. Friend and the Minister about the number of licences multiplex owners can own. I referred in an intervention earlier to the need to make sure we do not end up in a monopolistic situation, with a media company owning lots of these multiplexes and having control over pricing. It is vital that there is a restriction on the number of multiplexes that one licence holder can hold. At the same time, of course, we need to balance that with the need for investment—clearly, there is investment in the technologies and the equipment and in the staffing—to make sure the Bill delivers a solution that sees the roll-out of multiplexes, while making sure community operators and small commercial stations get access at the right price.
That means that if it felt a monopoly was emerging in an area, it could use its powers. However, this is probably one more issue for detailed consultation and for the order, rather than for the Bill itself.

Kevin Hollinrake: Yes, my hon. Friend makes a good point. Perhaps monopoly is too strong a word. Nevertheless, we could get into a situation with a bit of a hinterland, where the operator of these multiplex licences has too strong a control, particularly in a given area. Putting some protections in place would make sure that affordability of access remained, while retaining an incentive for a commercial operator—these may well be commercial operators rather than not-for-profit operators—to invest.

I would like to congratulate the Department on its foresight in starting the trial in 2014 and on putting the time and investment into this new technology, which has led to its potential roll-out and created a new opportunity for a lot of commercial stations and community operators.

To conclude, I congratulate my hon. Friend again on the deep understanding he has shown of the process of Parliament in getting this far—he is nearly over the finishing line—and on his understanding of the technology. His work will help many operators and many communities.

1.47 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): My remarks will also be fairly brief, since we discussed the Bill quite extensively in Committee the other day, and we have had very good debates today on Report and Third Reading. I also know that the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and the Government are as keen as the Opposition are to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) by 2 o’clock, so my remarks will not be overly extensive.

I congratulated the hon. Gentleman in Committee on bringing the Bill forward, and I do so again today. I also congratulate him on bringing it this far in its parliamentary journey. He said earlier that, had the amendments been accepted, there would have been no chance to do anything about that later. Of course, that is not technically correct, because his Bill now makes its way down to the other place right now—the Digital Economy Bill—that might not be open to existing large-scale commercial radio operators rather than not-for-profit operators—to invest.

As I say, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the Bill. It is a non-controversial, handout Bill from the Government, but he still had to carry it effectively through its parliamentary stages, and he has indeed done that. However, it might not be unfair to observe that there is a Government Bill in Committee in the other place right now—the Digital Economy Bill—that this proposal may well have been a suitable part of had it been ready in time.

We support this Bill. We championed community radio while we were in government, introducing the Community Radio Ordinance in 2004, which established the community radio fund. The Bill continues that work by updating the infrastructure available to community radio stations and facilitating affordable access to digital frequencies. I am sure that most Members, as we heard particularly on Second Reading, have had a community radio station in their own constituency in mind throughout these debates. Of course I, like others, pay tribute to my local community radio station, Radio Cardiff. Community radio stations are undoubtedly agents for social good. They involve volunteers, they engage listeners, and they contribute to social cohesion. Any measure that supports these stations in extending their reach and expanding their impact is very welcome.

Labour Members welcome the Bill and support its Third Reading. I hope that we are sending it on its way to a bright future in the other place and, without too much further delay, into law so that it can have the impact that it undoubtedly will have at a local level in our constituencies.

1.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak on this important occasion. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) this is the first opportunity I have had to do so—on getting this Bill through to Third Reading. He has done an extremely detailed and thorough job on it, and it is a great credit to him that it looks as though it is going to pass into law—without taking anything for granted in the other place, of course.

The Government support this Bill because it will enable the creation of an appropriate and low-cost licensing regime for the transmission of digital radio on a small scale. It will give small commercial and community stations a platform to broadcast on digital, which is currently beyond their reach due to the costs and constraints of the existing statutory regime. The detail of how the new licensing regime should operate will obviously be subject to full consultation, as we have heard.

I thank my hon. Friends, and all hon. Members, for their very thoughtful contributions to this debate and the previous debates—in particular, my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), and for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris).

I will quickly try to deal with some of the issues that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds asked about access for small community radio stations. I assure her that the aim is to provide a means for all small stations, especially community stations, to go digital. The Bill allows us to put in a protection to reserve capacity and exclude large operators. However this is done, it needs a very flexible approach.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton asked a similar question. I can confirm that the Bill already gives Ofcom the power to exclude holders of existing local and national multiplex licence holders from taking licences in small-scale digital radio multiplexes. This will prevent large groups, particularly large media organisations that operate digital radio multiplexes on a larger scale, from holding small radio multiplexes. That will have the benefit of keeping down the cost of carriage on small-scale multiplexes because they will not be open to existing large-scale commercial radio multiplex operators.

The hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) asked why this measure is not in the Digital Economy Bill.
That has been dealt with before by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Digital and Culture, who said that the DCMS needed to see the conclusions of the Ofcom trials before we moved to legislation. Ofcom did not publish that evaluation until September 2016, which was several months after the introduction of the Digital Economy Bill. I think the hon. Gentleman knew that anyway, but we will leave it at that.

Listeners have repeatedly said how important local radio is to them. Research commissioned by Ofcom in 2015 indicates that 45% of listeners to local commercial radio value the local news it provides, and 35% value it for local travel and weather information. It is clear that radio remains a very popular medium, with industry figures indicating that 90% of the adult population listens to the radio each week and that overall listening to radio remains strong, with more than 1 billion hours being consumed by adults in the UK each week.

Although the popularity of radio as measured by its reach and audience hours has been stable over recent years, radio is changing. Listening on analogue is falling back, while DAB listening on digital platforms continues to grow steadily. Digital radio’s share of listening is 45.5%, as I think my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay said, and almost 60% of households own a DAB radio.

The radio industry expects that long-term shift in listening habits to continue, which means that digital will overtake analogue as the default listening mode in the near future. One of the drivers—almost literally—of the change is new cars. According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders, around 85% of new cars sold have DAB radios installed as standard. According to Digital Radio UK, a quarter of all in-car listening is digital, and it is growing at 39% a year.

I endorse what my hon. Friends have said about the important role played by local radio stations. Small commercial and community radio stations continue to provide an important means of informing and engaging with communities, as well as providing entertaining, popular and lively programming. The Government recognise the importance of smaller stations to their local communities, and we have been aware for some time of the desire for small commercial and community radio stations to have a route to broadcast on a digital platform that meets their needs. The objective behind the Bill is to give smaller stations the ability to broadcast on digital.

A key success of the small-scale multiplex trial set up by Ofcom has been the strong support from smaller stations, including community radio, and the way in which they have all worked together. The majority of trial small-scale multiplexes are full or nearly full. The development of a layer of small-scale multiplexes will provide the answer, in most cases, to the question of how to provide the 400 small commercial and community radio stations that are transmitting to their local areas on FM or medium wave with the opportunity to broadcast cost-effectively on a digital platform. The development of a tier of small-scale DAB networks across the country could also attract new entrants to launch radio services, some of which have successful programme formats from prior experience of broadcasting via the internet.

Overall, we think that the development is likely to result in a wider selection of stations and programme content for listeners. I think we all agree that that can only be a really positive thing. It will create new audiences for advertisers and sponsors, facilitating growth in the sector. The Government welcome the Bill and support it as it moves to the other place. The Bill has had a strong airing in this place and we hope that the other place will give it a fair wind, given its limited but extremely targeted scope, the cross-party support—including all hon. Members here today—and the reassurances that have been given by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay today.

Kevin Foster: With the leave of the House, I want to thank the Members who have spoken and express my gratitude for the support that the Bill has just received from the Government. It is a welcome measure that will make a difference to many communities across the country, and I am pleased that it will go to the House of Lords with cross-party support, not least given the balance between the parties in the other place. The Bill will have an impact across the whole of the United Kingdom. The previous Bill that we discussed extended to England and Wales, but this Bill will cover the whole of the UK. It will bring the benefits of listening, creativity, diversity and, ultimately, jobs to all parts of the United Kingdom.

I am conscious that time is marching on, and there is another Bill that I am keen to discuss in a minute; I want to make some supportive remarks on it. I thank all Members who have spoken.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.
Child Poverty in the UK (Target for Reduction) Bill

2 pm

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to debate my Bill on the Floor of the House. The Bill seeks to establish a target for the reduction of child poverty, because it is a fundamental principle of fairness that every child should have the best start in life.

A great privilege of serving in Parliament is the broad range of people that we get the opportunity to meet. Kelly Louise, a remarkable 10-year-old, stands out as one of the many who I was fortunate to meet while working on this Bill. She conveyed how poverty can shape so much of a young person’s life, from what someone wears to school or the home they return to. When we see poverty through the lens of children, the solutions become a little clearer and more urgent. That is why I serve in Parliament: to ensure that where someone is born is no barrier to their future.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware of the figures that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation issued today, indicating that whereas for most of the population poverty will be decreasing by 2021, for children it will increase?

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend speaks with great authority on these matters. I am aware of the figures and will refer to them later in my speech, but I am grateful for her intervention.

I am sure that all of us in this House serve in Parliament to ensure that where someone grows up does not determine where they end up. As the Member of Parliament for Barnsley Central, it is a huge privilege to work to ensure that children who grow up in my constituency get the same life opportunities as those in other more affluent parts of the country.

I will make the case today that our shared duty means that in 2017 no child in Britain should have to grow up in poverty, and I will set out some of the challenges facing those children and their families. If we are going to take the steps required to ensure that poverty will no longer be an everyday reality for millions of children in Britain, we must recognise the realities of modern poverty and develop co-ordinated, prioritised solutions across Government, building partnerships with communities, employers and the devolved Administrations.

As in life, if someone wants to achieve something in Government, it is useful to set a target: a starting point on which a renewed effort can be built. The measures in that target and the policies required to achieve it should rightly be debated at length, but my Bill intends to establish the principle rather than to be prescriptive. In doing so, I defer to the advice of the House of Commons Library, which notes:

“Targets let those responsible for delivery know what needs to happen, so that they can plan, monitor and deliver.”

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that if someone does not meet their targets, they should change their actions, not their targets?

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend speaks with real authority on this matter, which I know is very important to her personally. I agree with her, and let us be clear: this House has previously united behind that principle, most notably in enacting the Child Poverty Act 2010.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing this important Bill. He is right to emphasise the importance of targets, and we should note the fact that targets work. Labour set its targets to reduce child poverty by a quarter by 2005 and by half by 2010. Does he agree that when we began to see progress falling back, adjusting action was able to be taken, which meant that more than 1 million children were removed from poverty under Labour?

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend speaks with huge knowledge, experience and authority, and she is absolutely right. Today’s debate represents an opportunity for all of us in this place to send out a clear statement of intent that our goal is that no child should have to grow up in poverty, and that we will hold ourselves accountable and measure progress through the target that we seek to set.

Why is it so urgent that we set a target? The Resolution Foundation highlights falling living standards among the least well-off, as a combination of rising inflation, welfare cuts and lower pay increases hits. It warns that for the poorest, this Parliament will be the worst for living standards since records began and the worst for inequality since the 1980s.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that a growing problem in our country is poverty among children whose parents are working? That is a real fear for many people.

Dan Jarvis: I do agree, and my hon. Friend has anticipated some of the remarks that I will come to shortly. I am grateful to her for the intervention.

Having referred to the Resolution Foundation report, I would also like briefly to mention a landmark report by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. It highlights what it describes as the “stark inequalities” between children of different backgrounds and the effect of poverty in worsening children’s health.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the importance of having a target or targets for child poverty. I agree with him about the impact of the targets that Tony Blair set in 1999. Does he agree that one reason why we are going backwards now is that Governments since 2010 have abolished those targets?

Dan Jarvis: My right hon. Friend speaks with experience of implementing a target in government, and I know that we are all grateful for the work that he and many others did. He is absolutely right. The reality is that if any Government were serious about reducing the number of children who grow up in poverty, they would seek to set themselves a target. That is the very essence of what this debate is all about.
The figures show that every Member of Parliament serves a considerable number of constituents who are growing up in poverty, so collectively we should and will be aware of the many challenges faced by families throughout the country. Times are hard, and for many money is short. In Britain today, an average of nine children in a classroom of 30 are growing up in poverty. For those 4 million children, it can mean living in a cold and cramped home, falling behind in school, and suffering ill health later in life. Today, we have an opportunity to make a clear commitment to do right by those children, because feelings of concern and insecurity about our future direction as a country are becoming increasingly commonplace. That is not just about the Brexit debate; it extends to the fundamental question of what we are prepared to tolerate as a society.

Ipsos MORI regularly surveys the public to ask about the top issues facing Britain. One in five people now highlight poverty as one of the biggest challenges facing our country. The anxiety about it has increased significantly in recent times and now stands at the highest level since the question was first asked in 1997. In these uncertain times, we face a defining challenge of providing greater security to families, and calling time on child poverty must be fundamental to that. The Institute for Fiscal Studies projects that without a change in approach, the level of relative child poverty will increase by 50% by 2020. The reality may actually be starker, because greater economic uncertainty, rising costs and lower pay growth mean that the IFS concludes that the outlook for poverty is almost certainly worse. That is a wake-up call to all of us because ever-increasing child poverty is not inevitable. It is a result of political choices. We have seen it before, when child poverty rose sharply in the late 1980s and peaked in the late 1990s before falling very significantly.

The previous Labour Government showed us how that could be achieved by delivering the biggest improvement of any EU nation and lifting 1 million children out of poverty. It did not happen by accident. The Government set themselves a target and made achieving it a priority. Many families, including, as we have heard, those in work, are increasingly struggling to make ends meet. This debate is about how we can provide support to those families.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): As someone who grew up in a family rich in love but not in money, I welcome the hon. Gentleman bringing the Bill to the Floor of the House. I sometimes comment that we hear from Labour anger but no alternatives, so it is welcome to see solid proposals backing up his speech.

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that heartfelt intervention, and I hope that in just a moment he will hear from me a few more alternative proposals. A target would provide a strong foundation for a wider approach matching the complexity of the causes of poverty today. I will briefly set out the proposals in my Bill. It asks the Government to consult the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission to decide the date by which the target should be met. It is not prescriptive about all the measures the target should include. Rather, it would require the Secretary of State to bring forward a proposal which would allow for a range of measures to be considered, including the Government’s favoured indicators—of children living in workless households and educational attainment at age 16.

I am clear, however, that reference should be made to the four established measures of poverty based on income, because that is a central factor in meeting children’s needs. These income measures have enjoyed cross-party support and their recording was placed on a statutory footing by the coalition. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman just alluded to, money is not everything, but that does not mean that it is nothing, and a target should recognise that.

In order to ensure accountability, the Bill would require the Government to lay before Parliament a child poverty strategy setting out the measures they will take to meet the target.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend has mentioned a target and a strategy. Does he agree that the Government could learn from the Welsh Labour
Government, who, in 2011, acknowledged the need for a strategy to tackle child poverty and identified five key areas for improvement, and are now on the way to achieving their goals?

**Dan Jarvis:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A great deal of extremely constructive work is being done, not only in Wales but in Scotland and other parts of Britain. I think that, collectively, we all have a responsibility and a duty to learn from that work, and spread best practice throughout the country.

I was talking about accountability. The Bill would require the Government to lay before Parliament a strategy setting out the measures that they will take to meet the target and, crucially, to report on progress towards meeting it. Now is the time to make an unambiguous commitment to reducing child poverty, and to measure our progress by setting a target. The social and economic costs of failure are too great to risk. A target will also help to co-ordinate an approach across Government: poverty reduction should be incorporated in strategies that are being developed on social justice, housing and industrial policy.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): The issue of child poverty affects Members on both sides of the House. I welcome the Bill, and congratulate the hon. Gentleman on introducing it. Does he acknowledge that poverty involves many other factors as well as income? Rural poverty, for instance, affects many children throughout the country.

**Dan Jarvis:** The hon. Lady is right. So far I have been outlining the moral case for action on poverty, but I think there is a sound economic case for it as well. We should recognise that that focus is necessary if we are to build an economy that works for everyone. Action on child poverty today can strengthen our economy, improve productivity, and reduce pressures on the public purse. Both the International Monetary Fund and the OECD have emphasised that poverty acts as a drag on economic growth. Reducing poverty will strengthen our economy, not least because the less well-off households spend more of the money that they receive than those that are better off.

When we hear about those who are, as Prime Minister described them, just about managing, we must all seek to understand the reality of those people’s lives. Many families are just one bill away from finding themselves struggling. Those families have been feeling the squeeze for years: 50% of households have received no meaningful pay increase since 2005. Over the last decade, real earnings have fallen by more than 10%, which, as the TUC has pointed out, leaves the United Kingdom at the bottom of a league table of OECD nations, equal only with Greece. This has been the longest pay squeeze for more than a century.

Poverty also increases demand on the public purse. It is responsible for £1 in every £5 of public spending. To put it simply, poverty will make it even harder to balance the books in the future.

**Lyn Brown:** Poverty is not just about “now”. Poverty among children creates conditions in which they will not thrive in the future, and in the future it will cost us more to deal with the poverty that our children are experiencing today. Food, education, prosperity and health all involve costs.

**Dan Jarvis:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to invest in our future as a country.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates, on the basis of its research, that the annual cost of poverty to the public purse comes to £78 billion. That is why it is penny wise but pound foolish to cut investment in early years intervention.

**Kevin Foster:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dan Jarvis:** I shall make a bit of progress, if I may.

I note with some concern that House of Commons Library analysis shows that investment in Sure Start children’s centres has halved since 2010. As a result, more than 300 local centres have closed. The social challenges of poverty—gaps between the richest and the rest of our society in our schools, and poor health—come with economic costs.

As well as redirecting public spending, poverty makes it harder to achieve the productivity gains that workers and the economy desperately need. This matters because for too many families work no longer pays. Two thirds of children in poverty grow up in a home where at least one parent works. While the Government rightly highlight the role that work can play in moving people out of poverty, taking a comprehensive approach requires action to support those trapped on low incomes, so that they can progress into better paid jobs. Four in five of those who enter low-paid work remain low paid 10 years later.

The Government’s upcoming industrial strategy can take two steps to support those workers. It should feature a plan to support low-wage industries, and Government can also play a role by bringing together employers and trade unions to focus on raising productivity, which is the key to increasing pay. Localised pay commissions could also play a role in areas dominated by low pay. By taking action now on low pay, we can recognise the realities of the modern world of work for so many, and in doing so reduce child poverty.

There is vital work under way across the country to support families who have hit hard times. In my Barnsley constituency, the local anti-poverty board, led by Councillor Jenny Platts, brings together local partners to support residents. They identify those families most in need, then target resources to provide debt advice, information on fuel poverty initiatives and healthy eating programmes. Despite that local effort, more than one in four children in Barnsley grow up in poverty, so today I stand here to give a voice to those 5,114 children.

I want to take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to the Child Poverty Action Group, which has long campaigned on this issue. I am very proud to have its support for my Bill. I also thank the parliamentary Clerks and the many stakeholders who have lent support through this process.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. Will he join me in also welcoming the work of anti-poverty charities such as Magic Breakfast, which is providing primary school breakfast clubs to tackle educational disadvantage and childhood poverty? However, does he agree that we
should not need charity to make sure that children are well fed or well clothed or that families have the right level of income? These are structural issues in our economy, and that is why it is vital that the Government commit not only to a target, but to the necessary action to rebalance our economy in a fairer way.

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I am sure that all of us on this side of the House, and I hope many on the other side, will absolutely agree.

This neatly takes me to the nub of the issue. I brought this Bill forward because millions of children in Britain need real change. Poverty destroys childhoods and limits futures. Ending that burning injustice should be a defining mission for the Government.

A century ago, Joseph Rowntree demanded action on poverty. He made the case to a Liberal Government that the prevalence of poverty in Britain would undermine its continued presence as a world power. That sense of national purpose in tackling poverty was also witnessed most memorably during our country’s darkest hours. In 1942, in the middle of a world war, Winston Churchill’s coalition Government published the Beveridge report. It defined a national mission that would follow in peacetime under Clement Attlee. Today, at a moment of greater uncertainty for our country than at any time since, ending poverty once again deserves to be an unrelenting effort. Brexit should not be used as an excuse for inaction; instead it should provide the reason for a new approach. Britain’s place in the world of tomorrow will be brighter if we focus on child poverty today. Solving this historical problem should be part of a modern national mission.

Our success as a country will increasingly require us to meet our duty to those who are left behind; to provide security, opportunity and hope to those who need it most; and to end poverty so that every child can realise their potential. That has to be our ambition. It should be a challenge that unites us all, so let us set real change. Poverty destroys childhoods and limits futures. Ending that burning injustice should be a defining mission for the Government.

Between 1997 and 2010, as Labour set about reducing child poverty and set targets for doing so, we saw that targets are the most powerful tool we have for driving progress and measuring and taking action when progress falters. It is right that the Government continue to emphasise the importance of addressing poverty with their new measures, but when two thirds of children in poverty grow up in families where someone is in paid work, a target that simply looks at worklessness misses one of the key and perhaps most disgraceful aspects of child poverty today: no working parent should be struggling to provide and care for their children. That shames our country. It shames a country as rich as ours that one in four children continues to grow up poor.

I know that there is a consensus right around the House on the importance of the Bill that my hon. Friend has brought forward this afternoon. We need more than warm words. We need meaningful targets, established in legislation and committed to by Government, and the determination, the policies and the resources to achieve them. It can be done. It must be.

Kevin Foster: I fully agree. A family in poverty in a wealthy rural community will feel a sense of social isolation, and children at school will see their friends get certain things and so on. I was going to say when I tried to intervene on the hon. Member for Barnsley Central—I understand why the intervention was not taken—that
this sort of Bill could be developed, potentially in future debates, to include provisions about educational attainment. Poverty can almost be a double hit. Someone may grow up in a deprived family, but many pupils on free school meals also do not do well in our education system. I remember a speech by the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) in which he pointed out that fewer pupils in the entire free school meals cohort attained three grade As—the passport to a top university—than the pupils at Eton did in the same year. That is why, for me—[Interruption.] I am aware of the time, but the Minister would have spoken to the mark anyway. I felt it was appropriate for there to be a speech on why it is not only Labour Members and Scottish National party Members who are pleased to see the Bill. A number of Conservative Back Benchers are pleased to see it, and I hope that these ideas can be taken forward at another time.

2.30 pm

**The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2)).**

**Ordered,** That the debate be resumed on Friday 24 February.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for your indulgence. My Bill to introduce Helen’s law was due to be read a Second time today. Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, that has not happened. I thank the 400,000 members of the public who signed the petition, and I particularly want to recognise the families of victims who have travelled to be in Parliament today: my constituent Marie McCourt and the families of Michelle Gunshon, Jonathan Dolton, Danielle Jones, Carole Packman and Jane Harrison. The Government Whip will object to the Bill, but there is lots of support for it on both sides of the House—I think even from the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris)—and I am working with the Government. Today is not the day, but there will be a day for Helen’s law.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. He knows that, from the Chair, I cannot as a matter of order do anything about the fact that his Bill has not yet been reached, but I appreciate that it is sometimes difficult for those who do not have a full grasp of parliamentary procedures, which is most people—[Interruption.] As hon. Members indicate, that includes a great many people who sit in this House.

The point I would like to make to the hon. Gentleman is that the fact his Bill has not been reached today is not an indication that his Bill is not held in high esteem, and I am sure that the points he would have raised in introducing his Bill would have had a lot of support in this House, for the many points in his Bill and what he is trying to achieve are very, very worthy. As he said, there will be another day. In fact, we are just coming to that now.

**Business without Debate**

**UNLAWFUL KILLING (RECOVERY OF REMAINS) BILL**

*Motion made,* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February.*

**GUARDIANSHIP (MISSING PERSONS) BILL**

*Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).*

**PROTECTION OF FAMILY HOMES (ENFORCEMENT AND PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT) BILL**

*Resumption of adjourned debate on Question (25 November), That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 24 February.*

**CROWN TENANCIES BILL**

*Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).*

**KEW GARDENS (LEASES) BILL**

*Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).*
**Jane Harrison**

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

2.34 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I am grateful to have the opportunity to lead this debate. Before I begin, I wish to thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) for championing Helen’s law in this House last year, following the tireless campaigning of Marie McCourt after her daughter Helen McCourt was murdered in 1988.

This is not a speech that I would ever have wished to make. On 15 June 1995, Ms Jane Harrison disappeared following a trip to Wood Green shopping centre. She has never been seen again and her body has never been found. She was just 32 years old. Jane was murdered by her jealous and controlling partner, Kevin Doherty. Jane left behind a grieving family, devastated parents and sisters, and two young sons, then aged 14 and just 18 months old. I would like this House to acknowledge the presence of Jane’s family in the Public Gallery today. I know that the Harrisons would be very grateful for the opportunity to meet the Minister in person to discuss their case.

The path to justice for the Harrison family has been long, and at times it has felt impossible. In January 2013, after 18 years of heartache and agony for the Harrison family, Kevin Doherty was finally sentenced to 12 years in jail for manslaughter. At the time of Jane’s murder, Doherty was leading a double life. He was married to someone else with whom he had other children, but he was also in a relationship with Jane. Together they had a baby, and Jane also had a teenage son from a previous relationship. Doherty was a controlling partner, and had been abusive to Jane previously.

On the day of Jane’s disappearance, the couple were seen arguing near her flat on Poet’s Road, Islington. The last trace of Jane was at 5 pm in Wood Green shopping centre, buying items for the family’s holiday to Florida. However, Doherty had already cancelled plans for the holiday without Jane knowing—because he knew that they would not be going.

Doherty claimed that he had later dropped Jane off at her mother’s house and that she had never returned home to him. Jane was reported missing by Doherty the following day. It was not until 2012 that technological advances allowed for cell site analysis to be undertaken, which proved that Doherty had lied to police in 1995 when he had originally been arrested. Doherty had claimed that Jane had called the landline at the family flat twice after she had disappeared. On both occasions the calls happened in the presence of witnesses. Call analysis in 2012 showed that the calls had actually been made from Doherty’s mobile phone. Furthermore, Doherty’s movements in the days after Jane’s disappearance did not tie in with cell site data. So what happened on 16 June 1995 remains largely unknown.

We do know that Doherty killed Jane. No one else has ever been investigated as being connected to the case. Doherty’s manslaughter conviction in 2012 should have provided the Harrison family with closure, but 12 years is not enough for a man who took away a loving mother, sister and daughter from her family.

At the same time, Doherty has never expressed any remorse for Jane’s murder, nor has he ever revealed the location of her body. Doherty’s final act of remorseless cruelty has meant that the Harrison family have never been able to give Jane the dignity of a funeral and a resting place. The Harrisons have never had somewhere to visit together on anniversaries—somewhere to place a bunch of flowers.

Jane’s parents, Phyllis and John, devoted their lives to searching for justice for their daughter and raising the two beloved sons she left behind, but they died before they were able to see Doherty finally being brought to justice. Jane’s sister, Claire, told me that it was her mother’s dying wish that Jane was found and laid to rest with her parents, but calculated murderer Doherty has denied the family that source of closure.

I hope that the Minister can empathise with the horror that the Harrisons felt when they discovered that Doherty, the same man that not only murdered Jane, but had concealed for 22 years where her body is, could be eligible for parole next year, six years into his 12-year sentence.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): While we are waiting on Helen’s law, there is nothing to stop the Parole Board from changing its deadlines. I would like to hear from the Minister about how he is going to act on the letter that I received in May 2016, saying that this whole matter would be reviewed by the Parole Board. When will those guidelines be updated to prevent people such as the murderer of Jane Harrison from being released on parole?

Siobhain McDonagh: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. The English legal system does not require a convicted murderer to admit guilt or to reveal the location of a victim’s remains before they are released on parole, after their determined tariff. It should be common sense that Kevin Doherty, like Ian Simms, the murderer of Helen McCourt, should under no circumstances be eligible to apply for parole. The law must be changed to acknowledge the suffering that Doherty has caused to the Harrison family.

Today, I wish to reaffirm my support for the campaign led in parliament by my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North. First, murderers like Doherty must be denied parole for as long as they refuse to disclose the whereabouts of their victim’s remains. Secondly, Doherty, and those like him, must serve a full-life tariff, without the option of parole or release, until the murderer discloses the location, and enables the recovery, of their victim’s remains. This must pertain regardless of their behaviour in prison.

Thirdly, as stipulated in Helen’s law, the following rarely used common law offences must automatically be applied in murder and manslaughter trials without a body:

“preventing the burial of a body and conspiracy to prevent the burial of a body, disposing of a body, obstructing a coroner”, as applied in the case of Regina v. Hunter in 1974. Those pieces of legislation would serve to properly enforce laws that are already in place but rarely used.

Currently, decisions are made by the Parole Board on a case-by-case basis, but the law needs to change so that it is, by default, on the side of victims and their families,
Mitcham and Morden has secured this debate and why I should like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest sympathies to the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), Helen McCourt in 1988, who was just 22; Keith Bennett in 1964, who was just 12 years old; Paul Morson in 1911, who was 32 years old; Danielle Jones from Essex, who was 15; Suzanne Pilley from Scotland, in 2010; and little April Jones in 2012, who was just five years old.

The families of each of those victims have suffered untold grief, without the humanity of a funeral and a peaceful resting place. Indeed, since 2007, there have been 30 murder cases throughout England and Wales in which no body has been recovered. In every single one of those cases, a murderer who continues to torment the families of their victims in such a cold-blooded way should under no circumstances be eligible for freedom. Jane’s killer should not have the option of freedom until Jane’s family are granted the dignity of a final resting place for her.

Without robust laws in place, our justice system can go horribly wrong. Take the example of the notorious Sidney Cooke, convicted child molester and serial killer. In 1989, Cooke was sentenced to 19 years for the manslaughter of 14-year-old Jason Swift, and he was guilty of the murder of seven-year-old Mark Tildesley. But in 1989, his sentence was reduced to 16 years, and he was paroled nine years later, in April 1998, having refused rehabilitation in prison and having never revealed where Mark Tildesley’s body was to his bereaved parents.

Mercifully, Cooke was rearrested in 1999 and received two life sentences. Nevertheless, that demonstrates that our justice system has made terrible mistakes in the past. We must act now to stop that happening again in the future. The policy of “no body, no parole” is already in force in South Australia, and it is being considered in Australia at federal level. Under the law, convicted murderers in prison are given an opportunity to co-operate with the police in exchange for more lenient sentencing or parole options. All states in Australia have considered something like this, with South Australia and Victoria taking the lead in its actual implementation.

The law will only apply to people who have the opportunity for parole anyway, so someone could not get a lesser charge for information on the whereabouts of a body if they had no chance of parole from the outset. At the same time, just describing the location of a victim’s body would not guarantee a murderer early release. The Parole Board would still have the final say and could deny it if the perpetrator still posed a threat to society. As of now, Australia is the only country that has implemented something like this, even at the local level.

Along with my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North and many others, I firmly believe that the UK could lead the way and be the second country to enshrine this law. This would not only give grieving families the chance for some closure but serve as a future example to others. I hope that the Minister will today outline the Ministry of Justice’s plans to amend the law to reflect this groundbreaking and fair mechanism, to deliver justice to the families who deserve it and to the memories of so many people. Jane Harrison’s family must not be let down by our justice system, and I hope that the Minister will agree that we all have a duty to preserve Jane’s memory. Jane should be remembered in life, more than in death, as a loving mum, sister and daughter.

This was not an easy speech to write and this is a very difficult subject for any of us to talk about, so I would like to end with a few words from Jane’s sister, Claire, who I know has fought for years for justice for her sister:

“We were so close, and we spoke every day. She was a wonderful sister, and a devoted mother. And I know that the last thing that my sister thought of the day she died was of her two boys.

This grief that we have carried for twenty-two years, it doesn’t get easier—it gets harder each day. And not to have some closure, somewhere for us to gather, to lay flowers—it is absolute agony.

I want to ask the Minister, what if this was a member of your family? Can you put yourself in our shoes? Could you stand to see a man who has caused such devastation walk free?

Please help us, for the sake of our whole family, for the memory of our wonderful Jane—and for all those who have had to suffer the same agony before and since.”

Please listen.

2.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this important debate today. I should like to express my deepest sympathies to Jane Harrison’s family. It is impossible to imagine the pain they have experienced and continue to suffer after losing Jane in such tragic circumstances. I should also like to take this opportunity to extend my deepest sympathies to Marie McCourt, who has tirelessly campaigned for a law change in memory of her daughter, Helen.

On a personal level, when considering this debate and, indeed, the private Member’s Bill introduced by the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), I recalled the sight of Winnie Johnson, the mother of Keith Bennett, who died never knowing where her son was buried. Indeed, her face etched with agony on every anniversary of the Moors murders stays with me. To lose a loved one in such circumstances is truly horrendous. The fact that Winnie was then denied the opportunity to give her son a proper burial is too awful even to comprehend, so I understand why the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden has secured this debate and why the hon. Member for St Helens North is pursuing his campaign for Helen’s law.

The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden has set out the background to the case. I must stress that, as a Justice Minister, I would not normally comment on individual cases. As should be clear, this case involves a conviction for manslaughter, not murder. I do not think it would be helpful to revisit now that conviction or to discuss the difference between what amounts to the offence of murder or manslaughter. It might be helpful, however, for me to explain the different options available when sentencing for manslaughter and the different consequences of these sentences.

Murder is the only offence that carries a mandatory life sentence. In every case where someone is convicted of murder, they will receive a life sentence. Apart from
the most serious cases, which receive a whole-life order, the court will set a tariff for the offender. That means they will serve a minimum time before they are considered for release, and will be released only when the independent Parole Board considers it safe to do so.

Manslaughter, on the other hand, has a maximum penalty of a life sentence, but that sentence is discretionary, rather than mandatory. The judge can impose a life sentence, or any other sentence short of a life sentence, having considered all the factors in each case. The length of the custodial sentence imposed must reflect the culpability of the offender. In the case of manslaughter, that can vary widely given the wide range of behaviour that the offence covers. Defendants convicted of manslaughter can, and do, receive standard determinate sentences.

In contrast to a life sentence, and since the introduction of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, prisoners serving a standard determinate sentence are automatically released at the halfway point of their sentence. The remainder of the sentence is served on licence in the community. While on licence, offenders will be subject to probation supervision and the licence will include appropriate conditions. If an offender breaches those conditions, they may be recalled to prison. I stress that offenders serving standard determinate sentences are released automatically by statute and are not considered for release at the discretion of a body such as the Parole Board. It is worth noting that an offender convicted of manslaughter who is serving a determinate sentence of whatever length will not be eligible for release earlier than the halfway point of their sentence under the home detention curfew scheme.

The judiciary are of course aware of how sentences are structured when determining the appropriate sentence in a case, and explain the effect of the sentence in open court. Therefore, any offender subject to a determinate sentence will be released at a fixed point, irrespective of whether they admit their guilt or co-operate with the authorities, and their sentence will come to an end at a fixed point. There is no discretion under the law to hold them beyond the sentence that was imposed by the court. To change that would require a significant change in the law and to sentencing generally. It also raises some practical issues that I will mention briefly.

The practical issues are similar to the issues championed by the private Member’s Bill of the hon. Member for St Helens North—otherwise known as Helen’s law—in response to the murder of Helen McCourt. I stress that the Government sympathise with the calls for a Helen’s law. Along with the sentencing Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), I met the hon. Member for St Helens North to discuss his private Member’s Bill earlier this week. I congratulate him on his approach during that meeting. I again express my respect and admiration for Marie McCourt, who has led the campaign for Helen’s law. I pay tribute to her commitment to the issue and her tireless work over many years. As I said earlier, any murder is horrific and no family should have to go through such a traumatic experience with the added pain of not knowing the whereabouts of their loved one and being denied the chance to lay them to rest. For that reason, the Government welcome the discussion generated by the Unlawful Killing (Recovery of Remains) Bill.

I think the hon. Member for St Helens North would be the first to accept that his Bill does not present a legally sound solution to this difficult issue. In short, it proposes to deny release to those who refuse to disclose the whereabouts of their victim’s remains. The Government recognise the honourable intentions behind this approach. There are, however, some concerns regarding how the proposed changes can be delivered—concerns regarding the legality of some of the provisions, as well as the potentially adverse effect on the families of victims if they were made aware of information disclosed by offenders. As the victims Minister, I will always represent and work hard towards delivering in the best interest of victims of crime. As such, I intend to ensure that any changes made to the current process are tailored towards delivering a just and fair outcome.

I do not want to get into any technical or legal details during this debate, but let me say that we all have to be careful not to support something that would create perverse incentives for offenders to lie about where the victim’s remains are located, to try and secure release or to further torment victims’ families. There is a risk that each and every time an offender claimed to remember where the victim’s remains had been buried, they would have to be taken seriously, which could result in them being allowed to leave prison temporarily to help authorities search for the body. In that regard, I think, once again, about Winnie Johnson. We do not want offenders creating false stories to toy with victims’ families or to create false hope. The further pain and anxiety that could be inflicted upon victims’ families as a result of this is simply unthinkable.

Additionally, while the Government have been unable to examine the Bill in detail, there are several other complex practical and legal issues arising from the proposals. These could include avoiding arbitrary sentences; being clear about the level of co-operation required and whether this needs to lead to a successful outcome; and avoiding unlawful retrospective application of provisions.

I would, however, like to reassure the House that the Government are taking this issue very seriously. As already mentioned, I met the hon. Member for St Helens North earlier this week to discuss his Bill and the options going forward. The Government understand the importance of this issue and are committed to considering what more can be done.

Conor McGinn: I want to place on record my thanks to the Minister and the Ministry of Justice for meeting me this week and for the constructive approach they have taken. Notwithstanding what he has said, I do not believe that any of the practical difficulties is insurmountable. In terms of the impact on victims, the thing that is causing Marie McCourt and her family and Jane Harrison’s family most torment and anguish is the thought that the murderer of their loved ones will be released from prison. The Minister should make no mistake about that whatever.

Dr Lee: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and, of course, I get that.

The Government wrote to the independent Parole Board last year and asked it to review its guidance in respect of prisoners serving life sentences who do not accept full responsibility for their offence and who wilfully fail to disclose the whereabouts of their victim.
While it is not directly relevant in this case, the Parole Board is strengthening its guidance, which will be issued in the spring, clarifying the issues that may need to be considered where the offender does not disclose the whereabouts of the victim’s body. While the guidance reaffirms that the Parole Board’s primary focus is on the risk to the public, it makes it clear that the offender’s withholding of this information may raise factors that are relevant to risk and can therefore result in the offender not being released.

I should also mention that the Parole Board continues to improve and develop the way it liaises with and involves victims in its decision making. I very much welcome its approach, which recognises how difficult it must be for victims to engage in any consideration of an offender’s release.

In addition, the Government are aware of the recent developments in some other countries, and we will be examining these approaches in more detail and seeing how they work in practice. Mercifully, these cases are rare, but we will consider whether these approaches would be appropriate for our justice system in England and Wales.

With reference to the question that was raised about the family having a chance to influence the conditions of release, it is not appropriate for me to discuss individual details of the case here. As the Department has previously said, we will be happy to meet the family to update them. I know they have been kept informed of any developments in the case by the victim liaison officer in the national probation service, on any move to open conditions and on the eligibility and conditions for any temporary release.

I would like to end by again extending my deepest sympathies to the family of Jane Harrison, and I thank the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden for drawing this issue to the attention of the House. As victims Minister, I firmly believe that victims are at the heart of our criminal justice system, and I know that this is a deeply distressing and troubling issue for victims’ families.

There is, sadly, no easy solution here. I can tell the hon. lady that we will examine all the options that might provide a lawful and effective way to discourage offenders from withholding information. We all agree that we should consider any practical solution that will allow families to lay their loved ones to rest.

Question put and agreed to.

2.58 pm

House adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Monday 23 January 2017

[MR PETER BONE in the Chair]

Non-recyclable and Non-compostable Packaging

4.30 pm

David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 167596 relating to the banning of non-recyclable and non-compostable packaging.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. The petition’s aim is clear. Regardless of the potential challenges posed in achieving it, I am sure we all support its aspiration. The environmental impact of packaging is a significant and growing concern for consumers, Government and retailers. It is not an issue only here in the UK, but I believe that the people of the United Kingdom have an especially keen sense of responsibility towards our environment and the finite resources of the islands we call our home.

The challenges in achieving the aim set out in the petition break down to a number of key areas: innovation in packaging materials to increase recyclability; the incentivising of manufacturers and retailers to use a larger percentage of recyclable and compostable materials; greater uniformity from council to council on the materials that can be recycled; and a general reduction in excess packaging.

Manufacturers and traders have a legitimate need to ensure that their products reach consumers in a satisfactory condition and that perishable goods are adequately protected to prevent them from spoiling. It is important to recognise that protective packaging plays an important part in preventing damage to the goods that people have purchased, which they rightly expect to find in a good condition. None the less, there is agreement among consumers, legislators and industry that the total use of recyclable and compostable materials is a goal that should be pursued.

Personally, I am concerned about the excessive use of packaging. I am sure we have all at times been baffled by the amount of unnecessary packaging that fills up our recycling bins; I will not be the only person here who is frustrated by that as a consumer. Although there has been a general improvement over the years as the public’s sensibilities have changed, producers could do much more to limit further the use of packaging materials. Of course, consumers also do not want to see any increase in price, and that is a challenge.

We all, I am sure, actively engage in delivering leaflets in the run-up to local and general elections, which usually fall a few weeks after Easter. I am always struck by how much Easter egg packaging there is in recycling bins, and the situation is similar shortly after Christmas. We have to question seriously the excess packaging used in many products.

The recent introduction of the 5p charge for plastic carrier bags in the UK. That was a consumer-facing initiative, however, and it may be that similar initiatives could be introduced to help encourage the same sort of changes in the manufacturing and packaging industries.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that producer responsibility is at the heart of this issue? The very best suppliers of anything, from fresh vegetables to the most complex white goods, do very well on recyclability and the way they think about the end use of packaging and wrapping. Is it not time that we made producers conform to the highest standards, not the lowest?

David Mackintosh: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The issue will be driven by consumers, and producers need to take a role, but we as legislators also need to look at the issue and debate it from time to time. I look forward to the Government’s response later today.

As the petition states, there is a specific problem with the amount of plastic being used. In some parts, it cannot be recycled. Almost all types of plastic can or should be recycled, but some are less likely to be recycled because of the issues of cost and the local sorting infrastructures in place. An example of that is black plastic, which for technical reasons is generally discarded as landfill. Industry estimates suggest that that amounts to between 26,000 and 60,000 tonnes each year.

Although the packaging and retail industries are already making efforts to modify materials to improve recyclability, significant improvements can clearly be made if retailers are incentivised to use alternative materials. I understand that the packaging industry is developing new materials that will increase the number of options open to manufacturers. I am pleased to note that much of that work is being driven by retailers. The packaging and retail industries are working together to push those innovations forward. Initiatives such as Pledge4Plastics, the “New Plastics Economy” initiative and the industry-led Plastics 2020 Challenge and plastics industry recycling action plan are playing a key part in that. It is encouraging that major brands, including Coca-Cola, Danone, Mars, Unilever and Sainsbury’s plc, are leading by example and supporting such initiatives.

Government at all levels has a responsibility to encourage progress, not least in these times when local government needs to look for cost savings and efficiencies.

The media also have a role to play. I am pleased that tomorrow, Sky will be launching an initiative right across the corporation known as Sky Ocean Rescue. Tomorrow, it will be showcasing the documentary “A Plastic Tide”, which looks at the amount of damage caused by the plastics in our oceans. There are some startling facts. It is estimated that there are 5 trillion pieces of plastic in the world’s oceans, with 8 million tonnes of plastic ending up in the ocean every year. The average UK household uses one rubbish truck’s worth of single-use plastics each year. Every minute, an equivalent amount is dumped into our oceans. Some 40% of all plastic in Europe is used only once. A plastic bottle is estimated to take 450 years to break down into microscopic pieces. Plastic bottles are the third worst plastic polluter of the ocean. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation calculates that by 2050, the plastic in the world’s seas will weigh more than all the fish.
The Government are clearly committed to an increase in recycling and a reduction in the amount of waste going to landfill. It is positive that targets for plastic packaging are set to increase until 2020 and that the Government are consulting on increasing targets for other materials. Through the Waste and Resources Action Programme, the Government are supporting the sort of material development and usage that I have just mentioned. The guidelines issued in October regarding what can and cannot be accepted for recycling were a helpful step forward.

Mr Sheerman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if we were working at the highest level of the best local authority in terms of recycling achievement, we would be in a much happier and more successful place? Has he looked? I own up to this: my constituency of Huddersfield is under Kirklees Council, which has a terrible record on recycling. Many local authorities are poor recyclers. Is it not time we took action against underperforming local authorities?

David Mackintosh: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I agree that the difference between levels of recycling under different local authorities across the country is shocking. It makes it hard for people to understand the regimes involved, and it lets off the hook those retailers or producers that say they do not have to conform because some local authorities do not conform.

I know from my experience as the leader of a local authority that councils are committed to increasing recycling and are already under huge pressure to reduce landfill. As the hon. Gentleman said, recycling does vary across the country. Recycling policy is set at local government level, and there are a number of legal and financial obligations that make it central to the policies of all councils. Will the Minister pledge, when she sums up later, to raise the matter with Ministers in the Department for Communities and Local Government so that we can look at the issue right across Government?

Inconsistency in the types of materials that can be recycled by councils is clearly an issue. If that was resolved, it would give greater clarity to the manufacturers and to those local residents who wish to recycle more. When I raised the matter over the weekend on my social media pages with my constituents, I was pleased by the level of support people gave to doing more to recycle and to looking at how we can ban non-compostable and non-recyclable waste in the future. In fact, a Twitter poll that I carried out showed 80% in favour of banning those materials.

The main issue is one of infrastructure and cost. It may be that proper analysis of how individual councils recycle across the whole of the UK would provide valuable information that could help to identify the best and worst performing areas and inform the Government of possible solutions. There has to be a reasonable balance between reducing the use of non-recyclable and non-compostable packaging to an absolute minimum for the benefit of our environment and still allowing manufacturers to adequately package their goods to prevent damage and spoiling, and to keep costs down.

As well as reducing landfill, the petition talks about non-recyclable and non-compostable rubbish that ends up in waterways. As we have already heard, that can include our oceans. As an MP with both the River Nene and the Grand Union canal running through my constituency in Northampton, I often see the awful situation in which waste is dumped into waterways. Keeping them tidy and clearing them up involves huge difficulty and cost.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): My hon. Friend is making interesting points. Recycling is one thing, but reuse is the next step. We have seen some great initiatives such as the 5p carrier bag charge, which has meant more people reusing them and fewer bags going into landfill and the sea. Would he welcome a similar scheme for plastic bottles, with consumers encouraged to reuse those in supermarkets?

David Mackintosh: I am grateful to the hon. Friend for his intervention. I know he does a lot of work in this field in his own constituency and he works incredibly hard to raise the issue here in the House. He raises an important point and I am sure the Minister has listened to that. As he said, we saw the impact of the plastic bag charge: the 5p has made a huge difference. Clearly, we should look at other measures and other opportunities moving forward.

When rubbish has been dumped, the blame lies with the people who dumped it into the waterways and other places in the first place. However, different types of packaging would go some way to helping to compost or break it down, and it is right that we look at the issue today. There is agreement across Government, industry and retailers to move towards increasing recyclability, and those elements are already working together to move that forward. I hope we can consider today how that work can be encouraged further, and even accelerated, in a way that prioritises our environment while remaining sensitive to the specific needs of manufacturers and retailers and the challenges faced by local authorities.

The petition was signed by 75,000 people. They care about this issue and want it looked at again to protect our environment—for us, and for future generations. I look forward to the Minister’s response and what we can do to make improvements for the future.

4.42 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I was not going to speak, but I am a passionate parliamentarian; if I may say so, Mr Bone, you and I both are pretty passionate in the Chamber. You know that I have been a long-time supporter of recycling, reuse and remanufacture. It is important to get the Opposition on the record as being absolutely positive about what we are discussing today.

I have been an honorary fellow of the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management for some years. I also chair Policy Connect, where we have a very special focus on the reuse of resources. For many years, I chaired a charity called Urban Mines. Everyone who worked for it was an urban miner: what people used to regard as rubbish flowing from our towns and cities was seen as a new resource that could be mined, rather than digging holes in the earth’s crust and taking virgin material. I have a long history on this issue.
I am passionate about the misuse of our planet’s resources. Not only do we misuse the stuff that we use in packaging, but, as the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) said in an excellent speech, we then pollute our urban and rural environment and kill animals. We kill hedgehogs and badgers and all sorts of rare breeds by our misuse and by casting plastic and metal and all sorts of packaging on to our countryside. Even more importantly—this was brought out beautifully in the hon. Gentleman’s speech—we are now polluting our marine environment to such an extent that our grandchildren will probably live to see the end of fish as a regular part of our diet. That is the truth. How dreadful!

Scott Mann rose—

Mr Sheerman: I will not take any interventions. I simply wanted to get what I have said on the record, Mr Bone, and to be very well behaved for a change.

4.44 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) for securing this important and timely debate. I am chairman of the all-party group for the packaging manufacturing industry. I spent 25 years in the industry supplying packaging items, mostly to the food service industry. I agree with some of the points made by my hon. Friend, but I regret to say that a great deal of what is contained in the e-petition is not practical.

On a day when the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is in the main Chamber launching the Government’s industrial strategy policy, it is important to remember the importance and magnitude of the packaging industry in the UK. It employs 85,000 people, makes up 3% of all manufacturing that takes place in the UK and achieves sales of £11 billion. It is a highly innovative industry that responds to consumer preferences, and it takes its responsibilities very seriously.

I will mention various bodies and publications, but I want to draw attention to the Industry Council for Research on Packaging and the Environment—INCPEN—a research organisation that brings together food manufacturers and packaging companies to ensure that policy on packaging makes a positive contribution to sustainability. Its members include food manufacturers such as Britvic soft drinks and Diageo; food retailers such as Sainsbury’s and Tesco; and packaging manufacturers such as LINPAC and DS Smith. I recommend to all of those who are interested the INCPEN publication that explains why products are packaged in the way that they are.

I referred to the packaging industry’s innovation, which leads to a discussion about why we need packaging. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South drew attention to some of the reasons, but it is important to state at the outset that the demand for packaging arises purely from the demand for the products contained within. Nobody goes to a retailer looking to buy boxes, cartons and cans. What is in the containers is important and generates demand—the packaging is simply a delivery mechanism for food and the other goods.

Packaging has to do a lot of tough tasks. First, it has to protect the contents from hazards, particularly in respect of food items. We have gone from the era when much food was served in open packs and the traditional grocer cut slices of ham and put them in a paper bag, which could then be taken home and exposed to the atmosphere. Most of the food that we buy these days is sold in sealed packs, which protects the food from whatever hazards may be in the environment. Even if the food falls out of the carrier bag on to the floor, the food is protected from the hazard of contamination.

Importantly, packaging should provide easy access to the product. We have all seen examples of poor packaging that makes it difficult to access the product, but we have gone to an era of peel-back labels so that people can get hold of the product. We also ask our packaging to tell us all about what we are buying. There is a mass of information on the packaging that arises because our food is packaged in the way that it is. When people bought slices of ham in an old-fashioned retailer, they did not know the nature of the product unless they asked the retailer, whereas in the supermarket we can easily and readily see exactly what we are buying. Finally, packaging needs to make the product that we intend to buy attractive at the point of sale so that the consumer will be interested in buying it.

Within that, we ask packaging to minimise the amount of food waste. We have very low levels of food waste as a consequence of the very effective packaging our food is sold in. About 3% of our food is wasted. Some may say that that is 3% too much. Not only might that food otherwise have gone to those in need but, more importantly, the disposal of food waste presents real problems for the environment—if it goes into landfill, it unavoidably generates methane gas. Therefore, it is worth pointing out just how effective a tiny amount of packaging can be in preventing food waste. We waste some 3% of our food, but in economies such as Russia or India, levels of food waste are as high as 40%. Only 1.5 grams of plastic—a tiny amount—wrapped around a cucumber will keep that cucumber fresh for 14 days by preventing moisture loss. The item of packaging therefore performs an incredible task, preventing the need for the cucumber to be disposed of in landfill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South gave the example of Easter eggs as a product that might sometimes be thought of as over-packaged. That arises, however, because of how we want to give one another chocolate over the Easter period. If we wanted simply to give one another so many grams of chocolate, we would buy a slab of chocolate and hand it over. We do not do that. We choose to buy an Easter egg. That is the truth. How dreadful!

Mr Sheerman rose—

Mr Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman is making some good points about good packaging, but many of the people I represent are furious about bad packaging. What does he have to say about innovations in packaging such that we now have those coffee things for a Nespresso which cannot be recycled at all, or coffee cups that are totally unrecyclable—totally unnecessarily, because they could be recyclable, but no one knows what to do with them. What are his packaging friends going to do about that?
Mark Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman could start me off on coffee cups, but I will deal with them later in my remarks. We are talking about consumer choice, and we need an informed consumer. To go back to the Easter egg example, if we wanted only to give people a bit of nice chocolate, we would simply give them a chocolate bar. We do not do that; we choose to give them an Easter egg. In the same way, people choose to buy the Nespresso-type coffee because that is how they like their coffee. We need to find alternative delivery mechanisms that do not give rise to the same level of packaging waste.

David Mackintosh: Does my hon. Friend agree that other countries in Europe give Easter eggs in different ways? It is therefore incumbent not only on the consumer to want that to change, but on producers to look at different ways in which to market eggs.

Mark Pawsey: The packaging industry is doing that. It is highly innovative and the amount of material that goes into the average Easter egg pack has been reduced. The producers, which I will talk about later, is called light-weighting: using the least amount of material necessary to keep the products safe.

Frankly, from the packaging manufacturers’ point of view, because their material is relatively expensive, there is absolutely no point in over-packaging, and no point in creating too much or in making the plastic or board out of too thick a gauge—that would add cost unnecessarily. I acknowledge, however, that over-packaging exists. There are interesting pictures of internet delivery companies that have delivered something the size and shape of a ruler, but it has been wrapped, put in a box and put in another box before being delivered. There is some crazy over-packaging, but my point is that there is no incentive to over-package because of the cost of the material. Many of the internet delivery companies look hard at their policies to ensure that they do not over-package.

My favourite example of what, on the face of it, looks like over-packaging is orange segments in a plastic container on a supermarket shelf. I remember seeing a photograph of that with a little Post-it note stuck on to say, “Wouldn’t it be really nice if nature were able to make some kind of outer skin to make the plastic packaging unnecessary?” I thought that was witty and clever, and it made a point. Another interesting point about that product is that it might be targeted at a consumer without much manual dexterity who would find it difficult to unpeel an orange and for whom it might be much more convenient to buy the pieces of orange in a plastic container. If there were no demand, that product would not be there, but it is a good example of over-packaging.

We often talk about the resource that goes into packaging without thinking much about the resource that goes into manufacturing the product contained in the packaging, and which could therefore be more efficient. INCPEN itself drew attention to the fact that packaging accounts for only 10% of the average energy resource used for food products, although some items are less efficient. Meat, for example, which is probably the least efficient method of food manufacture, could have much better figures. Nevertheless, the packaging element as a proportion of food cost is relatively small.

I hope I have set out some ways in which the industry acknowledges the existing situation and is therefore innovating and effecting change. I will now move on to the content of e-petition No. 167596, which starts with this country’s recycling record, although this country actually has a very proud one. In 2000, just a little more than 10% of all household waste was recycled; by 2016 that figure had risen to 43.9%. It is certainly true that between 2015 and 2016 the recycling rate fell away slightly, but a bit of that was because we have done the easy stuff. We have picked the low-hanging fruit, such as Coke cans and plastic milk bottles, which are being recycled, and we now have to deal with much harder things. An example of a sector in which recovery and recycling are difficult is plastic film. When we buy our microwave meal, we have the moulded plastic container with a film on top. The film represents a relatively low proportion of the waste—about 10%—but it is not as easy to collect. The other problem with laminates, or plastic films, is that they are often contaminated with food. If we clean our waste before putting it out for recycling, it is relatively easy to clean the container—we can easily clean the food residue out of a container of, for example, lasagne, but it is difficult to get the food residue off the film. We will therefore probably find 10% of plastic material very difficult to recycle, although the e-petition assumes that we will manage to get to everything.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) mentioned paper cups. A multilaminate is difficult for the industry to recycle. It is made up of various levels of different materials—a paper cup is made up of an outer layer of board with a plastic lining on the inside. When we are recycling, we put paper in this bin and plastic in that bin. Where do we put the paper cup, which has a plastic lining on the inside? One of the challenges for the recycling industry is to separate those two materials before they can be recycled.

The industry takes seriously the low rate of recycling for paper cups. Therefore, in recent months the coffee companies and retailers, the cup manufacturers and the people who make the board have set up the Paper Cup Recovery and Recycling Group. They are doing very good work in bringing that together. In fact, as I am sure the Minister will be interested to hear, one of the pieces of advice I have given them is: “You need to get your house in order. If you don’t, and you don’t demonstrate that you can do more work to get more cups recycled, lots of people in Parliament will get on their high horses and make life difficult—you will be obliged to do it. So you have got a choice: either do it through voluntary agreement, or be told to do it.”

The producers have the responsibility for recycling—that is in legislation—but they are also happy to do it. To pick up on the point made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield, they accept that that is their responsibility.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): There is obviously a benefit to incentivisation. That used to happen with glass bottles, which people got 10p for returning. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the coffee companies that sell reusable cups in the hope that people will bring them back and fill them up should similarly incentivise the use of those cups by reducing what they charge? That might encourage people to change their mindset and not discard everything that they are given but retain and reuse things.
Mark Pawsey: In certain instances, that is the right thing to do. For example, where a coffee company serves coffee for consumption on the premises, a reusable cup has been properly disinfected and washed is entirely the right thing to use, but not many coffee companies are happy to serve their coffee in a cup that has not been cleaned properly. If someone takes a reusable cup around with them, how does the coffee company know that that cup has been cleaned properly? What happens if a consumer, having presented a dirty cup and been provided with coffee by a coffee supplier, falls ill because the cup had not been cleaned properly?

One of the great things about disposable packaging is that people use a unique, fresh product every time. It is the most hygienic way to serve coffee. I agree with the hon. Gentleman in respect of a restaurant environment, but I will not carry a cup around with me for takeaway coffee, and if I were to present a cup to a coffee supplier, I would want to be satisfied that it had been properly and thoroughly cleaned.

The e-petition refers to packaging that goes to landfill. We need to understand why goods collected by local authorities that were intended to be recycled sometimes find their way into landfill. That is in part to do with poor communication between local authorities and waste providers. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South referred to the variation between local authorities. As waste collection is a devolved matter, we leave it to local authorities to determine the right things to do in their area. As a Conservative, I am a great believer in devolving power down to the lowest available level. That engages people more effectively, but recycling rates vary as a consequence. In 2014-15, South Oxfordshire had a recycling rate of 67.3%, but the rate in Hammersmith and Fulham was 20.7%. That may reflect the different challenges in rural environments, where people are perhaps more likely to comply, and more gritty urban areas.

When we recycle plastic, it has to go through a sorting system, because there are various grades of plastic, and it then has to be cleaned and disinfected and put into granular form so it can be reused. One problem with the relatively low oil price is that virgin material has been less expensive than recycled material. What incentive has there been for manufacturers to use recycled material? As oil is traded in dollars, the recent fall in the value of the pound may mean that the economics change somewhat, but those economics exist.

Why would a manufacturer take the risk of using recycled material, which may contain contaminants, when virgin material is available at a lower price?

The petition also refers to packaging making its way into our waterways. My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), who is no longer in his place, is concerned about the marine environment. The question that we need to address is: how does that packaging get where it does? Litter is simply packaging that happens—usually after it has been used—to be in the wrong place. It should of course not be in the waterway, at the side of the road, on the footpath or on the football field. How does it get there? It gets there because of human behaviour—because as a mass of people, we do not do the right thing. I did some travelling last summer, I went to Japan, and I was astounded at how clean the city of Tokyo was, despite it having no bins. There is a culture in Japan that if someone consumes something in disposable packaging, they take that packaging home with them and put it in their household waste. This is a behavioural issue; clearly, we need to effect a change in our behaviour. That really starts at school with getting a message across to our young people.

Lots of innovative projects encourage people to reduce their litter. A social action organisation called Hubbub carried out a five-month experiment to reduce litter in Villiers Street here in London that included different types of bins. Hubbub wanted people to put drinks cartons and cans in the appropriate containers, and one of the innovative ways it got them to do that was by encouraging them to vote. It put two footballers’ names on the bins and asked, “Who’s the best footballer?” People put their rubbish in one bin or the other, thereby casting a vote for their favourite soccer player. We need more innovation like that. I know of a bin that has been used to encourage young children to put more litter in the bin. It is in the shape of an animal, it has an opening on the front and when packaging is put into its mouth, it burps. The children find that funny, so they are encouraged to use it. We must effect an attitude change. Notwithstanding what the petition says, it is not the packaging industry’s fault that packaging often ends up where it should not be. We can all agree that it ends up in the wrong place.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall mentioned the 5p levy on carrier bags. That has certainly reduced the number of carrier bags in circulation—of that there is no doubt—but Keep Scotland Beautiful recently conducted a survey and found there were more carrier bags littered on the streets than there were before the introduction of the 5p levy. Some people talk about a levy on coffee cups. I am not at all certain that that 5p levy has been particularly effective.

What are the solutions? The first is to ensure that we deal properly with packaging waste and make it easier for people to recycle. But recycling is a good thing only if it delivers a net gain. It concerns me that we often drive material around the country to recycling centres without sufficient regard for the environmental impact of those journeys. The hon. Member for Huddersfield referred to packaging as a resource. It can of course be a source of energy. Household waste is used to generate the heat that enables the cement company based in my constituency to manufacture cement. That strikes me as a much better use of the calorific value of packaging than sending it to landfill.

I have spoken about the challenges of using recyclable material, and I want to address what the petition says about compostable packaging—packaging made from material that might at some point in the future break down. Over the past 10 years, compostable packaging has been used in the food service sector by operators that believe they are doing the right thing, but compostable plastic—if I can use that term—looks exactly the same as PVC material, so how do people know which bin to put the compostable material in? If that material ends up getting into the plastic waste stream and being sent for recycling, it is effectively a contaminant. The reverse also applies: we do not want plastic to find its way into the compost stream. Clearly, there needs to be effective separation in the waste stream. Compostable material can work in co-located environments such as schools and colleges, or even festival sites, but ensuring that people put used products into the right container across the board is a real challenge.
If composting is to be the solution, we need to understand the process by which the compostable material breaks down. There are those who think that a compostable bag can simply be put on a compost heap or in the compostable waste stream and it will break down in days. That is not the case. It will hang around for some time. The time taken for it to break down depends on the composition of the material and the temperature of the composter in which it is put. Some litter groups are concerned that the attitude of, “This product is compostable and will break down,” will lead to even more litter being thrown from the car window, because of users’ belief that it does not matter as it will break down and return harmlessly to nature. It does not.

The petition refers to “big business” but, as I have said, both small and large packaging companies respond to consumers’ needs and what consumers want. If we want change, we need to get the message across to them. The call for action in the petition is to “ban all non-sustainable packaging” I do not know what the authors have in mind by that, or how it would be banned. If we do not understand the process by which the compostable material breaks down, we cannot do that. I have already given us the other side of the coin, and was very positive about why we have packaging.

The petition calls for a ban on the use of all non-recyclable and non-compostable packaging, but the Government, as shown by their response, clearly do not share that view and argue that it is ultimately for businesses to decide what packaging materials to use. My party takes a different view from the Government’s. We realise that the problem is complex, but believe that the Government could make more direct interventions. When the last Labour Government were in power, recycling rates quadrupled. It is worrying that the latest figures show that, across the UK, household recycling rates fell from 44.9% in 2014 to 44.3% in 2015.

As waste policy is a devolved issue, perhaps the Government could look for lessons from the Labour Administration in Wales, which is the only part of the UK to have met the EU’s 50% recycling target. In 2010, the Welsh Government committed to the principles of a circular economy in their “Towards zero waste” strategy. Since then, recycling rates in Wales have increased dramatically from 44% to almost 56%.

Regulations introduced in 2007 by the Labour Government placed a legal obligation on UK businesses to increase the amount of packaging waste that is recycled and reduce the amount that goes to landfill, but last year those regulations were substantially watered down, as the Government claimed that there was a need to reduce regulatory burdens on producer businesses. The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 2007 and the Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations 2003 have been important in ensuring that where businesses make or use packaging, a proportion of it can be recycled and the amount of packaging is not excessive for keeping products safe, hygienic and acceptable to the customer—something that the hon. Member for Rugby spoke about eloquently.

The regulations apply whether items are packaged in the UK or abroad, but there are plenty of examples, particularly in this age of online shopping, where it is clear that they are not adhered to. I am not a great one for shopping online, but in my limited experience of doing so, as well as shopping in stores, I have noticed how much excessive packaging there seems to be, which leads me to agree with Dr Colin Church of the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management, who, in recent comments on the fall in recycling figures, pointed out that perhaps the packaging recovery note compliance scheme is in need of revision.

Experts and organisations agree that the biggest problem discouraging the public from recycling is uncertainty and confusion about what can and cannot be recycled. Indeed, perhaps that is one of the reasons for the popularity of the petition, even if the public do not think its ultimate aim can be achieved. That confusion has already been discussed in the debate. I hope that different local authorities’ inconsistent approaches to what can be recycled will be addressed to some degree through the work done by WRAP, recyclers, waste management companies and local authorities on developing national recycling guidelines. Those were published last autumn. However, as with the plastics industry recycling action plan, which was launched in 2015 with the aim of co-ordinating action across the supply chain to improve recycling rates, it relies on a voluntary approach. It is not clear whether those initiatives will deliver the necessary improvements within the timescales required under the regulations. WRAP will keep the guidelines under review, but it would be helpful if the Minister commented on the progress of those initiatives.
Although 80% of a product’s environmental impact is determined by decisions made at the design stage, there is little incentive for businesses to take environmental issues into account at that stage. That must change and a number of proactive steps could be taken to encourage businesses to make more efficient use of resources in designing new products. For example, to help make eco-friendly products more appealing, the Government could set variable rates of VAT based on recycled content.

Much more action is surely needed if the Government and EU target to increase the rate of plastic packaging recycling to 57% by the end of 2017 is to be considered realistic. As has been mentioned, a new global action plan announced by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation was launched at the World Economic Forum last week. It has been endorsed by industry leaders and aims to increase the global reusing and recycling of plastic packaging from 14% today to 70%. That and other initiatives are a welcome step forward. Given the involvement of companies such as Coca-Cola, Unilever, Mars and the People’s Postcode Lottery, I sincerely hope that the work done under the global plan will have a great influence in the UK.

The impact of Brexit on much of the work of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is still not clear. The most immediate questions relate to the EU’s circular economy package, which will include updates to key directives on waste disposal and packaging. Some of the details of those changes are still to be negotiated, and once finalised, will need to be implemented at national level. While the Government have said that existing EU law will be carried over by the great repeal Bill, it is not clear what will happen to EU laws that have been passed but not yet implemented in UK law at the time of our leaving. Will the Minister give a specific answer on whether the circular economy package will be implemented before we leave the EU? Will she tell us how we will enforce those laws outside the current EU framework? Will she also say what additional plans the Government have beyond the circular economy package to bring the UK closer to those ambitious recycling targets?

Embracing the circular economy is something we should all agree on. We need to see more action from Ministers if they are genuine about recycling across the UK and if they take seriously the views of the people of the UK, as expressed in the petition.

5.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It has been a very interesting debate on the petition, which was created by Teja Hudson and secured more than 74,000 signatures. It was chosen for debate by the Petitions Committee, and was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) with his usual aplomb. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) extensively shared his professional experience, which has helped to inform the debate.

Packaging is critical in allowing the sale and distribution of products in a safe, secure and hygienic manner. It allows us to eat a huge range of fresh food at any time of year and to extend the shelf life of products. As we have already heard, a cucumber can now remain edible for 14 days thanks to plastic wrapping. Packaging also become key to supporting our lifestyles, in which we enjoy products in a convenient, consumer-friendly and appropriately portioned format. It allows retailers to provide us with a choice of products, and allows us to make choices about what products are right for us based on the information on the packet, through labelling and similar.

As a result of significant change in our lifestyles, and to both our purchasing and consumption preferences, the amount and types of packaging has increased dramatically in modern times, alongside the need for responsible disposal. Technically, most packaging is recyclable. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby pointed out, the challenges are more evident for certain products than for others. Nevertheless, the essay question becomes, “Why is it that our recycling rates are not sky high?”

Businesses are encouraged to reduce waste in the first place by using appropriately sized packaging. Our regulations require businesses to ensure that packaging does not exceed what is needed to ensure that products are safe, hygienic and acceptable for both the packed product and the consumer. Those regulations apply to those responsible for the packing or filling of products into packaging, and to those importing packed or filled packaging into the UK from elsewhere.

Christmas presents and Easter eggs have been discussed extensively. While some of the packaging for Easter eggs is clearly for branding purposes, a considerable amount is functional. A hollow chocolate egg is somewhat fragile, and the packaging allows for a product to be presented to the consumer intact. Of course, many brands of egg are available, but the challenges of packaging, for example, a Dairy Milk egg are quite different from the challenges of packaging a Creme Egg, which is solid and has substance inside.

Our regulations already place a legal obligation on UK businesses that make or use packaging to ensure that a proportion of the packaging they place on the market is recovered and recycled. Each activity throughout the packaging supply chain, from the original producer to the packager to the retailers, carries a different proportion of the responsibility to reflect the potential impact that a producer may have. For example, sellers of goods have 48% of the responsibility for recycling packaging, with packers or fillers having 37%. Those regulations create an incentive for companies to use less packaging, and to ensure that their packaging can be recycled at the end of its life, because it reduces their costs of complying with the regulations. In 2014, almost £20 million of revenue from the obligations paid by businesses was used specifically to help plastics recycling. Our targets for plastic packaging recycling are set to increase by 2020, which should provide a further incentive.

Why is our recycling rate not sky high? Consumers need to be able to dispose of waste responsibly, and many do so at home, while on the move and while at work. As we have heard, plastics come in all shapes, sizes and formats. While all councils are required to offer recycling of plastic bottles, several councils inform us that it is not economically worth while for them to collect and recycle some formats, such as yoghurt pots or ready meal trays. They also inform us that local reprocessing infrastructure may be limited; that the type of reprocessing needed could create different environmental impacts that outweigh the resource efficiency benefits;
and that there may be a lack of end markets for some types of recycled materials. There is also the problem of contamination, which can make the contents of an entire recycling bin unfit for recycling.

Mark Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend agree that fluctuations in the exchange rate may now provide additional incentives for manufacturers to use recycled material, as it will be proportionately less expensive?

Dr Coffey: I agree with my hon. Friend. However, we both worked in industry for some time, and the idea that a strategy could be changed based on temporary changes in exchange rates is unlikely, owing to the required amount of capital investment. Nevertheless, if there is an opportunity appropriately to design products so that it does not matter whether virgin or recycled materials are used, I am sure companies will take advantage of those short-term measures to do so.

A great deal of work is being done by some local authorities to improve their recycling facilities and collection, and I congratulate those that are doing well, but I challenge the view that recycling in densely packed urban areas is difficult, or that local authorities cannot do more to improve recycling rates. We know that they can, and that many are delivering high levels of recycling and are actively exploring what can be done to extend services, even in challenging circumstances. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby referred to energy from waste. I caution against some of what he said. In environmental terms, it is generally better to bury plastic than to burn it. The opposite is true of food—it is better to burn it than bury it. We need to be careful about what incentives we push.

I will try to come to some of the shadow Minister’s questions—if I do not cover them in my speech, I will ensure I refer to them before the end. I reassure her and my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby referred to energy from waste. I caution against some of what he said. In environmental terms, it is generally better to bury plastic than to burn it. The opposite is true of food—it is better to burn it than bury it. We need to be careful about what incentives we push.

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must be properly disposed of if the benefits of such technologies are to be fully realised. If biodegradable packaging is put in the domestic waste bin, it is likely to end up in landfill and break down to release methane, which is obviously not good from a carbon emissions point of view. If biodegradable packaging is mistakenly recycled with other plastics, it has the potential to damage the quality and integrity of the new products made from the recycled plastic—for example, damp-proof courses in houses.

However, biodegradable or compostable plastic that degrades fully without causing harm in the natural environment would clearly be desirable. My colleagues at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy are currently seeking input to help to shape a UK bioeconomy strategy, including how standards for new materials, such as bioplastics, could be used to help promote growth and innovation in the bioeconomy.

Reference has been made to litter, which is part of the petition’s message, by speakers today. The Government are developing a litter strategy for which my noble friend Lord Gardiner is the responsible Minister. As was indicated in the House last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is personally interested in the issue of marine litter, and I am sure there will be opportunities during the development of the strategy to address such matters.

Another question raised today was the EU and environmental law. I assure the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) that our intention is to bring existing EU law into UK law on the day we leave the European Union.

On the circular economy package, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister laid out several times, while we are members of the European Union we will negotiate in good faith; I am approaching the negotiations on the eventual outcome for the circular economy in a way consistent with that. On the timing, it is likely that we will still be in the European Union, which will mean that we are required by directive to introduce it into law, but we are approaching the matter in good faith while negotiating quite hard on behalf of the United Kingdom and what we think is achievable and realistic. First, we must agree a definition of “recycling”. There are many different views.

On additional plans for recycling targets, I have laid out some of the work by WRAP, but I am conscious that, as I visit more and more councils and discuss air quality regularly, another issue is their approach to achieving their recycling targets.

The hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) referred to the coffee cup incentive. Several retailers offer an incentive for people to use reusable cups. I must be careful not to endorse one company’s products, but in my constituency a company, Frugalpac, which I have visited in my capacity as an MP, does well and there may be other sources of coffee cups for retailers. I am pleased that Frugalpac seems to have created technology to make recycling easier.

There are regulations on producer responsibility. We will be looking at that in future.

We have referred to the circular economy negotiations. The Government are absolutely committed to hit the 50% recycling target. When we leave the European Union, I genuinely believe that what the hon. Member for North Tyneside refers to as the circular economy and we call resource efficiency could be a genuinely competitive advantage for UK plc. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby has referred to that. Some companies are already showing a lead. The best companies are achieving these things because it is good for the company, good for consumers and good for the environment.

We have seen a tremendous transition over the past decade from a throwaway mindset to one that focuses on extracting the value from resources more than ever before, but we must continue with this trend, finding new and innovative ways to extract even more value from our resource assets and protect the quality of our environment. Companies, consumers and the environment will benefit. That is the triple crown for which we all strive.

5.38 pm

David Mackintosh: Thank you, Mr Bone. I will be brief. I thank you for chairing this debate and the 75,000 people who signed the petition. We have had a passionate debate, not least because of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman). He is no longer in his place, but he is a passionate supporter of trying to change things.

We had knowledgeable input from my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), who is chair of the all-party group on packaging manufacturing. Although we disagreed on Easter eggs, I was pleased to hear from him—not least about the variation of rates of recycling among local authorities.

The hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) touched on the reuse of coffee cups, which is a valid discussion. I am grateful for the input from the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon), who talked about recycling rates in Wales particularly. I am grateful to the Minister for outlining her approach and continued commitment to developing this theme and the Government’s approach to the litter strategy. She outlined her approach to local authorities and their recycling rates, and even managed to mention George Clooney.

I am pleased that we have debated this issue today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered e-petition 167596 relating to the banning of non-recyclable and non-compostable packaging.

5.39 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall
Tuesday 24 January 2017

M R G E O R G E H O W A R T H i n t h e C h a i r

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Midlands Engine

9.30 am

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Midlands Engine.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this debate.

Some 105 Members represent the midlands region. We may not have all of them here this morning, but we are represented by quality if not quantity. The midlands is a major contributor to our national economy. It generates 13% of the UK’s gross value added and has enormous potential to be at the forefront of economic growth. The midlands engine initiative is therefore extremely welcome and necessary to develop a long-term strategy that works for business, the region and its people.

As I am sure we all know, the midlands is the biggest economic region in the UK outside London. It has a £210 billion economy and employs 4.6 million people. If we adopt the right approach, it will be well placed to build significantly on that, and that is what I hope to discuss this morning.

We have a rich industrial heritage going back to the industrial revolution; our constituencies are linked by a comprehensive canal structure that dates from the beginning of that time. Today's economy is much more diverse, but our sense of regional identity remains strong and manufacturing continues to be an essential and vibrant sector. It is right for the midlands engine to pay tribute to that history and to use it as a foundation for the prosperity and growth to come.

In formulating the strategy, the first consideration is the extent to which powers should be devolved from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to the midlands engine, our local enterprise partnerships, our local authorities and the West Midlands combined authority, strike a balance between empowering the region and maintaining sufficient oversight of returns on investment.

It is good to see the Minister, who represents a Warwickshire seat, in his place. As I have told him, we could devote time to unitary authorities as part of this discussion, but we will save that debate for another day. Perhaps he will put a date in his diary.

The midlands is already an attractive proposition for business, but to improve the situation further more investment in infrastructure is absolutely essential.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate; he is a strong champion for our region as well as for his constituency. On infrastructure, I wonder whether he welcomes the tone of our Prime Minister towards the midlands engine. Although the announcement on infrastructure yesterday was largely to do with northern areas, there is a strategy paper on the way—and, crucially, LEP allocations to go with it.

Chris White: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I hope we will see over the coming weeks a more tangible effort and energy going into the midlands region, with local enterprise partnerships having the necessary funding to do what we require them to do.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, and I congratulate him on it. The point about infrastructure spending is really important because there is a massive disparity between the amount of spending in the midlands and that in other parts of the country. Transport funding per capita in the west midlands is less than half that of Scotland and 40% of the level in London. In the midlands as a whole, which has 10 million people, we got a mere £1.72 billion spent on transport compared with London, whose population is smaller—it had £3.87 billion. Over a decade, £15 billion less has been spent on transport in the midlands than in other parts of the country.

Chris White: I get the hon. Gentleman’s point. I am sure the Minister is listening to see how we can rebalance our regions to make sure essential investment will be forthcoming.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Does my hon. Friend believe that the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) should include in his figures all the investment that is going into HS2 in the midlands, particularly in Birmingham?

Chris White: I was coming on to HS2, which I have religiously voted against at every single opportunity. However, even I am beginning to see that it may become a reality. If it does, we must make sure that we take the benefits that HS2 brings, whatever they may be.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman, like me, is obviously opposed to HS2. The only area of the midlands to benefit will probably be Birmingham and the surrounding area, but Coventry and Warwickshire, where he has a seat, will not necessarily benefit.

More importantly, whatever the negotiations in relation to Brexit are, we need the Minister to reassure us that regional aid will be replaced with another form of aid for the midlands. We do not want to lose out. When I was leader of Coventry City Council, we did not get regional aid; companies such as Nissan went to Sunderland instead, because that area got regional aid. That is a very important point.

Chris White: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He says, perhaps unkindly, that Birmingham might be the only place that benefits from HS2, but there has been a suggestion that only London will benefit. He is tempting me into a debate that is perhaps for another day.

Digital infrastructure is also part of our connectivity and a vital component today. That will increasingly be the case in the interests of the local economy. Each region has its own specialisms and needs, which means
that it is necessary to make tailored decisions that will impact positively on each region. Midlands Connect has an important role in this, representing the transport partnership of the Midlands engine with 28 local authorities, Network Rail, Highways England, Government and the business community working together. In addition, developing a skills base to match the demands of an ever-evolving business world is imperative. As such, aligning skills with regional business can be instrumental in boosting our economic growth.

The Government’s industrial strategy, which I was delighted to see launched yesterday through a statement in the House, is a policy I have spoken on at length before. I see the Midlands engine as an important part of the broad approach. As the strategy develops, regional empowerment must be at its core so that the constituent parts of the UK reach their potential and the whole nation benefits.

As with the industrial strategy, the Midlands engine must be underpinned by a focus on individuals and communities feeling a part of the policy. If each community understands how relevant the strategy is, that strategy will seem much closer to individual citizens than something such as a long-term economic plan. Individuals and communities can better understand the role that they can play in an industrial strategy.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. He will be pleased that I am steering clear of HS2; my thoughts are broadly in line with his, if not a little stronger.

One of the key industries for my constituents is the motor industry. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to support businesses that choose to locate themselves in north Warwickshire, such as Plastic Omnium, Sertec and the smaller businesses that play such a vital part in the supply chain and the local economy?

Chris White: I worked for MG Rover and I know Plastic Omnium and its role in the supply chain. We are very proud to be home to Jaguar Land Rover in Warwickshire, and investing in the supply chain is just as important as investing in and supporting Jaguar Land Rover.

“The Midlands Engine for Growth: prospectus”, which was produced in 2015, saw 11 local enterprise partnerships join together to produce a vision for the region. I was particularly heartened to see manufacturing and engineering highlighted as the cornerstone of future success. As the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on manufacturing, I recognise how important it is to incentivise UK-based production, whether through new investment or reshoring.

Advanced manufacturing is a notable aspect of the Midlands economy and can propel our competitiveness globally. As the prospectus identifies, advanced manufacturing is the bedrock of the region, employing more than 600,000 people and accounting for just less than 20% of the UK’s manufacturing output. It was good to visit Jaguar Land Rover with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on Friday, to see some of the technologies taking place there that will lead not only the region but the country, on a global level.

I welcome the Government’s support for the Catapult network. The high-value manufacturing Catapult has generated £15 of benefit to the economy for every £1 of funding. It cannot be said enough that research and development is key to our future success; it acts like a magnet for business and is the core of business and manufacturing. To lose our R and D facilities would be to endanger our manufacturing output, which is just beginning to recover. Other projects include the Energy Research Accelerator, where six world-class universities are working together with the support of £180 million of investment, as well as the energy systems Catapult, which is located in Birmingham.

Energy storage is an issue for the future and the Midlands can be a driving force in developing those technologies. If we are serious about electric cars, which are the cars of the future, we need the batteries to power those cars. To be able to produce those batteries where the cars are manufactured—in Warwickshire, in the Midlands, at Jaguar Land Rover—we need the power supplies to be able to make that happen.

Mr Mitchell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. He is making a very good speech. Would he agree that apprenticeships, which have been championed by the Government, have had a real effect on the Midlands region? In particular, they have stopped our region from being at the bottom of the employment league table in Britain and have significantly increased the number of new businesses that are starting and growing in the west Midlands.

Chris White: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. Apprenticeships are very much part of our future. I was also very fortunate to visit Warwickshire College with the Minister for Apprenticeships on Thursday. It was great to see how those young people are taking a totally different path for their future—one becoming more recognised for the skills that it will deliver—and to see them designing clays for cars and getting right into the process. Any encouragement we can give to make sure that business, schools and colleges are working together to increase the number and deliver on the 3 million apprenticeships that we need by 2020 can only be beneficial to our regional and national economy.

We need to have a thriving environment for innovation and tech. In my constituency, that includes the creative industries—the video games sector cluster is rapidly becoming the second or third-biggest cluster outside London. We need to create a framework in which such sectors can thrive, providing a flow of talent into the industry.

Developing a local identity on a regional level can be a catalyst for success. We have a proud tradition of manufacturing that we must build on, but other sectors can come to the fore and boost the region’s international prospects—in particular the creative and digital industries. I hope that our strong academic base can continue to grow. The Midlands is home to 25 universities and 50 further education colleges. Closing the skills gap across a variety of sectors is an integral part of the Midlands engine and poses one of the greatest challenges ahead. Technological advances are shifting the needs of industry and we need to embrace the opportunities ahead, such as in Industry 4.0, and pinpoint areas that we need to strengthen, such as encouraging children to
study science, technology, engineering and maths subjects. I note that the Midlands Engine prospectus highlighted proposals to create a network of regional science parks. I fully support efforts to push the Midlands to the forefront of academic research in the UK, complementing our advanced manufacturing and technical skills base.

On a slightly negative point, productivity is a key challenge for the Midlands—it is 10% lower than the national average. Improving infrastructure, as well as continued investment in science and research, could have a profound effect on reversing that figure.

In the autumn statement, the Chancellor announced that a Midlands Engine strategy was to be published, and I understand that more details will be provided in the coming weeks. Yesterday’s industrial strategy Green Paper pointed to places making their own unique contribution to driving national economic growth. Much has been made of the northern powerhouse and the regeneration of the north, which is an important goal, but I hope that the Midlands engine can develop in parallel, working with other regions wherever prudent. We must continue to attract foreign investment, which will naturally happen as we strengthen our network of business, research and education.

Julian Knight: Part of attracting foreign investment is connectivity through Birmingham Airport. As my hon. Friend probably well aware, Birmingham Airport is, frankly, a couple of decades behind Manchester in many aspects at the moment, although it does have spare capacity. Would he support my call, and that of the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), to devolve air passenger duty so that Birmingham Airport can compete on a level playing field as devolution moves forward?

Ian Austin indicated assent.

Chris White: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, which got a “Hear, hear!” from the other side of the Chamber. I suggest that those sorts of powers could be devolved; at the same time, if my hon. Friend could ask Birmingham Airport not to increase the number of flights over my constituency, that would reduce my postbag.

Ian Austin: The important thing about Birmingham Airport, with its 12 million passengers last year, is that it contributes £1 billion a year to the regional economy. With HS2 on the way, expanding capacity at Birmingham would enable it to play a much bigger role as a global hub, increasing the region’s connectivity and enabling travellers and businesses to come to the Midlands and local businesses to export much more easily.

Chris White: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about the connectivity of our transport infrastructure. The airport issue, which could be contentious, deserves time for its own debate. Debates on the Midlands engine and everything that will underpin that engine need to happen again and again. Just to discuss the issue this morning and then close the door would not serve any purpose.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): My hon. Friend has been talking about Birmingham Airport. I would remind everybody that there are two airports in the Midlands—there is East Midlands Airport as well. We need to make sure that there is connectivity across the whole of the Midlands, not just the west Midlands.

Chris White: That is a salutary reminder that the Midlands are made up of both the west and east, and I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Chris White: I will, although I can imagine what the hon. Lady is going to say.

Lilian Greenwood: I just wish to follow up on the point made by the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup). East Midlands Airport is, of course, different from Birmingham Airport in that it is the second-largest freight airport in the country, which is hugely important for serving businesses across the whole region. Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that point?

Chris White: I thank the hon. Lady for making it simple for me by asking me to acknowledge the point. I most certainly do.

As with the industrial strategy, it is important to provide measures to understand how the Midlands engine initiative is succeeding. For example, to what extent do we need to boost foreign direct investment? How many apprenticeships are needed in the region? What is the required level of financial support for science and research? An office for industrial strategy could and should be created and held accountable for the progress made, including our region’s economic success.

The Green Paper sets out 10 pillars to boost the nation’s economy, from business growth and investment in infrastructure to clean energy and world-class research. The Midlands engine touches on all those pillars and will benefit from the strategy. In turn, the region can play an instrumental role in our nation’s success.

9.50 am

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) on securing the debate. I am sure the Minister will enjoy the opportunity to talk about the Government’s industrial strategy, but I am afraid that most attention right now is probably focused on what is happening on the other side of Parliament Square. I will return to the significance of our relationship with the European Union later.

Outside this place, many people still ask what the Midlands engine is. The answer is simple: we are the Midlands engine—we being the many right hon. and hon. Members who stand up for their Midlands constituencies in this place, and the entrepreneurs, innovators and grafters back at home. All of us are working harder than ever, together, to build our collective identity; to develop our competitive offer; to promote the Midlands to the world; and to attract people to come to us to invest, to study, to work and to live. The Midlands engine is not just a brand, an organisation or a place. It is all of us working together to show that when the Midlands succeeds, Britain succeeds.
The assets of the midlands engine will be familiar to everyone, not only up and down the country but throughout the world—Range Rover, Rolls-Royce, JCB, Toyota and Boots are a few of the names that have made the midlands famous. What is great about all those assets is that their industrial evolution is constant as they reinvent themselves and their products to meet the demands of our ever-changing world.

No clearer evidence for midlands resilience and ability for reinvention exists than in my constituency. The site where thousands were once employed to manufacture Raleigh bicycles is now the University of Nottingham’s innovation park, where businesses and researchers work together on everything from satellite navigation, aerospace and sustainable energy technologies, to drive-chain engineering and sustainable chemistry. The city centre site where ibuprofen was discovered by Dr Stewart Adams is now one of the UK’s largest bioscience incubators, commercialising cutting-edge research. When I came through Nottingham yesterday, I saw that the brand-new BioCity Discovery Building is almost up and finished, showing how the sector is developing and growing.

None of that is new. As the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington said, the midlands has been an engine for growth for centuries, and will be for centuries to come. The strong midlands DNA is rooted in our industrial heritage, which is reflected in our being the advanced manufacturing heartland of the nation, responsible for almost a quarter of the UK’s total manufacturing capability.

Two and a half centuries ago, new canals connected England’s major rivers, opening up the interior for the movement of raw materials and trade of finished goods. High Speed 2 can have that same transformative impact, with the potential to unlock huge economic benefits for the midlands and for the UK as a whole. To me, HS2 is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us to transform Britain’s infrastructure, linking the cities of the midlands and the north with fast, frequent and reliable services, connecting people and places, businesses and workers, markets and customers, driving up growth and productivity, and expanding the life chances of more than 11 million people in the midlands engine region. HS2 is not about the much mocked 20 minutes off the journey time to London—although who would not want to have even better connections to one of the world’s mega-cities? It is about improved capacity and incredible connectivity within the midlands region.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. HS2 is not about speed; every day 4,000 people stand on trains going into and out of Birmingham.

Lilian Greenwood: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Phase 1 of HS2 in particular is about vitally needed extra capacity, although for phase 2 connectivity and journey-time savings are important. Cutting the journey time between Nottingham and Birmingham from a dawdling 1 hour and 13 minutes to only 36 minutes will make a real difference to the choices available to workers, businesses and investors. We should not downplay that.

HS2 can and must act as a spur to regeneration and job creation. The West Midlands combined authority’s growth strategy aims to add £14 billion to the economy and to create and support 100,000 jobs. The Curzon investment plan is designed to regenerate that area around the planned HS2 station. In the east midlands, councils, local enterprise partnerships and the East Midlands chamber of commerce are working together to develop ambitious but deliverable proposals for maximising the economic potential of a new HS2 and classic-rail hub station at Toton, not only for that immediate area, important though that is, but for the whole region.

The benefits of HS2 for the region will be fully realised only if they come alongside other transport improvements. I recognise the danger of my sounding like a broken record, but Conservative Cabinet Ministers came to the east midlands before the most recent elections promising to deliver our region’s top transport priority—the electrification of the midland main line—only then to pause it, unpausing it, delay it by four years and now give the impression of wanting to scrap it altogether. That is not good enough. The midlands deserves 21st century infrastructure, and the Government must deliver on the promises they made to our region if we are to be ready for the global challenges ahead. I am sure the Minister understands the importance of the midland main line electrification to our region, so I hope he will speak to his Department for Transport colleagues and ask them to think again.

I remain optimistic about what the midlands has to offer and its ability to seize the coming opportunities. However, I cannot fail to sound a note of caution about the UK’s future relationship with the EU and the profound risks that that poses to the midlands engine. The midlands is the manufacturing heart of the UK, so the potential loss of tariff-free access to the single market and the potential imposition of customs controls would surely have a chilling effect on those businesses I mentioned. We know that Toyota is considering how it can survive the potential imposition of customs controls would surely have a chilling effect on those businesses I mentioned. We know that Toyota is considering how it can survive.

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. While we are on the subject, it might be of benefit to those present to know that the Supreme Court has ruled that an Act of Parliament will be necessary to trigger article 50. Whether that changes anything that the hon. Lady wishes to say, I do not know.

Lilian Greenwood: Thank you for that update, Mr Howarth, which I am sure is welcome to everyone who wants to both participate in this debate and follow what is happening outside.

I will not just take the Government to task on their approach to Brexit negotiations—we now know that we will have the opportunity to do that through legislation—but raise concerns about cuts to school funding. Those are hitting my constituency and will make it harder for us to close the skills gap, which is important to the success of the midlands engine.
Whatever the Government throw at us, we will find a way around or over it. Midlanders always do. They are very resourceful, and necessity was ever the mother of invention. When they are done working their way over and through all the obstacles, midlanders can enjoy everything else that our region has to offer, whether that is sport; art or literature; caves, canals or castles; theatre or music; or food or drink. My city of Nottingham alone, which is a city of literature and football—although our ice hockey team needs to expand its trophy cabinet at the moment—has everything from a two-star Michelin restaurant under a flyover to a castle that is not a castle but has been the rebellious heart of the country for centuries. That is just one corner of the midlands engine.

No wonder we are what makes the country go.

10.1 am

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your stewardship, Mr Howarth. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) on securing this important debate.

As I come from Derby North, the success of the midlands engine is incredibly important to me. In 2015, the then Chancellor launched his vision for the midlands engine—this Government’s 15-year vision for our region to create an engine for growth in the United Kingdom. Everyone who attended that launch was excited by that plan’s potential benefits for the region: the creation of hundreds of thousands more jobs, the opening up of more trade routes around the globe, and overall improvements to the quality of life in the midlands. The plan envisages boosting our regional economy by £34 billion. We can reach that target, but to do so, we must come together and all sectors—public and private—must co-operate.

The midlands engine can be a vehicle to deliver policy to support the vision that we develop for a successful United Kingdom outside the EU. We have a strong offering in the midlands, which can deliver growth that is both balanced—by sector, geography and trade—and sustainable, in that it creates skilled, highly productive roles backed by private sector investment.

What are the opportunities? The midlands engine must focus on elements that give us competitive advantage, central to which is our expertise in key sectors, especially advanced manufacturing. We have a high density of original equipment manufacturers. In and around my constituency alone, we have Toyota, Rolls-Royce and Bombardier, and well-established supply chains that serve them all. Greater competitiveness in those supply chains will boost jobs and attract inward investment, and that is a key area where the policy we set here can have a real impact.

Our location has fantastic connectivity to the north and south. If we capitalise on that, we can be as good at moving things as we are at making them. My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) and the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) mentioned East Midlands Airport, which is the UK’s largest pure freight airport. Although east-west connectivity requires improvement, we hope that Midlands Connect’s work to inform road and rail infrastructure spending will start to address that. Affordable land is available for development, and our workforce has a heritage in manufacturing. In recent months, we have also seen companies looking to relocate from the EU to the midlands to be closer to their customers.

Importantly, our starting position is strong. According to East Midlands Chamber’s quarterly economic survey, east midlands businesses ended 2016 performing stronger than they had for six quarters, and businesses are already reporting revised investment plans and new overseas strategies to capitalise on forthcoming opportunities. However, with opportunities come challenges. We must work collectively to sell the midlands as one region, not continue to divide ourselves as representatives of the east or west. We need to ensure that the strengths and attributes of the whole midlands are brought to bear. The strategy also needs to have the private sector at its heart, shaping and informing activity.

Under this Government, the midlands has started to grow faster than the UK average outside London, and that trend must continue. Opening up the midlands to overseas investment, encouraging our small and medium-sized enterprises to export and showcasing the fantastic manufacturing and engineering firms that help drive our economy overseas are all steps we can support to make the vision of the midlands engine a reality, and to open the region to previously untouched markets.

Crucially, we must have an environment underpinning the midlands engine in which local people are educated and trained in skills that match needs.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): As a west midlander, I completely agree with my hon. Friend that we should speak with one voice as one region. In that way we will do better. On skills, the Government’s agenda to deliver 3 million apprenticeships is to be commended. That is probably one of the biggest benefits for our region and manufacturing.

Amanda Solloway: Absolutely. I was going to come to apprenticeships, which are significant in Derby North. We really need to look at having training and skills that match local employers’ needs. Our local enterprise partnerships outlined that as a key theme when they were consulted by the Government about plans for the engine. During my time as an MP, I have regularly heard concerns that more needs to be done to tailor skills to play to local strengths and boost our productivity. Brilliant work is being done in Derby to try to tackle that problem. For example, in response to the needs of businesses such as Rolls-Royce and Bombardier, the university in the city recently opened a new science, technology, engineering and maths building. Apprenticeship providers such as 3aaa are building initiatives to link employers, schools and apprenticeship providers to tailor skills. More needs to be done to support such initiatives if the midlands engine is to live up to its full potential.

Sir John Peace, chair of the midlands engine, said yesterday that “playing to our strengths and enabling new sectors…will deliver the high wage, high skill economy of the future.” We know what our strengths are in the midlands. We now need to ensure that they reach their full potential.

10.7 am

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I welcome this debate on the midlands engine, which my hon.
Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) secured. It is also a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), who is a fellow east midlands MP.

This year, among other special dates, I am celebrating 30 years of living in the midlands. When I first moved there, I thought I would move on and not stay, but the midlands has offered me so much, both socially and from a work point of view, that I have stayed. I moved from Yorkshire as a result of a promotion. People tend to move further south as they move on in their careers, but the midlands has so much to offer, as we have heard from both west midlands and east midlands MPs, that more people need to hear about what we have in the midlands, and that is what we are doing today.

Mr Mitchell: May I confirm, as everyone will agree, that in moving from Yorkshire to the midlands my hon. Friend has been promoted?

Maggie Throup: I thank my right hon. Friend for that. I do not want to offend anyone from Yorkshire who still lives there, but I am proud to say that I live in the midlands and represent a midlands seat. It is really important that we bang the drums and fight our corner to ensure that we get everything that we need to make the midlands a true engine for growth.

Just yesterday, the Green Paper on our new modern industrial strategy was published. Although I welcome that and its focus on skills and training, it would be remiss of me, as the representative of Erewash, not to stand up for traditional industries as well as new technologies. So many traditional industries are taking on board new technologies, and it is important that we combine those. I am proud to represent a constituency that still makes. Despite being called Nottingham lace, it is made in Ilkeston in Derbyshire—work that one out. It is still made on the traditional looms in historic mill buildings.

I am also proud to represent a constituency that proudly proclaims to those arriving at Long Eaton station that it is a UK centre of excellence for upholstery manufacture. We export sofas and chairs, and the upholstery is sold in some of the UK’s top stores; it can also be bought in some cheaper stores. Many seats that people sit on at home or in friends’ houses, and in hotels and public buildings, are made in Long Eaton. We must never forget that there are many traditional businesses that boost midlands growth.

Erewash is a place that provides a great example of how traditional and modern industry meet. Anyone driving through the constituency is likely to see storage yards full of concrete pipes and drains. Perhaps that seems strange, but I was delighted when a few weeks ago I officially opened a new “magic manhole” plant at Stanton Bonna, which will help to speed things up, provide consistent quality, and decrease waste. Interestingly, when the pipes leave my constituency we shall probably never see them again, because they go underground. Whether they are for new housing, industrial sites, Crossrail or—fingers crossed—HS2, those reinforced concrete pipes made in Erewash will form a critical part of construction in years to come.

As I have explained, Erewash already plays its part in the midlands engine; but I know it can go further. That is why I welcome the Government’s commitment to the area and their ambition to make the midlands a true engine for growth. We have heard about the west midlands, but I want to think about the east midlands. The commitment includes £250 million of investment funds providing access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises. My constituency has many SMEs rather than huge employers, so that is important for Erewash. There is £60 million for the energy research accelerator, and some of it is going to the University of Nottingham, which is close to my constituency. Also, there is multimillion pound investment to make the most of the HS2 hubs in the west and east midlands; the east midland HS2 hub abuts my constituency. That brings me to the subject of skills, specialist STEM subjects, and engineering in particular.

HS2 and the HS2 hub create economic and employment opportunities for my constituency, but we need to make sure people have the right skills. We should also not forget the residents who will lose their homes and the businesses that will lose their premises to make way for the track, which will come right through my constituency. It is vital that they get timely and appropriate compensation, especially as many of them have lived in their homes for 30 or 40 years; some have lived in them all their lives.

To maximise the potential of HS2, residents need the right skills—including employees of flagship companies, some of which have already been mentioned, such as Rolls-Royce, Bombardier and Toyota. Businesses and the local economy can continue to be successful only if people and goods can get around, as has been mentioned, and if there is the right infrastructure. The road network across and around Erewash is already creaking at the seams. I welcome the benefits from the east midlands HS2 hub and the additional proposals for 2,000 new homes, with light industry, on a brownfield site in Stanton, but we need dramatically to improve the road network, and to bring it into the 21st century. Otherwise the area will become a huge car park, and that will not stimulate growth but stifle it. That is why I am calling for an additional motorway junction on the M1, to help ease current gridlock and keep Erewash moving well into the future.

We need the investment and commitment that the midlands engine brings, but we also need more joined-up thinking; and we need to make sure that no area is left behind. It must not revolve around the big cities—Birmingham in the west midlands, and Nottingham and Derby in the east midlands. Too often I get the feeling that my local enterprise partnership, D2N2, puts Erewash at the bottom of the list. We need to address that. The midlands engine must be maximised, as a strategy and an investment mechanism. We must nurture full collaboration between businesses and universities. It should be used as a vehicle to attract domestic and foreign investment, on top of what the Government have put in, if we are to have long-term, sustained economic growth across the whole of the midlands. We need to make sure that the midlands is a true engine for growth for the whole UK.

10.15 am

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) for bringing this issue to our attention so that we can tease out some
important issues. I declare an interest, of sorts. West Bromwich Albion FC beat Everton FC in the FA cup final on 18 May 1968 at Wembley, by scoring three minutes into extra time. It was a traumatic experience for an 11-year-old Evertonian. However, I hold no grudges against the Midlands and I deny that I was psychologically scarred by the event, so my comments today should not be taken in that context.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington dealt with a wide range of issues, including academic research, research and development in general, energy storage, matters affecting the creative industries, and the challenge of low productivity. Of course there is also the vexed question of the airport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) talked about the Midlands engine being not a brand but the people, and an engine for growth. I fully concur with her view that when the Midlands do well the UK does well. She also made crucial points about HS2 helping to transform Britain's infrastructure, other transport investments in the area, and Brexit concerns. The hon. Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway) talked about working together and playing to the region's strengths, and of course the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) talked about the need to stand up for traditional industries as well as new technologies. In that respect, when I sit on my sofa I will be reminded of her.

As a former leader of a council in the Liverpool city region I have, as the saying goes, been there, to some extent. I am pretty au fait with the difficult gestation period that comes with setting up the structures and mechanisms of a city region and the wider region; but it is about time, and long overdue. The dragging hand of Westminster and Whitehall on regional policy is a danger; that approach is well past its sell-by date. In fact, the centralisation from London has clearly left the other regions in a less favourable position than the south-east and London. That is not to say that I have any criticism of those regions. Quite the opposite—good luck to them. But it is time that other regions also got more attention. I think that that point has been raised today several times. The same thing has been true of successive Governments who over the decades have to an extent had a stranglehold on local government, leaving it passive and dependent. However, that is changing, and that failed approach cannot continue.

The “Midlands Engine for Growth” prospectus of 2015 mentions that the offshore wind market is worth up to £100 billion. In fact, as you know, Mr Howarth, in Liverpool bay, off the coast of my constituency, there is a large wind turbine field, which is growing exponentially with investment from, among others, DONG, a majority state-owned Danish company, and, if I remember rightly, some input from the city of Copenhagen. It is a pity that local government and regions in this country are not in a position to do the same. I am very concerned that the Government are ideologically opposed to such ventures even if they would be in the best interests of city regions such as Liverpool working collaboratively with city regions in the Midlands, or combined authorities in the Midlands. I am afraid there is a danger of there being many words but little action from the Government, with that ideology hidden in the small print.

Conversely, at the same time as the former Business Secretary, the now Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, talked in the prospectus of freeing up local government and its partners to compete in the global market, he was interfering in their day-to-day affairs with the Trade Union Act 2016—which sought to micromanage local authority labour relations—with no recognition of any irony at all. Meanwhile, one of his predecessors at the Department for Communities and Local Government wanted to tell local authorities how to run off and on-street car parking arrangements. That state of mind has to be broken out of.

The consequences of the incapacity to deal with devolution in a significant way fall on and negatively affect people in the regions, such as the Midlands. I am afraid that this rather petty, Lilliputian and prosaic interference re-affirms that the Government and Whitehall simply cannot let go; it is endemic, and it has to stop. Can anybody imagine the equivalent Secretary of State in Germany, France or Italy having the time or inclination to be bothered with such trivial interferences in the affairs of local government? I raise these issues simply for context. If the dead hand of Westminster continues to stifle innovation, imagination and entrepreneurship in the regions, and in the Midlands in particular, because of a pathological inability to let things go, things will not change.

The Government set out their aims for the Midlands in February 2015, which include raising the long-term growth rate of the Midlands to at least that forecast for the whole UK, creating 300,000 extra jobs in the Midlands, which is enormously welcome, creating a new skills matching service for local people and increasing the number of skilled apprenticeships, which others have referred to. They also include delivering £5.2 billion of investment in new transport infrastructure in the Midlands, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) referred, and backing science and innovation, including by developing an Energy Research Accelerator through local universities. The Government also aim to support new technology in the automotive sector, to support the construction of 30,000 new homes and to make improvements to local education. The Opposition’s main concerns are how the Government will meet those targets and whether they are committed to fully funding them, particularly as our economy heads into a difficult period that will be defined by high inflation, a continued weakened pound and potentially flattening tax receipts.

More specifically, the prospectus indicated that the Midlands engine partnership would develop a €180 million fund of funds, utilising the European Union’s joint European resources for micro to medium enterprises programme, which combines European regional development funds with matched funding from the European Investment Bank. Will it still? Does the Chancellor’s slush fund, as I like to think of it, account for the loss of that money, and will it be put back into the Midlands engine? My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), who was here earlier, referred to that.

The Government’s aim for the Midlands economy is to raise its long-term growth rate to at least that forecast for the UK. That target is based on the ability of the Midlands to continue to grow at the same rate as between 2007 and 2013. There are a plethora of reasons why that is unlikely and, perhaps, overly-ambitious unless the Government pull their finger out and deal with many of the issues raised by hon. Members here today. As the
[Peter Dowd]

prospectus says, the region's gross value added is currently £222 billion annually, which is about 14.6% of the UK’s total economic output, and has grown by 30% in the past decade. With 24% of the 11.5 million population under the age of 20, the midlands clearly has the potential to offer a long-term, sustainable workforce. That has been referred to today in terms of skills. However, although the midlands accounts for 15.7% of all employed people, the average GVA per worker is lower than the national average.

In fact, the midlands has not been able to keep up with the north and the south-east in employment, investment and job creation. A Resolution Foundation report found that, prior to the financial crisis, employment in the west midlands city region stood at 66.7%, which was 3.2% below the city region average. It also found that, while the recovery from that crisis has seen the proportion of people in work nationally rising to record levels, the west midlands is still not back to where it was, with an employment rate of just 64.5%, compared with 71.6% across other city regions. Barring Solihull, each local authority in the west midlands has an employment rate below the average across the UK’s other city regions. That is important.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones) indicated dissent.

Peter Dowd: I am referring to Government statistics; I am happy to send them to the Minister. In the east midlands the situation is worse. I do not want to push on; I think we have to look at this in a constructive and positive fashion. If we are going to do that, the Government need to pull their finger out and get that midlands machine cranked up and going. Members across the Chamber have highlighted and indicated where that could be pushed and sustained. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington laid it out fairly clearly, but laying it out and practically putting it into effect are completely different things.

The reality is that the call to take back control that we heard during the referendum debate extends not only to the national level. It is not just about bringing back control—whatever that means—to the United Kingdom, it is about a demand from the regions for the Government to move aside to some degree and let them get on with wealth creation for all people, not just a chosen few. Andrew Bounds from the Financial Times made the point that so long as the Government control from the national level. It is not just about bringing back control, but in practice.

That said, there are still challenges. Productivity is a key issue. GVA per capita in the midlands engine area is about 20% below the England average, and there is much more to be done to promote growth across the midlands. Just yesterday, we launched a Green Paper setting out our ambitions for the UK’s modern industrial strategy. Our aim is to improve living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and ensuring that growth is spread across the whole country. This is a consultation, and we are asking people to tell us how we can best achieve our goals. Our industrial strategy will lay the foundations for a more prosperous and more
equal Britain. Our focus is on improving productivity, rewarding hard-working people with higher wages and creating more opportunities for young people. Following the consultation, we intend to publish an industrial strategy White Paper in 2017. That will set out the plan for the long term.

The Midlands engine is at the heart of our country and must be central to our approach. A key part of our vision is to spread growth across the UK economy, ensuring that the economy is working for everyone. Local partners have come together and formed a Midlands engine partnership, which stretches from the Welsh border on one side of the country to the North sea on the other. The partnership is led by the internationally respected businessman Sir John Peace.

There has been very good progress. Under this Government, the Midlands has been growing faster than the UK average, excluding London. Our support for the Midlands includes the £392 million that we allocated to local enterprise partnerships in the Midlands in the third round of growth deals, announced in the autumn statement. That is in addition to the first two rounds of growth deals, through which the Midlands local enterprise partnerships will receive almost £1.5 billion.

The Government will publish a Midlands engine strategy shortly. We are working with Departments across Government to set out the priorities for delivering the Midlands engine. We will set out our plans to improve connectivity, employment, innovation and investment, which are all very important factors in the prosperity of the people in the Midlands and very important issues that have been raised by hon. Members throughout the debate.

We have of course already published a northern powerhouse strategy. The future of our economy is too important for this to be seen as a race between the Northern powerhouse and the Midlands engine. We are working with each area on its specific needs to ensure that all of the UK is economically strong.

Many of the Government’s existing initiatives are spreading growth and empowering local communities in the Midlands. Our devolution deal for the West Midlands combined authority devolves significant powers, such as skills provision and funding. It includes a £1 billion investment fund and a £1.8 billion enterprise zone extension. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made a commitment in the autumn statement in November that the Government will continue to work towards a second devolution deal with the West Midlands combined authority.

Our local growth fund has supported projects across the Midlands. For example, the £20 million north-south rail and Coventry station scheme will improve passenger capacity and secure an increase in train service frequency between Coventry, Bedworth and my constituency of Nuneaton. There has also been support through city deals. In the Leicester and Leicestershire city deal, the advanced technology innovation centre received £2 million to create more space for high-technology jobs and businesses. That supports one of our largest science parks, where major companies include Caterpillar and E.ON.

As hon. Members have been keen to point out, many major routes and railways go through the Midlands. Improving connectivity there has real benefits for the rest of our country, as well as significant benefits for local residents and businesses. Better transport connectivity allows businesses to grow and helps people to get to work. The Midlands will be a major beneficiary of HS2 with various stations, but particularly at Toton in the East Midlands and at Birmingham, as has been announced. The Government have recently committed to funding Midlands Connect to the end of this Parliament and have signalled our intent to see it established as a sub-national transport body. That will enable local partners to develop regional transport proposals for the Midlands.

Lilian Greenwood: The Minister talks about the importance of HS2 to the region. That is important not just because of the transport connectivity and capacity improvements it will provide, but because the east Midlands is the largest rail cluster in the world, and there is the obvious potential for us to benefit from it industrially. Will he say how, within the industrial strategy, he will ensure that HS2 procurement, including the £2.7 billion for new rolling stock, is used to boost our rail industry in the Midlands region?

Mr Jones: The hon. Lady asks a very good question. We have significant capacity in the Midlands region in regard to rail infrastructure and the manufacturing base around it. I am sure she has already looked at the Green Paper released yesterday, which contains a section that relates to procurement. I urge her to contribute on the Green Paper. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has made it clear that he is keen to hear from right hon. and hon. Members in relation to development of the Green Paper and the reality of the White Paper. I encourage all colleagues to get involved in that process.

To elaborate on the potential of HS2, there is a lot of debate about speed. I say to hon. Members that speed is important and, if we are delivering a brand-new rail line, why would we not use up-to-date technology? The biggest wins, however, are in developing additional capacity and reliability. My constituency is on the west coast main line. Because there is very little if any capacity left on that line, there are perpetual reliability challenges. The situation should improve once we secure HS2.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the benefits of HS2 stretch out not only to the building of railway carriages, but to environmental needs, namely trees? Trees along the HS2 route will be grown in my constituency, even though, sadly, HS2 is quite a way away from it. That is an example of HS2 investment having a benefit across the whole of the Midlands region.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes an extremely pertinent point. It is often said that only the places that have the hubs will benefit from HS2. It is certainly the case that there will be many related situations that we might not automatically think of—in my hon. Friend’s case that means the trees that will be grown in her constituency. As she says, that will have an important economic benefit to her constituency. I am sure there are many other examples we will be able to point to as that project moves forward.

A key component of the Midlands engine is trade and investment. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government led the inaugural Midlands trade mission to the US and Canada in September, and Sir John Peace led a second mission, in November, to China. The successes of those missions include
Mr Marcus Jones

£1.3 million of business secured, and a further £6.2 million of business expected over the next 12 months. To date, more than 70 companies have benefited from those missions.

Before I conclude, I want to pick up one or two more points, particularly on transport infrastructure. There was a suggestion that there was a significant lack of investment in transport infrastructure across the midlands. I reiterate that £5 billion of capital investment into new transport infrastructure is being made across the midlands. That includes upgrading sections of the M42, M5, M1 and M6 to four-lane smart motorways, and £2.7 billion for new trains on the east coast main line. In addition, a £55 billion investment is going into HS2. As hon. Members know, a significant amount of local funding is also being devolved across the region to our local enterprise partnerships.

We should not underestimate the importance of Birmingham Airport and East Midlands Airport to the midlands region. East Midlands Airport is at the forefront of freight and is the second busiest freight hub in the country. It is probably the biggest dedicated freight hub in the country. Birmingham Airport is now seeing significant passenger growth. As part of the regional growth fund made by the Government during the last Parliament, a significant project was undertaken to extend the runway at Birmingham Airport, including the diversion of the A45. As a subsequent benefit of that longer runway, Birmingham Airport is now able to serve longer-haul markets than it was, because it has that longer runway to support the long-range planes.

To conclude, I thank hon. Members for their thoughtful contributions. I know that all the Members who are here representing midlands seats bring a passion not only for the country, but for the midlands region. Many of the topics that have been mentioned—connectivity, enterprise, trade and investment—will be covered in our midlands engine strategy, and the midlands engine will have found the points made in this debate extremely helpful in its future work. We will continue to work with the midlands engine to respond to the challenges and opportunities set out in the industrial strategy and to develop its vision for making the midlands an important engine of growth.

Chris White: Once again, I thank you for your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I am grateful for the Minister’s response to the debate, and am also grateful for all the Members who were able to contribute. I agree with the Minister—one thing we share is our passion for the midlands. How we reach a consensus on a direction for the midlands will play a key role in how the strategy develops.

I cannot end this debate without mentioning that, in terms of vibrancy and desirability to live, Warwick district has just come top in the west midlands. That is possibly because we have the skills, we have low unemployment, we have the colleges and we have the great universities on our doorstep. I hope what we have in Warwick district is a microcosm of what we will be able to achieve in the midlands as a whole. I hope that, as the strategy develops into a White Paper, the debate will continue to ensure that we achieve the best we can for our constituents and the region as a whole.

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved.
That this House has considered the Midlands Engine.

10.46 am

Sitting suspended.
UK Helicopter Industry

11 am

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered the UK helicopter industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. The helicopter industry is a strong existing centre of research, innovation and excellence on which we must build, using the tools emerging in the Government’s industrial strategy to secure our strategic ability to produce helicopters and other defence aerospace products. My constituency is absolutely central to that industry in the UK.

Yeovil has a long history of involvement; we have been making helicopters for many decades. Many will have heard of the company Westland Helicopters, known as Leonardo now that it is owned by the Italian Government-controlled firm Leonardo. It was initially involved in making fixed-wing aircraft, and has latterly focused more on helicopters. Our area takes great pride in the firm; pretty much everybody in my constituency is connected in some way to someone who has flown a Westland product, had a hand in making one or worked for a Westland supplier at some point in their life. It touches everybody.

It is also worth pointing out that my constituency contains the royal naval air station at Yeovilton, which flies a lot of those machines and has done for many decades. Soldiers and sailors in our armed forces know very well how important helicopters are to their safety on and around the battlefield. I particularly do not want to see a repeat of what happened in the Iraq war when armed serving officers essentially said that they did not have the battlefield helicopter support that they needed, which exposed them to unnecessary casualties from improvised explosive devices.

About 3,000 jobs in Yeovil depend directly on Leonardo, and there are more in the supply chain. It is a multi-billion-pound firm in terms of revenue generated a year, and the biggest Italian inward investment into the UK. It has an iconic set of products, including, over the years, the Westland Wessex, the Sea King, the Lynx, the Merlin and now the Wildcat. In all my dealings with the Italian management, they have shown themselves to be willing to invest more in the industry to support it. I would like our Government to step up and think about how we can make more of that good relationship with Italy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. The fact that there are not enough Members here to back it is not an indication of the interest in the subject. Does he agree that it is essential that the skills of our workforce are not wasted? The Minister must fulfil the Government’s obligations to source locally rather than outsource, and a clear message must be sent about the possibilities of producing in Britain, the importance of a skilled and expert workforce and opportunities for apprentices in Great Britain, here at home.

Marcus Fysh: I absolutely agree with that sentiment. It is essential that we build on the highly skilled workforces in the UK. There is one in Yeovil, and I know that there are others within the industry in other parts of the UK.

We have a great opportunity to construct a proper modern industrial strategy for turbo-charging skills development and apprenticeships.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): The hon. Gentleman mentions the industrial strategy, but it makes no direct mention of this hugely important industry and the need for a stand-alone industry that produces helicopters. Will he call for a commitment—it would be great to hear one from the Minister—to a direct reference to that in the refreshed defence industrial strategy when it is announced? Will he also commit to working with everyone in Yeovil and nationally—this is a national issue as well—including Lord Ashdown, who retains a big interest in it?

Marcus Fysh: Yes, absolutely. It is an important national industry, and I want to see it mentioned specifically within the industrial strategy. I have been working hard—I thank the Minister for her engagement with me over many months, since she was appointed, as well as the former Minister—on how we can make the industry a part of the industrial strategy. I welcome the support of everybody across the political spectrum to help the industry go from strength to strength.

The issue is about how we go forward. We have a strong local cluster in the Yeovil area, which at the moment can produce helicopters end to end, making all parts. I would like that to continue. There is a live issue involving the Wildcat airframe jigs, as anyone who has been following it will know. It is a relatively small issue within the overall scheme of the industry, but it is an important signal that we want to be able to manufacture helicopters end to end in the Yeovil area. It would give the community a lot of confidence that we mean business about ensuring that the industry is as strong as possible for the future. The question is how to preserve the industry and take it to the next level.

I believe that joined-up thinking and a clear plan for infrastructure and skills development is essential and should be promoted through the industrial strategy. It is about raising the competitiveness of the whole industry environment in the Yeovil area, and indeed in the south-west. The thing about competitiveness is that it is both an internal and an external matter. From an internal point of view, our local industries should focus, as they are doing, on continuously improving their competitiveness, but it also helps to have external players involved. Yeovil made a fundamental mistake some years ago by not inviting Ford to come and manufacture cars in the town. That would have been good to have as a discipline.

The issue is also about promoting innovation within the industrial strategy. I welcome the Government’s strategic partnering arrangement with Leonardo to consider developing its existing platforms as well as how we can make the products of the future, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, and all their potential technology spin-offs, including battery development and so on.

It is also very important to promote inward investment, and since I was elected I have tried to create a step change in the way the town thinks about such investment, and to get it to grab opportunities to diversify its industries. That is because Yeovil very much grew up as a company town. There was a time some years ago when out of 30,000 residents 10,000 were employed at the Westland site. That number has come down over the
years to about 3,000 now, but Westland remains a very important player locally. Nevertheless, the more that we can try to diversify, the better health the industry will be in.

The UK helicopter industry has very serious competitive strengths, in design and engineering, and in specialties such as the manufacture of blades and gearboxes. In addition, Yeovil works closely with the Ministry of Defence client, and skills behind that work in areas such as certification, software design, materials and acoustic treatments, are available in the local supply chain and are second to none in the world.

There is a strategic imperative for an independent design and production capability to exist in the UK, and that inevitably entails some level of Government involvement as well as early, clear and efficient procurement that will take the whole business ecosystem into account. I welcome the focus on value for money within the MOD, but we also need to think quite holistically about the impact of different procurement decisions.

It is also very important within this context that we attempt to develop indigenous intellectual property. It is much better to develop our own products, because that is how the industry captures higher margins and secures higher living standards for the workforce and the population. Building to print, using other people’s designs and simply assembling products, is just not as good a business to be in. Indeed, it is almost a distraction from what the core endeavour of design and engineering should be, which is to create product opportunities and export opportunities. So, we must have early engagement with Her Majesty’s armed forces, to ensure that we are developing the capability that they want and need, while also making the platforms flexible for volume production at different levels of capability.

As I said before, there are opportunities to deepen relationships with Italy and the EU, and with US firms. There is a huge opportunity at the moment, for example, in service and support. There is the potential for Leonardo to work closely with Boeing, which I encourage and I would like the Government to try to encourage it too, because that could be a very good foundation for new product development to emerge from the excellent cash-flow opportunities.

There is a role for Government. We have seen some part of that in the strategic partnering arrangement and I would now like to see more joined-up thinking by the MOD, including in procurement, in addition to the support that can be given by both the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and the Department for International Trade. At times civil servants in different areas have not always known what other parts of the Government are doing.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so gracious in giving way again. Does he agree that there is also a need to have closer relationships between the helicopter manufacturers and those companies that provide the armaments for use on the helicopters, in other words companies such as Bombardier in Belfast? It is very important sometimes that we are in touch with the companies producing the technology as it is developed. Having heard her speeches in the past, I know that the Minister is well aware of that, but does he also feel that we need that closer co-operation between these armaments companies and the helicopter manufacturers?

Marcus Fysh: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention and, yes, I absolutely agree that the industry needs to take a holistic view, in order to work with the MOD and other clients in the rest of the world, to see how we can optimise these matters.

I call on the Government to support my infrastructure-led industrial strategy plans for the Yeovil area, with broader input from the national work on industrial strategy. I would also like the Government to support the iAero hub, which is a proposal that came out of the county council and the local enterprise partnership. The idea is to network up all the aerospace technology firms in the south-west around a hub in Yeovil, with a dedicated facility in the town for manufacturing innovation. Leonardo wants to acquire land. The county council has committed to putting in some money, but we need more money for the LEP to come up with its piece and, eventually, we will need more money from the EU funding—£10 million—or whatever the successor to that EU funding is.

I would also like the Government to encourage the clustering around the Yeovil area and inward investment, which I mentioned earlier, and to help the companies to focus on transforming themselves into firms that can sell products around the world in volume, to enable them to take advantage of the very high quality products that are being produced in and around Yeovil.

I would also like the Government to support the Yeovil area as a centre of excellence and technological skills development, with an institute of technology as a step change in the local tertiary education offer. There is widespread industry support among the local tech firms for that idea, and I would like to take it forward.

I would also like to make sure that the prosperity agenda is implemented in Yeovil, to ensure that Boeing and Leonardo work together in the town to seize opportunities in service and support, and in their manufacturing supply chain.

I would like us to work more closely and creatively with Italy on mutual defence programmes, and I would love it if the Minister would find time in her busy schedule to visit Italy and meet the management of Leonardo and, potentially, some Italian politicians, to talk about the ways in which we can build on our relationship with Italy after Brexit and do even more to co-operate with Italy than we are doing now.

I would also like us to consider spending substantially more than 2% of our GDP on defence, to increase our defence capabilities with more personnel and more equipment, which will be needed given the enlarged role in global affairs that I see us having in the future. Clearly, in Europe there is a loss of confidence in America’s commitment to the NATO alliance. We should lead on that issue, and on ensuring that our friends and allies in Europe are confident that the NATO alliance will continue to matter in the future.

Last but not least, I would also like the Government to help to promote civil use of Yeovil-made Leonardo helicopters, which have an exemplary safety record. That is especially important given the low morale that currently exists among offshore platform workers, due to safety concerns about other fleets of helicopters.
To give the Minister ample time to reply to the debate, I will just summarise by saying that the Yeovil area presents huge opportunities to raise growth and export potential, and to help to drive up local and UK living standards. Its helicopter industry is the core of the UK’s strategic ability for the flexible production of crucial battlefield lift capability, and its companies are focused on delivering continuous improvement, innovation and value for money to military and civil clients, and they also make some of the safest and most capable aircraft available. So let us build on this existing centre of excellence and rotor speciality, using all the elements of the Government’s industrial strategy to drive growth, skills and innovation throughout the south-west.

11.19 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth, this morning. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Marcus Fysh) on securing this timely debate on the UK’s helicopter chairmanship, Mr Howarth, this morning. I congratulate him absolutely right to raise this issue, which is vital in ensuring that we have the helicopter capability to transform and upgrade the sector. The consultation will provide a firm basis on which the Government can deliver a strategy that will drive growth and productivity for decades to come across all parts of the UK and all industries. The Ministry of Defence is fully engaged with the work, recognising as it does that the defence industry provides significant opportunities in many sectors and in all parts of the UK.

For defence in particular, as we outlined in the 2015 strategic defence and security review, we have a national security objective to promote UK prosperity, part of which includes a refresh of our defence industrial policy, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland). That work is well under way, and an industry consultation has just been completed. I will take on board the representations I have received today regarding the opportunities that UK defence and security companies have to compete, grow and develop successfully in a global market. We want to use our defence spending to help the industry sustain vital skills, and to promote prosperity through developing the export potential of new equipment, including helicopters.

The commitments are all part of the Government’s 10-year £178 billion plan to provide our armed forces with the battle-winning equipment they need.

Given that Leonardo’s helicopter division is based in Yeovil, my hon. Friend is especially interested in the helicopter element of that. Last year, we put in place a 10-year strategic partnering arrangement with Leonardo, building on the many decades of work we have done with the company. That arrangement is key to maintaining and improving cost-effective support for our helicopter fleets.

On my recent visit, I was briefed not only about the thousands of people employed directly by Leonardo’s helicopter division in Yeovil, but about the supply chain of companies, which my hon. Friend mentioned. I pay tribute to the 4,300 people who work at the royal naval air station—RNAS—Yeovilton, one of the Navy’s two principal airfields. More than one third of the UK’s military helicopter fleet is based in, and maintained from, Yeovil. The people working there will continue to support our Merlin and Wildcat helicopters for at least the next two decades. Indeed, the company will also support our current Apache fleet until they are retired. Put simply, it is clear that none of that world-leading capability would be possible without the expert work undertaken every day by the British helicopter industry, particularly by those working in my hon. Friend’s constituency.

The industrial strategy Green Paper, which was launched yesterday, has been mentioned. It signals the start of an extensive period of engagement with businesses, local leaders, local enterprise partnerships and other stakeholders right across the country, and offers an “open door” challenge to industry to come up with proposals that will transform and upgrade the sector. The consultation will provide a firm basis on which the Government can deliver a strategy that will drive growth and productivity for decades to come across all parts of the UK and all industries. The Ministry of Defence is fully engaged with the work, recognising as it does that the defence industry provides significant opportunities in many sectors and in all parts of the UK.

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The industrial backdrop and each of the themes that have come up in this debate—skills, exports and new technologies—is as applicable to the helicopter industry as it is to any other. Those themes are already enshrined in our strategic partnering arrangement with Leonardo’s helicopter division, which was signed in July 2016. I take on board my hon. Friend’s invitation to go and
mark the anniversary of that signing with our Italian colleagues and friends. We are already very engaged in working with Italy on the Typhoon aircraft as well.

**Jim Shannon:** In my earlier intervention I mentioned apprenticeships but the Minister has not mentioned them. In the strategy, could we have a confirmation of a commitment to apprenticeships?

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Gentleman is right to re-emphasise that point. It was a pleasure to meet the apprentices employed in Yeovil by Leonardo’s helicopter division when I visited. I think I am right in saying that the armed forces are the biggest provider of apprenticeships. The defence industry partners we work with are also enormous providers, so we have a key role in that regard.

I want, briefly, to touch on exports and on how important they are to our work on helicopters at Leonardo in Yeovil. Leonardo has sold the Wildcat aircraft to South Korea and the Philippines, and continues to sell the Merlin to customers with demanding operational requirements. The contract I saw last week, for example, was for the search and rescue variant currently being manufactured for Norway. Those sales bring valued jobs and prosperity to the local region, and have contributed an average of more than £700 million a year to UK defence exports for the past five years—a truly remarkable sum. We are doing everything we can, building on the specialist skills of Government, our network of defence attachés in embassies around the world and our newly created Department for International Trade, where the Defence and Security Organisation resides. The latter provides specific export support to Leonardo, meeting regularly with the company and doing whatever it can to use Government resources to create a strategic export plan for the firm, with the aim of maximising civil and defence exports and producing an ongoing impact on UK prosperity.

My hon. Friend mentioned important initiatives such as iAero, which is being driven by leading south-west aerospace partners. Through the aerospace growth partnership, industry and Government have committed £3.9 billion to aerospace research to 2026, including on rotary wing, from which the UK helicopter industry will benefit. We are also co-funding a project with Leonardo to understand the potential of a rotary wing unmanned air system capability, which I had the privilege of witnessing at first hand in Benbecula last October.

My hon. Friend raised the matter of jigs and tooling for Wildcat held at the GKN premises in Yeovil. I can confirm that that is Ministry of Defence equipment but also that we have not yet been given a proposal by the industry about the next steps. We would expect to be able to make a decision by July, however, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend closely during this time. That decision will take into account not only the specific proposal but the UK’s wider interests.

In conclusion, I emphasise how grateful I am that the outstanding skills and expertise of those employed on helicopter-related work in the UK, particularly in the south-west, are helping us to meet our ambitions and our commitment, ensuring that we continue to deliver cutting-edge, battle-winning capability for our armed forces in the UK for years to come.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.29 am

*Sitting suspended.*
UK Decarbonisation and Carbon Capture and Storage

[Mr Clive Betts in the Chair]

2.30 pm

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK decarbonisation and carbon capture and storage.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, and to have secured this debate. First, I declare an interest. Prior to coming to this place, I was Shell’s contract lead on the carbon capture and storage project at Peterhead. I moved the project from its previous format in Longannet. Further to that, I was on the CCS parliamentary advisory group working under Lord Oxburgh. It reported to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in September last year with the report, “Lowest Cost Decarbonisation for the UK: The Critical Role of CCS”. I therefore have great interest in the subject, and I commend all Members who have come forward to speak in the debate.

It is prudent to consider, at least summarily, the background against which the debate has been brought to the House. Since successfully winning a narrow majority, the Conservative Government have been rapidly drawing back from the previous coalition Government’s much-lauded green policies. Tony Juniper described it in his article in The Guardian on 24 July 2015 as “an anti-environment ideology based on the view that ecological goals interfere with the market, increase costs and are against the interests of people.”

The cancellation of the ring-fenced £1 billion funding for the carbon capture and storage competition on 25 November 2015 is just one of a succession of cancellations of green policy initiatives and renewable programmes. Those cancellations include scrapping support for onshore wind; axing solar subsidies; removing the guaranteed level of renewables obligation subsidy for biomass; killing the flagship green homes scheme; privatising the green investment bank, which my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) will discuss tomorrow; removing incentives to buy greener cars; abandoning the plan for zero-carbon homes; a U-turn to allow fracking on sites of special scientific interest; dropping the green targets; and—this is what triggered the CCS parliamentary advisory group’s report and, subsequently, this debate— scrapping the ring-fenced £1 billion of funding for the carbon capture and storage competition in November 2015.

With so much backtracking on green and renewable energy initiatives, the scrapping of that funding may not have been a shock to everyone. I forecasted it, but the industry, which was four years into the £1 billion competition, was shocked. Quite honestly, it virtually wiped out the industry in the UK in one fell swoop. Dr Luke Warren, chief executive of the Carbon Capture & Storage Association, said that the decision was “just incredible. Only six months ago the government’s manifesto committed £1bn of funding for CCS... Moving the goalposts just at the time when a four-year competition is about to conclude is an appalling way to do business.”

What does that do for investor confidence? The litany of cancelled, diluted and abandoned renewable and green initiatives, as well as those within the energy industry as a whole, have virtually destroyed investor confidence in the UK energy sector. The third report of the 2015-16 Session by the Energy and Climate Change Committee, “Investor confidence in the UK energy sector”, was published on 23 February 2016. The Committee is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), and the report identified six factors that combined to damage investor confidence in the UK. The fourth was:

“Policy inconsistency and contradictory approaches have sent mixed messages to the investment community”.

The report goes on to cite three specific examples, of which the third is “emphasising the important role of gas while scrapping support for carbon capture and storage.”

Earlier in the same month, the same Committee released a report, “Future of carbon capture and storage in the UK”, which opened with the warning:

“Meeting the UK’s climate change commitments will be challenging if we do not apply carbon capture and storage (CCS) to new gas-fired power stations and to our energy intensive industries.”

It goes on to state that alternatives to CCS are likely to cost the UK more in the future to meet legally binding climate change targets as set out in the Climate Change Act 2008. The report went on to criticise the Government’s focus on investment in shale gas exploration and quoted the then Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change as saying:

“In the next 10 years, it’s imperative that we get new gas-fired power stations built.”

The report concluded that “the manner in which the carbon capture and storage competition was cancelled, weeks before the final bids were to be submitted and without any prior indication given to the relevant parties, was both disappointing and damaging to the relationship between Government and industry.”

There will be positive news for the Government on that later in my speech.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. The National Audit Office said that CCS is still proving costly. The Treasury pulled the funding away before there was an opportunity to prove whether or not it was going to be too costly. CCS would provide such a major boost to industries such as those on Teeside, which include cement, steel and fertilisers. Does he agree that it is about time the Government re-engage? They are seen as disengaged at the moment.

Philip Boswell: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. There are signs that the Government will be considering that. I look to the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and the Minister to confirm that they will consider that in their strategies. The hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) is absolutely right about investment in a key industry. When I was in the project in Peterhead, the technology was basic. We were capturing 90% of the carbon. With advances in technology, we will increase that, and with economies of scale and improved technologies, it will be cheaper. While the report understands the difficult balancing act that the Government face with public expenditure, the delay in bringing forward any plans to implement CCS in the UK while proceeding with fracking means we will not remain on the lowest-cost path to our statutory decarbonisation target.
What of forward planning? On 26 February 2016 in an interview in *Utility Week*, the chief executive of the Committee on Climate Change, Matthew Bell stated:

“We’ve been very clear that, with the 2050 target in mind, it is much less expensive to meet if we’re able to develop successfully CCS. The government needs to come up with a very credible plan on how it’s going to push forward with CCS.”

Bell says that, without such a plan, that investment in the power sector, at least on the more conventional generation front, could suffer. Gas is being pushed by the Government as the bridging fuel in the transition towards a low-carbon economy, although no new combined-cycle gas turbine power stations have been built in the UK in the past six years.

Acknowledging what is widely expected to happen as coal-fired power stations leave the energy system, Bell said:

“Between now and the early 2030s, gas could have an increasing and significant role”.

He also said:

“However, from some point in the 2030s, if you’re going to hit the 80 per cent gas target and don’t have CCS, then gas has to be virtually off the system…That would imply that during the course of the 2030s gas has to play a declining role – but there is a big ‘if’ there as that depends on CCS.”

2.37 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

2.47 pm

On resuming—

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): The sitting is resumed and the debate can continue to until 4.10 pm.

Philip Boswell: Thank you, Mr Betts. I will continue with my quotation from Matthew Bell:

“We have a 15 to 20-year time horizon with reasonable certainty for the role of gas, then we have an uncertain period—is that enough for investors to decide to go ahead with their projects? There is a way of clarifying that uncertainty, and that is for the government to be clear on CCS.”

There is a consensus from watchdogs and experts alike. They agree that the Government have the opportunity to get this right. Getting it right, including carbon capture and storage, will be more economical for the UK in achieving our climate change targets, while simultaneously creating CCS as a leading, technologically advanced industry within the UK.

What of the costs of meeting our climate change commitments without CCS? The National Audit Office’s report of 20 January 2017, “Carbon capture and storage: the second competition for government support”, found that carbon capture and storage “formed an important part” of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy’s role in reducing carbon dioxide emissions. The report goes on to state:

“Given its potential to decarbonise different sectors, many stakeholders still regard CCS as being critically important to the UK achieving its decarbonisation target. It is currently inconceivable that CCS projects will be developed without government support.”

That support would enable investment in CCS, creating a large-scale demonstration of CCS technical and commercial viability, and leading to further-improved CCS schemes in the UK and the development of CCS as a successful industry. Although the report is constrained by the very specific NAO brief, which was to assess how the Department ran the second competition before its cancellation, it is none the less unequivocal in its support for CCS as the least-cost route to decarbonisation.

What of the most detailed report focused on the determination of whether CCS offers the solution of lowest-cost decarbonisation? I am referring to “Lowest Cost Decarbonisation for the UK: The Critical Role of CCS”, which is cited as Oxburgh 2016, a report from the parliamentary advisory group on carbon capture and storage to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The report was requested by the then Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, the right hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd). Its terms of reference were to assess the potential contribution of CCS to cost-effective UK decarbonisation and to recommend accordingly to the Secretary of State by the end of summer 2016.

The report was delivered by Lord Oxburgh and his team in September 2016. The group comprised some of the most qualified and experienced representatives of politics, industry and academia. They did not carry out primary research but instead, given the substantial volume of work already published on the subject, focused on synthesising experience and knowledge into an optimum recommendation. They also considered walking away from CCS as an option.

The report found six core recommendations that are worth repeating in full:

1. Establish a CCS Delivery Company...A newly formed and initially state-owned company tasked with delivering full-chain CCS for power at strategic hubs around the UK at or below £85/MWh on a baseload CfD equivalent basis. Formed of two linked but separately regulated companies: ‘PowerCo’ to deliver the power stations and ‘T&SCo’ to deliver the transport and storage infrastructure, the CCSDC will need c£200-300m of funding over the coming 4-5 years.

2. Establish a system of economic regulation for CCS in the UK...The government will establish a system of economic regulation for CCS in the UK which is based on a regulated return approach. This will draw heavily on existing regulatory structures in the energy system and hence include: a CCS Power Contract based on the existing CfD or capacity contract to incentivise CCS for power...

3. Incentivise industrial CCS through Industrial Capture Contracts...The Industrial Capture Contract, will be funded by the UK government and will remunerate industry for capture and storage of their CO₂. It will be a regulated contract which will have a higher price in the early period in order to deliver capital repayment in a timescale consistent with industry horizons...

4. Establish a Heat Transformation Group...The Heat Transformation Group will assess the least cost route to the decarbonisation of heat in the UK (comparing electricity and hydrogen) and complete the work needed to assess the chosen approach in detail. The HTG has a likely funding need of £70-90m.

5. Establish a CCS Certificate System”—this is completely self-explanatory——

“Government will implement a CCS Certificate System for the certification of captured and stored CO₂.

6. Establish a CCS Obligation System...Government will also implement a CCS Obligation from the late 2020s as a means of giving a long-term trajectory to the fossil fuel and CCS industries. This will put an obligation on fossil fuel suppliers to the UK to sequester a growing percentage of the CO₂ associated with that supply.”
Climate change bodies, politicians and industry alike almost all agree that CCS is the optimum low-cost option for decarbonising the UK, but it is generally accepted that only Government intervention will stimulate it in the UK. I therefore ask the Minister please to consider carefully carbon capture and storage as part of the Government’s new, hands-on, interventionist industrial strategy for Britain.

What is the way forward? The way to a greener industrial future and lowest-cost decarbonisation for the UK without doubt includes carbon capture and storage. The proven technology continues to improve and we should not be frightened to embrace the new technologies that continue to spring up around CCS, such as Toshiba’s new 25-MW-gross electric turbine, the headline for which reads:

“Toshiba Ships Turbine for World’s First Direct-Fired Supercritical Oxy-Combustion CO₂ Power Cycle Demonstration Plant to U.S.”

That supercritical CO₂ power-cycle system achieves the same level of generating efficiency as a combined-cycle power plant. It separates and collects CO₂ at high pressure, eliminating the need for separate carbon capture equipment or processes, and secures full CO₂ capture—I repeat: full CO₂ capture—without any increase in the cost of electricity, using supercritical CO₂ as a working fluid to generate low-cost electricity while eliminating emissions of nitrogen oxides and other pollutants. We must embrace such technology or risk falling further behind or completely missing out on a unique opportunity.

Where should we develop the first CCS project? We already have some shovel-ready projects.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. He is making some good points. Has he considered the impact that leaving the European Union might have on Britain’s ability to deliver on its climate change obligations? Previously, we looked towards a European-wide solution at the Paris climate change summit, so what more do we now need to do in Britain to meet those carbon-reduction obligations?

Philip Boswell: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Now that we have chosen this path for the country, I hope that Brexiteers and remainers alike will make the best fist of it and work collectively with our European neighbours for the best, but he is right that we should do more in Britain and should focus on that. His point is well made.

Alex Cunningham: Further to the previous intervention, it is all the more important that, post-EU membership, we ensure we get our emissions-trading regime correct to protect the industries I mentioned in my earlier intervention.

Philip Boswell: Again, I agree completely with the hon. Gentleman. Given the coal mining in Europe for power generation and having to deal with climate change, we certainly ought to look at that.

Shortly before the demise of the Department of Energy and Climate Change—it is now the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—it commissioned a study from the Energy Technologies Institute to examine where CO₂ clusters and commercially viable storage could be developed around the UK by 2030. The study identified five locations. Only one is deliverable right now, and I will spend a few moments describing how that so-called Acorn project could grow into a mighty oak tree of carbon capture, transport and storage.

To get a CO₂ takeaway network to operate, we need to gather CO₂ from multiple sources onshore and to transport it to the coast through a pipe and then through an offshore pipe to its carbon storage destination. St Fergus in north-east Scotland is the offshore oil industry equivalent of Clapham Junction. Many of the gathering pipes from the North sea bring oil and gas to landfall at St Fergus, which has a huge amount of pipeline infrastructure and processing equipment available. With the decline of North sea activity in certain fields, some of that equipment is no longer required.

Specifically, pipelines from St Fergus to the Atlantic and Goldeneye gas fields have now ceased hydrocarbons transport and are in fact scheduled to enter a decommissioning process. Onshore, three facilities service different offshore pipeline networks and produce about 400,000 tonnes per year of carbon dioxide, which at the moment is vented into the atmosphere. The Acorn project aims to capture and store that CO₂. The SAGE—Scottish Area Gas Evacuation—plant is also in St Fergus but, given the time, I will move on to allow other Members the opportunity to speak.

What of the Government’s new industrial strategy? My colleague the hon. Member for Waveney will discuss that in more detail, so I will touch on it only lightly. Publication this month of the initial “Building our Industrial Strategy” Green Paper is the first step towards introducing a new, engaged Government—industry relationship, which is to be commended. The paper invites engagement and comment, and is most welcome. I urge the Minister to include CCS in the final strategy, and ask him to give assurances today that CCS will be considered carefully and implemented as one of the many steps into Britain’s new industrial future, which looks to both industrial development and a greener, cleaner industrial future for our children and our children’s children.

The summary of the key findings of the CCS parliamentary advisory group’s report states:

“CCS is essential for lowest cost decarbonisation
1. This report addresses the policy disconnect that arises between the previous Government’s cancellation of the…CCS …competition on grounds of cost and the advice it received from a number of independent policy bodies that CCS was an essential technology for least cost decarbonisation of the UK economy to meet international agreements (most recently Paris 2015).
2. The Committee on Climate Change…recently reported the additional costs of inaction on CCS for UK consumers to be £1.2bn per year in the 2020s rising to £4.3bn per year in the 2040s. The group agrees carbon capture and storage is an essential component in delivering lowest cost decarbonisation across the whole UK economy.

CCS works and can be deployed quickly at scale…Current CCS technology and its supply chain are fit for purpose”—as I said, CCS works are shovel-ready—

“UK action on CCS now will deliver lowest cost to the consumer. There is no justification for delay. Heavy costs will be imposed on current and future UK consumers by a continued failure to enact an effective CCS policy…Ample, safe and secure CO₂ storage capacity is available offshore in the rocks deep beneath UK territorial waters and this represents the least cost form of storage at the scale required…CO₂ re-use, such as enhanced oil recovery and the production of materials such as building products, already exists and should continue to be encouraged.”
but it will not be able to deal with the huge volume required to make a difference in meeting our climate change targets. The summary continues:

“The lowest cost CO₂ storage solution for the UK at the scale required will be offshore geological storage in UK territorial waters. There is no reason to delay...

CCS in the power sector has an essential enabling role.

CCS has direct or indirect implications for the decarbonisation of all four of the major fossil fuel consuming sectors of the UK economy—industry, power, transport and heating. They need to be considered together so that synergies of a common infrastructure can be exploited...

With some 200TWh/year of new clean power generation needed in the UK system in the 2020s fossil fuels with CCS will play an important role as a cost competitive and potentially flexible power generation technology.

There is a widespread view that CCS has to be expensive. On the contrary, the high costs revealed by the earlier UK approaches reflected the design of these competitions, rather than the underlying costs of ‘CCS itself.’

The poor design in the second CCS competition “led to the lack of true competition and the imposition of risks on the private sector that it cannot take at reasonable cost for early full-chain” development. The summary also states:

“Previous third party analysis by the CCS Cost Reduction Taskforce and for the Committee on Climate Change as well as analysis performed for this report show full-chain CCS costs at c.£85/MWh under the right circumstances. This report concludes that, under the right conditions as set out in this report, even the first CCS projects can compete on price with other forms of clean electricity.

To ensure that least cost CCS is developed when earlier approaches have founedered a CCS Delivery Company...should be established that will initially be government owned but could subsequently be privatised”

if the Government so wish. The summary continues:

“This company will have the responsibility of managing ‘full-chain’ risk and will be responsible for the progressive development of infrastructure focused on industrial hubs to which power stations and other emitters could deliver CO₂ which, for a fee, will be pumped to appropriate storage.

The CCSDC will comprise two companies: ‘PowerCo’ tasked with delivering the anchor power projects at CCS hubs and ‘T&SCo’ tasked with delivering transport and storage infrastructure for all sources of CO₂ at such hubs.”

It is clear that we must think and act more holistically about our energy needs and uses, and the inevitable effects of our behaviour on our planet. I hereby recommend that CCS be included in the Government’s new industrial strategy for the benefit of everyone in the UK now and in the future, as our children and our children’s children will be presented with our bill should we get this wrong again.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): Order. Five hon. Members wish to speak, and I want to start the Front-Bench wind-up speeches at 3.38 pm. That gives us about 35 minutes—about seven minutes each. Will Members keep to that guideline?

3.2 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, and I will do my best. I congratulate the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) on securing this debate, which comes at a particularly opportune time, following the publication yesterday of the Government’s Green Paper, “Building our Industrial Strategy”.

I served with the hon. Gentleman on the group chaired by the noble Lord Oxburgh, which published its report on the future of CCS last September. I commend the noble Lord on the way he chaired the group and for looking at all the evidence, seeking out all views and arriving at what I believe are sound and sensible recommendations that the Government should put into practice as soon as possible. It should be noted that the report has been welcomed globally and the noble Lord has been invited to such countries as Norway, Australia and Canada to talk about it.

The group’s membership was wide-ranging and cross-party, and included independent experts from the fields of industry and research. We heard from a wide range of witnesses who work in research and development, industry, and banking, as well as groups such as the Committee on Climate Change. We set out with no preconceived ideas about what our conclusions might be, mindful that the Government’s cancellation of the CCS competition on cost grounds might mean that CCS was a non-starter. We considered a wide range of evidence and concluded that CCS has a crucial role to play if the UK is to deliver the emissions reductions to which it is committed at the lowest possible cost to consumers and taxpayers.

Alex Cunningham: I am grateful to my fellow co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on CCS for giving way. CCS could be a game-changer for areas such as Teesside; it could drive investment and improve air quality. The Teesside Collective is showing great leadership on plans in that area. There are also plans for a large gas-fired power station, but those are being frustrated by a complicated planning process. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government need to simplify that process while ensuring that plants are CCS-ready so that we can exploit them properly?

Peter Aldous: I agree that CCS has an important role to play in the regeneration of coastal communities and perhaps areas that have been forgotten over the last few years. That includes the area that the hon. Gentleman represents, many areas in Scotland and the area that I represent.

The report contains six recommendations for how CCS can perform that crucial role. I believe that we reached the right conclusions, for three reasons. First, the UK has made commitments, through the Climate Change Act 2008 and international agreements, to reduce carbon emissions. Those were most recently reconfirmed in Paris in autumn 2015. As a result, we have a duty to put in place measures that will enable us to get on with meeting those targets at the lowest possible cost to the country’s consumers and taxpayers.

It quickly became apparent to the group that we cannot get on with that without CCS. The great advantage of CCS is that it is a highly strategic technology that can deliver emissions reductions across many sectors, including, as we have heard, power generation, energy-intensive industries, heat and transport. It should also be pointed out that CCS has the potential to safely store 15% of current UK CO₂ emissions by 2030 and up to 40% by 2050.
There is a cost associated with inaction on CCS. Last summer, the Committee on Climate Change highlighted that if we take no action on CCS, the cost to UK consumers will be £1 billion to £2 billion per annum in the 2020s, rising to £4 billion to £5 billion per annum in the 2040s.

Dr Poulter: I endorse all my hon. Friend’s points. Does the history of renewable energy not show that those who invest early not only reduce their carbon footprint much more rapidly, but save money downstream? It will become much more difficult to invest and much more expensive to the UK taxpayer if we leave this decision for five or 10 years.

Peter Aldous: I agree. There is a compelling case for us to get on with this now.

The second reason why CCS is important is cost. That was why the previous pilots failed. The Oxburgh report established that the high costs revealed by earlier approaches in the UK were attributable to the design of the competitions, not the underlying costs of CCS itself. Analysis by the CCS Reduction Task Force and for the Committee on Climate Change, which was confirmed by Lord Oxburgh’s group, showed that CCS can be delivered at approximately £85 per MWh. That is competitive with other large-scale low-carbon energies such as nuclear and offshore wind.

CCS also has what I regard as a unique selling point. Some people might say, “Why us? Why the UK? Let other countries, such as Norway, do the hard legwork to get the technology off the ground. We’ll join the party later.” Such comments are wrong and misplaced, and out of context with what Britain should be doing in this post-Brexit world. The UK has a unique selling point that means that we must be pioneers in the vanguard of the CCS movement. This USP—what unites me in my Waveney constituency in East Anglia with the hon. Members from Scotland and the north-east—is the North sea, the United Kingdom continental shelf, where we have our own large safe and secure CO₂ storage vessel offshore in the rocks in this country’s territorial waters. As a result of the development of the oil and gas industry in the North sea over the past 50 years, the UK has developed an enormous expertise of experience that we can harness to deliver carbon capture and storage.

Yesterday the Government published their Green Paper, “Building our Industrial Strategy”. CCS and implementing the recommendations of the Oxburgh report fit well with the Government’s ambitions and directions of travel. When I go through the pillars underpinning the industrial strategy, CCS ticks all 10 boxes. If the Government accept the six Oxburgh recommendations, they will invest in science, research and particularly innovation. Investing in CCS goes hand in hand with developing skills, boosting science, technology, engineering and maths skills, and raising school levels and lagging areas. I could go through all 10, but I sense my time is pressing, Mr Betts, so I will cut to the chase—to the final pillar of creating the right institutions to bring together sectors and places.

The strategy states:

“We will consider the best structures to support people, industries and places.”

That is a ringing endorsement for the six Oxburgh report recommendations.

On that note, I will conclude. Lord Oxburgh has provided the right framework for an exciting new industry and now is the right time to invest in CCS.

3.11 pm

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) on securing this debate. His contribution was really good, technically sound and showed his background in the subject.

First, let me state that carbon capture and storage is an absolutely necessary component of the solution to our energy trilemma. It offers the opportunity to meet our emissions targets, provide energy security and take advantage of the natural resources and high-level skills of our nation. It is necessary because any conceivable energy future will require the burning of fossil fuels.

I encourage anyone who doubts the significant and important role that hydrocarbons will continue to play in meeting the UK’s energy needs to read Lord Oxburgh’s report. He concludes that to meet our heating needs we must continue to rely on natural gas, produce huge quantities of hydrogen gas or supply heat through electrification, which in turn would require new fossil fuel power stations. Any of those paths will produce large amounts of CO₂ and will therefore require effective carbon capture technology to meet our environmental targets.

The main challenge in developing such essential technology is achieving value for money. As the recent National Audit Office report found, the Government’s carbon capture technology competitions did not offer that. I hope, however, that the Government accept that the technology is still necessary to meet our environmental targets and will commit to creating a more cost-effective approach to building the technology in the UK, rather than letting CCS innovation, research and expertise leave the UK and create jobs, investment and opportunities elsewhere—that the Government are willing to take on some of the risks of developing the new industry in order to reap the economic and environmental benefits down the line.

I hope that in designing a new CCS competition, the Minister will take on board the NAO report’s findings to improve clarity on the risks carried by projects and on the financing the Government are willing to commit to, as well as draw on the lessons learned through stakeholders. I also hope they will look closely at the work done by the Carbon Capture & Storage Association, which points to circumstances under which CCS technology can offer value for money—namely, the strike price of £85 per MWh recommended by the Lord Oxburgh report—from the start.

I am interested to hear what other options the Minister has considered for implementing CCS, such as the possibility of doing so as part of a business model that relies on utilising indigenous sources of hydrocarbons, such as gasified coal. In short, I hope that the Government continue to explore options for supporting this vital technology. I know there are Members from all parties who would support them in doing so.

Finally, I want to point to areas where carbon capture technology is already proving cost-effective. Carbon capture and utilisation technology captures CO₂ produced
by manufacturing plants or smaller generators and uses that CO$_2$ to produce highly marketable green products. A British company, Carbon Clean Solutions, currently leads the world in this technology and, as I am sure the Minister is aware, has recently successfully implemented CCU technology on a commercial basis in Tuticorin, India. Carbon Clean Solutions has successfully managed to take the CO$_2$ produced by a chemical plant and produced soda ash, which in turn can be used to make glass, paper and a range of other products. The fact that the soda ash produced is green means it can be sold on at a premium to companies attempting to reduce their environmental footprint.

It seems bizarre that such technology, developed by a British company in co-operation with British universities and in part funded by grants from the British Government, has not been helped to take root in Britain. Although I understand that the technology does not operate on nearly the same scale or offer the same environmental impact as larger CCS projects, it also has advantages. For example, the smaller scale of the project means a smaller risk for investors. Indeed, Carbon Clean Solutions believes it requires only a guarantee on initial investment to get started in Britain, and that in turn offers the Government the opportunity to learn lessons in carbon capture technology that can then be fed into the development of larger projects.

Although the nationwide impact of CCU technology may be small, such technology could help our energy-intensive industries to reduce their emissions and give them a competitive edge. Furthermore, much of the infrastructure needed for CCU is already in place in former and current industrial areas such as Teesside. If we were to look at this project in combination with decarbonising our economy by using the gas grid, we would see a multitude of potential options for the existing energy-intensive industries to take hold of and entrench their position and also develop new green industry. That is a particular advantage, given that the NAO report highlights the “lack of supporting infrastructure” as a major barrier to investment in larger CCS projects.

Electrification obviously implies a vast amount of capitalisation—in the trillions—and a lot of capital to begin to even touch the sides of electrifying our transport, but we are the one nation in the world that has a unique gas grid that we could utilise in combination with hydrogen gas or shale gas, and using blends within the gas grid to overcome those obstacles.

Will the Minister meet me and Mr Ani Sharma, the chief executive officer of Carbon Clean Solutions, to discuss the potential of his company’s technology and how the Government can help CCU technology to mirror its commercial success in India closer to home? Carbon capture and utilisation may not have the environmental impact that successful large CCS projects would, but it can act as a stepping stone to achieving those vital CCS projects that are the only way we will be able to move towards a decarbonised energy sector.

3.17 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) on securing this debate. The Government U-turns he outlined at the beginning, and current Government policy positions, suggest that they do not know their backside from their elbow. That is demonstrated not only by the shambolic handling of the CCS competition, but right across the energy sector. It is clear that there is not a coherent strategy in place that will deliver long-term decarbonisation targets, let alone a cost-efficient strategy.

The NAO report of the CCS competition lays bare that the Treasury and the then Department of Energy and Climate Change were not working together. It also shows that all Government Departments are always at the mercy of a Chancellor who is ideologically driven to cut costs and taxes and look for short-term hits. Spending more than £100 million on design costs and then cancelling the competition beggars belief. It is also astounding that, in the NAO report on the CCS competition, one of the two designs that had been progressed was not even compliant with competition rules, so a lot of money was spent for a non-compliant design. The Peterhead CCS scheme was compliant, but instead of going on and developing that and protecting jobs in the north-east, the UK Government chose to walk away. Unfortunately, to date they have walked away with nothing to show for our expenditure.

I accept that, at the moment, CCS is not a complete silver bullet. It is a developing technology and there are some possible risks associated with the long-term storage of the carbon dioxide. Equally, there are plants up and running in North America, and in terms of the financial risks, that is something I urge the Government to look at. They have already underwritten the Thames tideway tunnel to the value of nearly £5 billion at today’s prices. They also offered to underwrite £2 billion-worth of bonds for the Hinkley Point C project, not to mention the contract for difference guarantees that have been given for Hinkley, which in an NAO report last year had an upper estimate of nearly £30 billion, which is truly astronomical.

The Treasury, which spiked the CCS proposals, had no qualms about Hinkley, yet while CCS is a developing technology, so is the European pressurised reactor system proposed for Hinkley—its track record so far is that it has not been demonstrated to work, and costs continue to rise. The Hinkley strike price agreed in 2012 is the equivalent of £100 per MWh at 2015 prices, so it is pretty much along the lines of what is being talked about for CCS. The only difference is that Hinkley is a 35-year long-term deal, whereas for other low-carbon technologies we are looking at 15-year CfD prices.

If the Government are serious about decarbonisation and compliance with the fifth carbon budget, they need seriously to consider a number of energy sectors. First, they need to revisit the pulling of the renewables obligation funding, which again disproportionately affected Scotland. At the same time, they should look at the need for island-based turbines to be classed as offshore rather than onshore. They should be reviewing the rush for nuclear reactors and mini-reactors, which are also unproven, and should change the regulations that are prohibiting the development of electricity storage. The National Infrastructure Commission has estimated that lithium ion batteries now cost only 7% of their estimated 1990 cost. Pumped hydro storage is a proven technology,
but Government regulations are limiting its expansion. I suggest reviewing the dash to frack if we are serious about decarbonisation.

It is a fact that investment in renewables is set to drop by 95% between 2017 and 2020 owing to Government policy, so it is no surprise that, in the Ernst & Young index on renewable energy attractiveness, the UK slipped from a ranking of seventh in 2014 to 14th by October 2016. Together with the possible sale of the UK Green Investment Bank to an overseas asset stripper, it is clear that the wrong message is going out to those who might invest in green energy. Even when it comes to tree planting, England achieved only a tenth of Scotland’s record in 2016; yet it is the Scottish National party Government who have increased their planting target. As to house building, approximately three in four houses built in Scotland are timber framed; that is closer to being carbon neutral and is more energy efficient. Only 9% of homes built in England in 2015 were timber framed, yet the Government White Paper on housing is unlikely to address that.

In conclusion, the Government must rethink their entire decarbonisation strategy, considering it across a number of Departments. The view of the Committee on Climate Change was that CCS has the potential to almost halve the cost of meeting the 2050 target for carbon dioxide reduction. It could support some remaining indigenous coal extraction in places such as my constituency. However, it also needs to be applied to gas electricity generation, given the role that that will play. In the National Needs Assessment report launched at the end of last year, it was estimated that CCS could reduce CO₂ emissions by 40% by 2015, but there was a stress on the need for Government support. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury attended the launch of the report, so I hope the Government reflect on the findings. It strikes me that the Government have found £8.5 billion for corporation tax cuts, and £5 billion of capital gains tax and inheritance tax giveaways. It is time to plan for our future and give us all a green inheritance to look forward to.

3.23 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) on introducing the debate. I suspect he will quickly find that we are not on the same side, but it is important, especially in the week when the Government have launched their industrial strategy, to have serious debates in the House on current and future energy policy. Of course, no industrial strategy can sit in isolation from a realistic energy strategy.

The first point of contention I want to make is that we seem uncritically to have accepted the mantra that we must decarbonise energy production. I know people say we have the Paris agreement, climate change obligations and so on, but we also need to look behind the mantra to see what the term means and has meant, and how it currently affects households, industry and business in the United Kingdom. The old Department of Energy and Climate Change estimated that to decarbonise the electricity and energy industries effectively by 2040, we needed 40,000 offshore and 20,000 onshore wind turbines and a new fleet of nuclear power stations, and that all coal and gas use would have to be subject to carbon capture and storage. That would happen at enormous cost, and we have already seen the impact on fuel poverty.

According to the Scottish household survey, there was a 25% increase in the number of households in fuel poverty in Scotland between 2011 and 2013. In Northern Ireland, there was an increase of nearly 100%. Why? Fuel bills go up because we have decided we want to produce energy more expensively. That is the first thing we need to realise in the debate. Decarbonisation means significant costs to the economy. Of course, this is at a time when we are talking about becoming more globally competitive, and when China and India, which signed the Paris agreement, tell us that every year they will increase their CO₂ by the amount of our total CO₂ emissions.

Tom Blenkinsop: I understand the hon. Gentleman’s frustration, but I see what we are doing as investment. Renewables, whether photovoltaic or wind-generated energy, have the capacity to be used, for example, in the creation of hydrogen gas. There is a future in which we could create gas at zero cost, with surplus renewable electricity for the consumer. In transport network terms, the ability to spread that around the country is vast. I see it as an investment that is expensive at the moment, but whose rewards we will reap if we stick to those commitments.

Sammy Wilson: Of course the people who pay for that expensive investment are the taxpayers, because there is less money for other public services; electricity consumers; and workers who lose jobs in the industries that can no longer compete.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sammy Wilson: No. I only have seven minutes and I do not want to rule out my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), or I will get in his bad books.

My second point is on the action required to do what is envisaged. As has been mentioned, part of the infrastructure is in place, and we may well be able to use redundant oil pipelines, but they must be linked to power stations, which must be where the centres of population are. I am fairly sure that we do not want to build power stations where most pipelines come ashore, unless we mean to build a huge infrastructure to distribute the power. Environmentalists have not cottoned on to the point that the plan is like fracking in reverse. Instead of fracking to get gas out of the ground, we will pump gas into the reservoirs, with all the same implications, unless we mean to build a huge infrastructure to distribute the power. Environmentalists have not cottoned on to the point that the plan is like fracking in reverse. Instead of fracking to get gas out of the ground, we will pump gas into the reservoirs, with all the same implications, according to environmentalists, for stability and leakage.

We in Northern Ireland are going through a constitutional crisis because of a botched energy scheme. I do not think that that warranted the outcome, but nevertheless we are living with it. I want to hear from the Minister about four things related to that. First, what will the cost be? Secondly, if there are costs involved, who pays them? Thirdly, what about the incentive structures? It is not lost on anybody that even some producers of traditional energy are now running after all of these green schemes. Why? Because the lucrative incentives increase their profits and fill their coffers—we saw that with the scheme in Northern Ireland. Fourthly, what kind of regulatory framework will be put in place?

The Government are right not to go ahead with the second exercise until they are sure of the answers to those questions. Even more fundamentally, they must ask whether the impact of decarbonising the economy on consumers, workers, industry and investment is worth it.
Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) on raising the issue. I may have a slightly different opinion from my dear friend and colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson).

Sammy Wilson: Maybe I should not have given my hon. Friend the time.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend may regret it, but it will not diminish our friendship in any way whatever. It is good to have a broad church of opinion within our party.

I will pose some questions because it is important to do so. Environmental issues are of great importance, so it is essential that our strategy is effective. I say to the Minister that I am not sure that we have managed to achieve all we could or should thus far. That is the question many have posed, including the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) during his introduction.

It is opportune that we are having the debate on the back of the industrial strategy Green Paper announced by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy yesterday. Many believe that the Department has not achieved value for money for its £100 million spend on the second competition for Government financial support for carbon capture and storage. Other hon. Members have said that there must be an investment to spend on the second competition for Government financial support. We have not seen value for money for its £100 million with no further resolutions and only lessons learned, as he said. If we have that information, let us see how we can use it to further the project.

There are currently no examples of large-scale CCS projects in the UK, and only 16 operational projects worldwide. BEIS should maximize its expertise for future CCS strategies and put into practice what it has learned—in other words, the evidence should be used for the betterment of delivering such projects. If and when CCS projects are self-sustaining and economically viable, we will see clean electricity from renewable sources, which we wish to see and are committed to trying to achieve. However, the sticking point is in the phrase “if and when”, meaning we could achieve those things “if and when” the Government and BEIS find a happy medium and the in-between. Hon. Members are often tasked with finding a balanced in-between or the correct way forward.

The substantial future benefit of the CCS process is to avoid the release of CO₂, as several hon. Members have indicated. However, it is clear that there are serious problems and critical issues with such projects that we cannot ignore. As I have discussed, there are no large-scale examples of long-term storage projects in the UK, despite a series of UK Government and EU initiatives aimed at incentivising their development. It has been argued that CCS technology is too expensive to be commercially viable for private developers without Government support in the shape of a strike price. CCS strategies and put into practice the lessons it has learned, and hopefully valuable commercial knowledge and technical understanding of how to deploy the competition projects will have been gained, as he said. If we have that information, let us see how we can use it to further the project.

The Minister will take note of my hon. Friend’s comments and is sure will respond later.

We have seen not one but two failed voyages into the unknown of CCS projects, for which we have spent £168 million with no further resolutions and only lessons learned. We do not want this to be like the Mary Celeste—setting sail, getting nowhere and disappearing. It is my understanding that CCS is a process to avoid the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and that it has the potential to help to meet the UK’s target for a reduction of CO₂ emissions in both the power and industrial sectors, which is commendable. We have pledged to cut 1991-level emissions by 57% by 2030. While that is a great goal, how will we achieve it? Hon. Members have outlined potential job creation and the opportunities that will come if it is done in the right way. To achieve the goal is most certainly a challenge, given the untried nature of the technology.

Philip Boswell: I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the technology is truly tried and tested. The curious scheme in Northern Ireland aside, I would urge both hon. Members from Northern Ireland, who are my friends, to read the Oxburgh report and contrast the less than £85 per KWh that is achievable under this system with the Hinkley Point strike price of £92.50. Furthermore, the networks already exist. That is the attraction of having an existing infrastructure.

Jim Shannon: I will respond to the hon. Gentleman’s intervention during my comments. The future costs for the duration of the CCS project are unknown, and perhaps the figures do not add up on all of the lines.

Two projects that were shortlisted for the CCS process both failed to meet the proposal goals. The work done centrally by the Department in sustaining negotiations for the second competition for the project with its preferred bidders must be noted—a process is in place. The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill has clearly outlined some of the evidence, and I will pose some questions on that. I can clearly say that I support the principle of what we are trying to achieve, but I wonder whether it can be achieved by that process. There are lessons to be learned, and hopefully valuable commercial knowledge and technical understanding of how to deploy the competition projects will have been gained, as he said. If we have that information, let us see how we can use it to further the project.

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Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) on both securing the debate and leading it in such an informed and passionate way. He set out the key issues around CCS, the history and, more importantly, the way forward.

I will also focus more on the way forward, but it is beholden upon us to look back slightly. The cancellation of the £1 billion competition that would have benefited the White Rose project and the project at Peterhead was deeply regrettable, in respect of both the way it was done—the announcement was snuck out after the autumn statement with little or no forewarning to the companies involved—and, as the National Audit Office report shows, the colossal waste of money.

At the time, I said it was clear that the Government knew the cost of everything but the value of nothing: the cost was £100 million to save £1 billion or £900 million. However, as we have heard multiple sources suggest, delays to the project could cost consumers £1 billion to £2 billion per year in the 2020s, and up to £4 billion to £5 billion per year in the 2040s. Colossal amounts of money could have been saved; if we do not act now, that will be lost through the additional costs that consumers will have to bear.

With the honourable exception of the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), most of us accept, although not unquestioningly, the requirement to decarbonise our energy system—that is, “energy” in its widest sense. We often focus purely on electricity, but as some hon. Members have mentioned, there are many cross-synergies among the different forms of energy. That is why carbon capture should be considered.

May I place on the record my commendation for the Oxburgh committee report—those who served on the committee and the chair in particular? It is an excellent report and, as we have heard from those who did serve, the work was done in a way that did not prejudice the outcome. The report was an open, honest and thorough analysis of the costs and benefits that CCS could bring, but it also left on the table the option of not progressing. It was produced in September 2016. As far as I am aware, the Government have yet to offer much in the way of a response. I hope that we will hear from the Government on how they will take this issue seriously.

The key point is that, as the hon. Member for Waveney said, this features across all the key aspects of the industrial strategy and all the areas where we are struggling or perhaps are not doing as much as we can in terms of decarbonisation. We can look at heat, transport or electricity in isolation. We can look in isolation at what we do with energy-intensive industrial producers. Alternatively, we can look at those things in the round. If we look at them in the round and see how we can apply carbon capture to those technologies, we will find a much more affordable and viable way of decarbonising. Finding those synergies, finding the areas of expertise and developing the companies that have the knowledge to do this provides us with a real opportunity.

How do we go about doing that? The Oxburgh report and its various recommendations are the blueprint. The key take-away from that for me was that what we are discussing can be done and can be done affordably. It highlighted some of the failings of the previous approaches in basically outsourcing the risk entirely to those bidding into the competition. Breaking it up and allowing different companies, with different expertise, to join in the process in the area to which they are best suited will allow costs to be reduced, to an extent where we could see a contract for difference price of £85 per MWh, which is competitive with other forms of production.

In some ways, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) suggested, CCS could be more established and cheaper than what we are pursuing at Hinkley. That shows the urgent requirement for the technology to be included in the Government’s industrial strategy and emissions reduction plan; if we do not do that now, it will, as we have heard, get more expensive.

I have been in many a debate with the hon. Member for East Antrim in which his views on this issue have been expressed. I disagree with him from an ideological point of view, but also from a practical point of view. Yes, there are costs in relation to the infrastructure that will be required to decarbonise our power system, but to suggest that there are no costs from continuing to do what we are doing is simply not correct.
Dr Poulter: Is not there also a case in respect of fuel poverty? Improving insulation and taking other demand-side measures to reduce the demand for electricity is a very good thing in which to invest. It decarbonises, but it also saves people, particularly those on fixed incomes, money on their heating bills.

Callum McCaig: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct: the cheapest fuel that we will ever use is the fuel that we do not use at all. Investing in such measures will save money and reduce fuel poverty. The coal-fired power stations to which the hon. Member for East Antrim made reference will be coming off the system anyway. They will have to be replaced, and they will be replaced by something that will not come free. It will be expensive, but it can be expensive in a way that is good for the environment and good for our industrial base, or it can be expensive in terms of its fuel and its production and the cost to the environment.

There are two ways to go about this. We can be at the front of the queue; we can be a leader and we can have first-mover advantage. That protects our business, allows us to export and allows us to save money for our consumers and industrial producers. I hope that the Minister and the Government will take that course and back CCS for the long-term future of the UK and our energy industries.

3.47 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I was going to say that the debate had been characterised by a mighty cross-party alliance in favour of CCS, which I heartily concur with, but obviously there is this afternoon one exception to that. I want briefly to address that exception: the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson).

The issue is basically about the imperative to decarbonise our energy supplies, and it is an unashamed imperative because we know that climate change is real and that, if we do not do anything about it, that will be disastrous overall, for us all. Indeed, we can go back, in terms of alternative costings, to the Stern report. Stern said that doing nothing on climate change would probably consume 5% of our GDP, whereas doing something about it might consume 1% of our GDP. It is a very substantial investment for the future and rather a good bargain overall, in terms of what we might put in and what we might get out.

Of course, the same applies, in the context of the energy sector, to CCS. The question is really how we decarbonise our energy supplies, using different potential scenarios, and what would happen if we did not take CCS into account as far as decarbonising our energy supplies was concerned. It is not that we cannot, but it is about the relative costs of doing that with different technologies. It is not me saying this: it is the Committee on Climate Change in setting out its scenarios for the fifth carbon budget, which, of course, the Government have now adopted as a way forward over the next period.

We have basically adopted a scenario for energy decarbonisation that has at its centre, and as part of that fifth carbon budget, that energy emissions should be below 100 grams of CO₂ per kWh by about 2030. The Committee on Climate Change says that the investments we have at the moment give us an emissions intensity of about 250 grams of CO₂ per kWh. If we close remaining coal-fired power stations and replace them with gas-fired generation in the short term, that would take emissions marginally further down to 190 grams of CO₂ per kWh.

Of course, if all the existing nuclear power stations were also replaced by gas, and gas met new demand subsequently, emissions intensities would rise to over 300 grams of CO₂ per kWh by 2030. The Committee on Climate Change goes on to say:

“Commercialisation programmes for CCS and offshore wind alongside lowest-cost investments in the 2020s in a mix of new nuclear, onshore wind, solar and offshore wind rather than expanding gas generation would bring emissions intensity down to below 100 gCO₂/kWh.”

That is a very straightforward and exact road map for where we need to go in terms of energy decarbonisation.

Of course, if we did not have CCS in that scenario, we would have to do a lot of different things to replace what CCS would have done by physically taking the carbon dioxide out of the process and putting it into the ground. We would have to do something else to take that carbon dioxide out of the process. That could be a lot of additional energy efficiency or it could be a lot of new, different low-carbon plant.

We come to the question of what the alternative costs might be if we did not have CCS in the process. Indeed, the NAO report on the carbon capture and storage pilots, which hon. Members have mentioned this afternoon, clearly sets out that meeting the 2050 target for decarbonisation of our whole system, without CCS, would “cost up to £30 billion more in the power sector alone”.

Hon. Members have mentioned what that means in terms of an annual basis, but that is the overall cost. Interestingly, the NAO cites where that particular figure comes from: of course, it came from the Department of Energy and Climate Change in 2015.

We are clear about the ends, but we are not currently clear about the means. That is where the scandalous cancellation of the two pilot projects—which, by the way, had already been included in those Committee on Climate Change estimates I just mentioned, so we are even further back from the starting line than we would otherwise have been—puts us in terms of having, at the moment, the possibility of ends.

We have agreed the fifth carbon budget. The Government are due to produce their low-carbon plan some day soon; I think it was supposed to be last year and then it was supposed to be this spring, but I see from the industrial strategy announcement yesterday that the target is now some time in 2017. I am interested to know from the Minister whether that low-carbon plan is going to be published in the early part of 2017, as I hope. If it is, I would be extremely surprised if it included no mention of the key role CCS will have to play in making that plan a reality. That is the truth of the matter: without CCS, it is very difficult to envisage a lot of the systems that we talk about in terms of low-carbon energy as a whole—not just low-carbon electricity—working very well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) mentioned, among other things, the possible role that hydrogen might play in the future heat economy. Hydrogen can be made by electrolysis of spare electricity but it is more likely that, during the earlier period, it is going to be
made using existing infrastructure by steam methane reformation. That gives us a potent fuel in terms of sorting out the decarbonisation of our heat structures, and possibly the substantial decarbonisation of our transport structures, but CO<sub>2</sub> is a by-product that needs sequestering in the process, otherwise it is not low-carbon at all.

The essential role that carbon capture and storage will play across the board in our decarbonised, low-carbon energy economy is without question. The question is: what do we do about it? We have heard mention this afternoon of the estimable Oxburgh report, which was essentially commissioned by Government after the closing down of the pilot schemes. Without wishing to repeat some of the details of the Oxburgh report that have been mentioned this afternoon, I would say that the report does not talk about pilots and does not talk about ways of trying to introduce bits of CCS here and there. It talks about a very practical route forward, which is costed and relatively low-cost, for what Government need to do—exactly in line with what we think we are doing at the moment about industrial strategy and how we move that forward—to make carbon capture and storage a part of our energy landscape over the next period.

I commend anybody who has not read that report to look at exactly what it says. That is exactly what it does: it sets out how we move forward over the next period to integrate carbon capture and storage with various measures as part of our processes. I ask the Minister whether the Government are committed to the Oxburgh report in the near future. If they do intend to respond, what form is that response likely to take? I hope that when the Government decide to respond, they respond in a very positive way because that is what we need right now. Undoubtedly, we need to decarbonise radically. Undoubtedly, carbon capture and storage has to be a part of that decarbonisation. Setting out a way forward for making carbon capture and storage a reality in our energy firmament is, it seems to me, a very high priority for Government at the moment.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I thank all hon. Members for being so co-operative with the time available to make sure that we got everyone in and they had a full opportunity to contribute. I now call the Minister.

3.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I absolutely welcome this debate and congratulate the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) on securing it and on his very interesting opening remarks. The hon. Gentleman is a strong proponent of carbon capture and storage—he has professional experience and expertise—and this has been a valuable discussion.

I will make some general statements before responding specifically to the concerns raised. We have not got much time, so I will have to move relatively quickly. As I am sure the House understands, the Government remain very committed to tackling climate change, and remain very committed to the Climate Change Act 2008 and the implications it has and will have for the coming decades. Climate change remains one of the most serious long-term risks to our economic and national security.

As a country, we have made great progress towards our goal. Indications are that UK emissions in 2015 were 38% lower than in 1990, and 4% below those in the year before. It is appropriate to recognise that, as well as to look ahead to the future to the emissions reduction plan, which we will publish in due course. I am happy to respond to the question from the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead). My colleague the Minister for Climate Change and Industry mentioned to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee that that would be in the first quarter. I can do no better than echo his words.

As a Government, we remain committed to exploring all technologies that can support the process of decarbonisation, including carbon capture and storage. As has been recognised today, CCS has a wide range of potential applications in which it could contribute to the reduction of carbon in our environment. Those include not merely decarbonising heating and transport, but providing a pathway for low-carbon hydrogen and producing negative emissions when biomass is combined with CCS in power generation. CCS offers a wide array of potential strategic benefits. It has been rightly noted that it has the potential to help energy-intensive industries in this country to remain competitive.

I understand some of the concerns that were raised about the cancellation of the project last year. The project was absolutely not without benefits and, as the Committee recognised, there had been investments in front-end engineering and design. It was an ambitious scheme. Everyone in the Chamber believes that the Government should be ambitious in their expectations for climate change improvement and carbon reduction, so I think it is odd to criticise the Government’s ambition, when they have sought to be precisely that.

The Government absolutely believe that CCS has a potential role in long-term decarbonisation, but it must be affordable. It is worth noting that we are not by any means the only country seeking to crack CCS from a cost perspective. Projects have been deployed, particularly in north America. However, the United States, Canada and Norway have all cancelled projects, so we are taking the time to look hard at CCS to see whether we can find a cost-effective pathway.

That does not mean we have not been investing in the meantime. As colleagues know, we have made a range of investments across the piece, including in Carbon Clean Solutions, which the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) mentioned—I would be delighted to meet him when officials can set it up—and in storage appraisal projects in the Northern Irish seas and the Summit Power CCS project at Grangemouth.

The Government continue to be very active. We commission research and provide support for innovation, and we remain engaged and seek to continue working with and learning from others, such as the United States, Canada and Norway. The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill mentioned the Toshiba CCS plant in Texas. Officials have already met the promoters of that scheme and are contemplating visiting it when it is up and running to learn more as part of our overall picture. We remain part of a series of international initiatives designed to understand CCS better, and to learn from and deploy it as effectively as possible.
Therefore, we have not closed the door, by any means. Indeed, Lord Oxburgh was asked to set up and lead his parliamentary advisory group—I very much recognise the contributions made by Members in the Chamber towards it—precisely because we have not closed the door to CCS but are looking to use it, if possible, affordably and effectively. I put on record my thanks to Lord Oxburgh and the group’s members for their work.

On the specific issues raised by colleagues in the debate, I was invited by the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill, who opened in the debate, to consider CCS as part of the industrial strategy. As I hope has been understood, we absolutely are doing that and will continue to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), who is no longer in his place, asked whether we, as a country, would be affected by Brexit in this regard. I point out that, as a country, we are a signatory to the Paris agreement independently of the EU as well as through it, and it is therefore far from clear that Brexit will make a difference.

The hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) is right that we need to get the EU emissions trading system correct. My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), in a very eloquent speech about the offshore potential for the UK continental shelf, said that we must be pioneers in CCS, but I slightly disagree with him on that point. There is an honourable place for us as an early mover, but not necessarily a first mover, in CCS. Such people often reap the benefits in technology and cost without taking a lot of the additional risks. That is a perfectly honourable position for this country to be in.

Hon. Members spoke about the Oxburgh report. I point out to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) to work in the same page, and I am sure the application from the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) to work for the Trump Administration will be successful.

Although the Minister understands that the cost of developing CCS is an existing issue, I am sure he recognises that the cost of not developing and including it will be greater—that is well articulated in the report. None the less, he has undertaken to keep to climate change commitments, to publish the Government plan in quarter one of 2017, to publish details about decarbonisation across all sectors including CCS, and to consider the Toshiba option, which is to be highly commended. I very much look forward to developments in the near future.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate will finish at 10 minutes past 4. It is my loss that I have missed most of it, but I need not worry, because Philip Boswell is going to sum the whole thing up in the few minutes remaining.

4.6 pm

Philip Boswell: I am delighted to see such excellent and almost comprehensive cross-party support for the inclusion of CCS in the Government’s commendable industrial strategy doctrine. Clearly, we are mostly on the same page, and I am sure the application from the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) to work for the Trump Administration will be successful.

Let me quickly wind up my remarks in the time that remains. The Government are actively interested in and engaged with the question of CCS. I very much thank hon. Friends and hon. Members for their wide-ranging and almost comprehensive cross-party support for the inclusion of CCS in the Government’s commendable industrial strategy doctrine.

Callum McCaig rose—

Jesse Norman: I am sorry, I cannot take interventions because I am really short of time, but I hope I have at least addressed the core point the hon. Gentleman made.

Let us be clear: the Committee on Climate Change seems to be contemplating a contribution on CCS from the contributions to a fascinating debate. This is not an easy issue to crack, but we are focused. The Government will set out our approach in due course and use the opportunity offered by the debate to further inform our thinking.

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I am delighted to see Lord Oxburgh in attendance and thank all hon. Members for their contributions. Finally, I thank you, Mr Hollobone, and all the staff who enabled the debate to take place.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK decarbonisation and carbon capture and storage.
Leaving the EU: Funding for Northern Ireland

4.8 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of the UK exiting the EU on EU funding for Northern Ireland.

I am very pleased to have secured this debate, Mr Hollobone. I welcome the fact that the Minister is here to respond on behalf of the Northern Ireland Office and that the shadow spokesperson, the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), is here. This is a momentous day in the history of the European Union; the declaration made—I am very glad to say—by the Supreme Court will enable parliamentary sovereignty to reign on this issue. That shows how important Parliament is in this matter.

I am here today to represent the majority of voters in South Down—67%—who voted to remain within the European Union, and the majority of voters in Northern Ireland—56%—who voted to remain. They do not want to see our local economy sacrificed to appease the anti-EU agendas of those with no connection to or no interest in Northern Ireland. I also rise to correct the glib “it’ll be all right on the night” hand-waving that some Ministers have offered when asked about the plan for Northern Ireland post-Brexit.

I mean no disrespect to the Minister responding to this debate when I say that some other Ministers, particularly from the Treasury, seem to have been so excited by the prospect of leaving the EU that they have neglected to familiarise themselves with the complex realities now facing the island of Ireland as a result of Brexit. I hope that highlighting the unique importance of EU funding to Northern Ireland will sharpen the Government’s thinking about precisely what their negotiating goals for Northern Ireland should be. I believe it to be of particular importance following the failure of Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist party to maintain an Executive who can represent Northern Ireland’s needs to the Prime Minister directly.

The European Union has been responsible for billions in investment in Northern Ireland over the past two decades—well in excess of what it would have received from ordinary Barnett formula consequentials. In the spirit of not re-fighting the referendum, I will not inundate those here with statistics on how much money the EU has provided over the years, although there are many. However, in the east border region alone, where my constituency is located, through Interreg V A, the EU is currently sponsoring projects to the value of £43.4 million, including £9.7 million for protected habitats and £19.4 million to agri-environment-climate measures and €194 million to support areas facing natural constraints.

Farmers Union has described as essential. Within Northern Ireland, the Ulster Farmers Union has supported it. I do not necessarily agree. Money is pooled. It is about the pooling of sovereignty and moneys in the European Union, so it involves money from other European Union countries. I caution Members that there is absolutely no guarantee that we will get equivalent funding from the Treasury post-2020. Unfortunately, the Chancellor’s assurance that all EU funding will be guaranteed during the Brexit process is of little reassurance to the people of Northern Ireland.

Ms Ritchie: I do not agree with that contention. The hon. Gentleman should take on board that there was considerable cross-border funding which is what I was referring to when speaking about PEACE funding and Interreg funding. As the name implies, PEACE funding comes from a special fund established at the European level to assist Northern Ireland with the legacy of the troubles. In fact, if I cast my memory back, the former Member for Foyle, John Hume, along with Dr Paisley and Mr Nicholson, a current MEP for Northern Ireland, came together with Jacques Delors to establish the PEACE funds for Northern Ireland.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): It is good to hear the hon. Lady raising this debate, but does she agree that a lot of funding from Europe that will stop in 2020 helps us on cross-border issues that bring communities together, whether they involve Donegal working with Londonderry or Newry down on the border? It is absolutely vital to the peace process.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention. I have mentioned the work of the east border region, of which South Down and its constituency council are part. Like other cross-border bodies, such as the Irish Central Border Area Network, those bodies bring people from north and south to work together effectively according to the issues that unite them rather than those that divide them. EU funding has been vital to that work.

I will make a little progress. I know that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), who is sitting beside me, is anxious to intervene, but I will let him do so by and by. PEACE funding has helped support 6,000 victims and survivors through the Victims and Survivors Service. It has helped involve 350 schools in integrating education, meaning that 144,000 students and 2,100 teachers have participated in classrooms that mix children from nationalist and Unionist backgrounds. It helps fund work essential to building a truly shared society in Northern Ireland.

As an MP for a primarily rural constituency, I cannot fail to mention the £283 million a year that the EU has provided to our agricultural sector, which the Ulster Farmers Union has described as essential. Within Northern Ireland, EU rural development programmes have allocated £194 million to agri-environment-climate measures and £79 million to support areas facing natural constraints. All that has been put at risk by Brexit and those who supported it.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim)(DUP): Will the hon. Lady confirm for the House that she fully understands that all the largesse being spoken about—I welcome that investment in Northern Ireland—is UK taxpayer money anyway?

Ms Ritchie: I do not necessarily agree. Money is pooled. It is about the pooling of sovereignty and moneys in the European Union, so it involves money from other European Union countries. I caution Members that there is absolutely no guarantee that we will get equivalent funding from the Treasury post-2020.
First, we must remember that that assurance is merely political and could be reversed with a simple press release from No. 10. Nor would it be the first financial promise broken in the wake of Brexit. We all remember those red buses that said “£350 million for the NHS”, which disappeared like snow off the ditches before the final votes were even tallied. The fundamental issue for Northern Ireland is that the promise to match EU funding is grounded in the premise that we can break away from our important trading partners without hurting our already fragile economy.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Does the hon. Lady not also recognise that a fundamental economic issue for Northern Ireland is rebalancing the economy away from the public sector? Brexit provides an opportunity for a more outward-looking export-based economy and will help rebalance it.

Ms Ritchie: Although I agree that we need to rebalance the economy in Northern Ireland, I do not think that it is valid to argue that we should do so by denying our access to 27 European countries’ important export markets, particularly at a time when it is difficult to secure export markets in south-east Asia.

I will not mince words or shy away from predicting the obvious: post-Brexit, the British Government will simply not be able to carry on as if it were business as usual. Despite the promises of the leave campaign, the only certainty that I foresee in the years post-Brexit is the obvious: post-Brexit, the British Government will simply not be able to carry on as if it were business as usual. Despite the promises of the leave campaign, the only certainty that I foresee in the years post-Brexit is that the north-south bodies established after the Good Friday agreement was high-wired not because the Good Friday agreement was high-wired not only into human rights provisions but into membership and continued membership of the European Union. North-south bodies—I can think of Tourism Ireland, which is a special EU programme body, or Interrail Ireland—could be hollowed out as a result of Brexit, thereby dismantling not only those very bodies but the processes through which funding can be dispersed.

That funding comes directly from the EU. It has brought much wealth, much income and much upgrade to our local community sector and our local infrastructure; indeed, it has been vital in regard to infrastructure. The important point is that everybody works together, right across the community, for the benefit of all. That has been one of the compelling imperatives of the European Union’s involvement in the north of Ireland.

All these issues must be stabilised and joined up into a wider strategy that has buy-in from the Executive and society. Also, and again I say this with no disrespect to the capability of Front-Bench Ministers, no British Government—regardless of the size of their majority—will be able to provide Northern Ireland with the same level of political dependability as the EU can. Policy can change quickly here and commitments made by one Chancellor today can be scrapped by another Chancellor.

We need only observe how quickly British Government orthodoxy on the benefits of the EU has transformed into British Government orthodoxy on the UK’s need to enter the global market alone. We heard some of that today, in the statement by the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, and we have heard it for the last seven or eight months in this House. That kind of weathervane politics might be sustainable for a wealthy region such as the south-east, where a resilient private sector is well established and there is less difficulty in securing overseas investment, but in Northern Ireland, alas, both local businesses and international investors need to know that when a programme says it will run until 2020, in reality it will run until 2020.

In the last decade, foreign direct investment has been a great success story for Northern Ireland and our economy is beginning to reap the benefits. The Government should be under no illusions: that has been possible because of EU funding, its role in supporting many communities, and in many cases by the EU financially underwriting the process of regeneration. I have first-hand knowledge of that as a former Minister for Social Development with direct responsibility for urban regeneration, which relied on a complement of European funding. An example of that regeneration was the Peace bridge in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan).

A vote of confidence in Northern Ireland from the EU has led to votes of confidence from businesses across the world; be in no doubt about that. However, even if funding from the Treasury could match EU funding, both in scale and in reliability, there would still be questions about how the character of the projects being supported would change post-Brexit, because one of the stated aims of Interreg funding is to minimise the impact of economic and social borders within the European community. That is of huge importance to border areas such as South Down, which is in the county of Down, where decades of neglect by policy makers locked communities out of their fair share of economic progress.
I just need to look at what is happening with the southern relief road in Newry, which carries a lot of cross-border vehicular traffic from Warrenpoint port. That port is the fifth largest on the island of Ireland, one of the biggest ports in the UK and a prominent member of the British Ports Association. Warrenpoint exports and imports, and 46% of what it does comes from the south of Ireland and goes there. That process relies on European funding and so will the southern relief road, which is essential to get round the bottleneck of Newry, because that relief road is a Trans-European Transport Network.

A similar tourist project that will rely on European funding—indeed, it had already received European funding through Interreg—is the Narrow Water bridge project, an infrastructural project that brought communities in South Down and in County Louth together, as part of the peace dividend.

Outside the EU and with a British Government potentially relying on the votes of my Unionist colleagues to the right for support in the Commons, can we really be assured that future investment in the north will have the same ethos of cross-border integration? How will the increasing number of cross-border trade organisations continue to function? Does it mean the end for effective examples of co-operation, such as Tourism Ireland?

That is why the European Union is important, because it is a “non-aligned” source of funding in Northern Ireland.

EU funding weakens those who would further divide the people of the north and strengthens those working towards integration and reconciliation. That has clearly been the value of Interreg and PEACE funding. Perhaps it also explains why the political parties of Northern Ireland took the positions they did ahead of the referendum. Ultimately, given that none of the Government’s 12 stated Brexit goals are incompatible with retaining the EU’s funding for Northern Ireland, why risk jeopardising the north’s economic regeneration by shifting the tectonic plates that it is founded on?

Recognising Northern Ireland’s unique constitutional settlement and the importance of the EU to that settlement would not require the British Government to compromise any commitments on either Brexit or the Union. Rather, recognition of the north’s unique constitutional position would serve as fulfilment of the principle of consent—a principle that the British Government accepted, along with the Irish Government, when all the parties in the north, except the Democratic Unionist party, signed up to the Good Friday agreement.

I am an Irish nationalist and I make no apologies for that. However, even as an Irish nationalist, I do not wish to see questions of identity in the north being further clouded and troubled by the injection of a new European dimension. Indeed, if the Prime Minister really is as committed to the Union as she claims, one must question why her Government would make the Unionist community in the north choose between their link with Britain and their membership of the world’s largest economic bloc.

The British Government must engage urgently with the Irish Government on establishing an arrangement whereby the north can maintain some form of that associate special status membership of the European Union. Ideally, trilateral work would occur, involving both Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive—if we had one—before article 50 is triggered, so that we could go to the rest of the EU with a concrete plan to preserve Northern Ireland’s special status. Given the EU’s historic support for the peace process, and the pride that Brussels rightly takes in its role in helping to bring about peace, I can only predict that such a measured plan would be well received.

The arbitrary timetable imposed by the British Prime Minister may not allow enough time for such a plan to be developed before article 50 is triggered, especially in light of the DUP and Sinn Féin collapsing the Assembly. Nevertheless, that is no excuse for the trilateral work to be put off for any longer.

I do not expect the Minister who is here today to be able to give me extensive reassurances on this issue, and I am well aware of the “omertà through clichés” that has been imposed on Government Ministers as we approach negotiations with the EU. However, I hope that he can feed back to his colleagues within Government the concerns that I have expressed, answer some of my questions, and provide me with further details in writing.

I also hope that the Northern Ireland Office will be fully included in the internal discussions that the Government are conducting, both in the Joint Ministerial Committee and at other levels, so that the institutional memory and experience of that Department is heard in the somewhat more gung-ho meeting rooms of other Departments.

4.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Kris Hopkins): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) on securing this opportunity to discuss a really important issue. I have to say that I approach the debate in a slightly more positive tone that she has. As a remain campaigner, I understand much of the passion in what has been articulated, but the people of the United Kingdom have spoken, the Prime Minister has clearly articulated where we are going as far as Brexit is concerned, and it is for us to make the best of that opportunity.

I agree with many of the sentiments expressed today. European funding in Northern Ireland, particularly of the PEACE programmes, has played a vital part in creating a more cohesive society and prosperous economy—

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Will the Minister give way?

Kris Hopkins: I nearly got to the end of the second paragraph, but there you go.

Gavin Robinson: Because the peace process was mentioned regularly in the contributions of the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) and others, I ask the Minister to reflect in his remarks, given this week’s experience and the scandalous events in north Belfast with the shooting of a police officer, that we should be responsible in the fears we portray, and that we should be careful and mindful about creating such a drastic circumstance and saying that leaving the European Union will have a fundamental impact on the peace process. That would be detrimental. It would be fearful
and scaremongering and would not be in any of our interests if we wanted to make the best stab of leaving the EU.

Kris Hopkins: I think we all agree that what happened the other day was absolutely outrageous and hope that the police officer recovers quickly and fully. I do not want to get into some of the rhetoric involved in the comments of the hon. Member for South Down, but I will say that there are a small number of idiots out there who seek to damage both our democracy and the peace that has been built. We all, I think, are resolved to pursue them and ensure that justice deals with them appropriately. I believe that the path of peace is embedded in the good people of Northern Ireland and the politicians. I have not met anyone who does not want to see a different path, and peace, and it is for us, as leaders, to ensure that we continue that path.

I nearly got to the end of the first page of my brief. It is right to say that Northern Ireland has benefited from the European structural and investment funds. The European regional development fund, which includes PEACE IV and the Interreg VA moneys, and the European social fund represent a significant financial commitment to Northern Ireland’s prosperity. As has already been mentioned, the Chancellor’s guarantee, which I will come to later, provides comfort to organisations in Northern Ireland and allows time for us to prepare and consider what the future looks like in terms of the use of similar moneys to deliver similar outcomes.

I want to comment on the hon. Lady’s constituency, which encompasses the fishing ports of Ardglass and Kilkeel. From conversations I have had with her, I understand her particular concerns about EU funding in relation to the fishing community. The European maritime and fisheries fund is worth some £23.5 million to Northern Ireland in the period 2014-20, and it seeks to promote growth in that area. As part of our negotiations, it is important that we think about our relationship with our European partners and friends and about how we ensure that we support the some 800 people who are employed in that sector.

I want briefly to touch on the engagement that is going on and to try to give some reassurance to Members about the process, which enables not only Members of Parliament but Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the leadership there to engage, through the Joint Ministerial Committee, with other devolved bodies, to ensure that the Secretaries of State in each of the areas can articulate their concerns, in particular regarding the funding for PEACE and for securing community cohesion. That cross-border engagement and continued participation in the process is really important. As a conduit in that process, individual Members of Parliament are welcome to use that opportunity to ensure that they are transmitting messages, whether from business, the voluntary sector or academia.

Ian Paisley: Does the Minister accept that the debate is all a little bit yesterday, when we consider the comments by Ray Bassett, a former Republic of Ireland ambassador and official in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the report by Dr Brian Murphy, Ralf Lissek and Dr Volker Treier to the German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, that Brexit means that Ireland’s two major trading partners will be outside the EU and that Ireland needs to get ahead of the game and leave along with the UK?

Kris Hopkins: I understand the hon. Gentleman’s comments, but the point of this space—of parliamentary debate—is that individual parties can express their concerns and Ministers can understand them and respond appropriately. We are on a momentous journey, and concerns on both sides of the debate still need to be addressed and people need to be comforted. I said earlier that I was a remain campaigner, and there will be constituents who want to understand, whether they have a particular interest or it is about that passion for Europe in the past. So we create this space and it is important that people have the opportunity.

To pick up the theme already mentioned, we have to consider what the future looks like in terms of the use of similar moneys to deliver similar outcomes.

4.37 pm
Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.46 pm
On resuming—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The Minister has three minutes of his innings left.

Kris Hopkins: Thank you, Mr Hollobone.

Jack Lopresti: Will the Minister give way?

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Give him a chance!

Jack Lopresti: Just briefly. I appreciate the Minister giving way. On the point about our attitude and the optimism that we need, we all recognise that people have genuine concerns about the process, yet we must not talk down the Northern Ireland economy. We are trying to attract inward investment and to create some energy, enthusiasm and optimism for the opportunities of Brexit, which are what we must focus on.

Kris Hopkins: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is right that we should be optimistic; we have lots of grounds to be so. At this moment in time, the economy has been completely transformed, and we can build on that. Whether in the tourism economy, manufacturing or agriculture, there is huge opportunity. Our highly skilled populace can add to that further growth.

To touch on the Chancellor’s guarantee, applications for funding secured before the autumn statement will continue through the negotiations period and afterwards. In particular, we guarantee common agricultural policy funding until 2020, which I know will be an important element for the constituencies of the hon. Member for South Down, which includes a big rural community that is dependent on the farming industry.
A difficult election campaign is about to start and its tone is important. It will be set against the context of our decision to leave the European Union. There is huge opportunity to grow the economy of Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. It is for us as leaders, whether here in Westminster or in the Assembly, to seize that opportunity. I reassure the hon. Lady that the Government’s intention is to ensure that we make the best of the decision we have made for the economy and the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I thank the Minister for his forbearance and all Members for returning. We are running 18 minutes later than scheduled and will move on to the next important debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Leaving the EU: Animal Welfare Standards in Farming

4.49 pm

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered animal welfare standards in farming after the UK leaves the EU.

It is a pleasure to open this debate under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. High standards of animal welfare are one of the key hallmarks of a civilised society. I take this opportunity to thank all the Chipping Barnet residents who regularly contact me about the issue, setting out their concerns. In this country, we have a long and proud tradition of protecting animals, often taking action many years before other countries follow our lead.

About 80% of our animal welfare rules are part of European law and are contained in more than 40 different pieces of legislation, including 18 on farm animals. Leaving the European Union gives us a range of choices in this House that we have not enjoyed in this country for more than 40 years. Brexit means that we have the chance to reaffirm our support for the highest standards of animal welfare. It also gives us the opportunity to consider ways to strengthen protection for animals as we design a new system of farm support to replace the common agricultural policy.

I warmly welcome the statement that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made in October, saying that high standards of animal welfare should be one of the unique selling points of UK-produced food in the post-Brexit era. I would very much welcome the Minister confirming, when he arrives, that the Government’s plans for a great repeal Bill will see animal welfare standards maintained at a level at least as high as the one they are at today.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the debate. She is right to highlight that in theory the European Union upheld consistent standards of high animal welfare, but does she agree that sometimes there was not a level playing field? While British farmers were proud to abide by those standards, we saw battery cages going from Suffolk to Spain. At the very time that British farmers were introducing high standards, other farmers in Europe were not abiding by those standards.

Mrs Villiers: My hon. Friend raises an entirely valid point. It takes me back to my days when I was a Member of the European Parliament. I consistently raised concerns about the inconsistent implementation and enforcement of animal welfare rules. As he points out, that often disadvantages UK farmers, who tend to take them far more seriously than their counterparts in some other countries.

I accept that retaining our current animal welfare standards does not mean that every dot and comma of EU law in this area needs to be set in stone. There may be legislative options that maintain prevailing standards but deliver the outcome in a more flexible way that better suits domestic circumstances. I hope we can all agree that the end result should be the retention and not the dilution of laws that safeguard farm animals in this country. Our goal for the future should be the further strengthening of that protection.
[Mrs Villiers]

When the Secretary of State gave evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee recently, she indicated that around two thirds of EU legislation could be rolled forward into UK law with only minor technical changes. That leaves around a third of laws within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs remit apparently needing more substantive change if they are to be retained after we leave the European Union. It would be useful to hear from the Minister which animal welfare provisions are expected to fall within that category. Will he indicate when the House will be given details on the practical changes that may be necessary to ensure that the protections they provide can be carried over into UK law after we leave the EU?

I was also struck, in the Prime Minister’s recent speech, that final decisions have not yet been taken on which of the powers that will return from Brussels will go to the devolved Administrations and which will stay within the remit of this place. Animal welfare, as colleagues will be aware, is generally a devolved matter, but in light of the Prime Minister’s speech, it would be useful if the Minister could give us an indication of the animal welfare decisions currently made in Europe that he expects to be devolved and the ones that might be retained at Westminster.

None of us in the Chamber should be in any doubt that the food and farming sector is one of the most important for our economy. It supports many thousands of jobs. I saw that for myself in Northern Ireland during my time there as Secretary of State. I met many farmers and businesses creating food of the very highest quality.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate. With regards to the animal welfare standards of food production, would she agree that the introduction of CCTV in all slaughterhouses is an important part of that to ensure that some of the abuse that has been widely reported can be stopped, because those operators will understand that they are being monitored?

Mrs Villiers: That is well worth considering. A number of constituents have contacted me about it. One has to be certain that there are effective ways of monitoring that CCTV, but we should give serious consideration to further strengthening animal welfare protection in that area.

A task ahead of us is to create a replacement in this country for the common agricultural policy. As we shape a new system of financial support, we have an opportunity to promote a new vision for agriculture, to help our farmers work in ways that restore natural resources in soils, promote biodiversity and maintain the rural environment in good shape for future generations. Continued financial support for agriculture is not just important for the rural economy and for food security. In my view, it is critical if we are to maintain high animal welfare standards.

There are methods that can keep the costs of maintaining animal welfare standards down to a reasonable level, but the reality is that, in many cases, humane forms of agriculture are likely to be more expensive than intensive, industrial production, so agricultural support payments will be needed into the foreseeable future to ensure that food produced with high welfare standards is not priced out of the market by cheaper, less compassionate alternatives.

With that in mind, I urge the Minister to ensure that animal welfare is an important consideration in future trade talks. We should not be afraid to ask those countries that wish to sell into our market to commit to acceptable standards of animal welfare. We would be constrained by World Trade Organisation rules, but my understanding is that it is possible to set standards for animal welfare and comply with WTO obligations as long as a consistent approach is taken to different countries. We all know that in trade negotiations, compromises and trade-offs occur, but the huge importance rightly placed by many people on animal welfare, including a number of my constituents in Chipping Barnet, means that our negotiators should not lightly trade away ethical concerns in exchange for perceived economic advantage in other sectors.

Quality, safety, traceability and compassionate treatment of animals should be at the heart of the UK’s post-Brexit brand for food and farming. I hope that we will see those themes running through the forthcoming Green Paper on this matter. Our new system of farm support should reward farmers who adopt higher welfare standards.

I hope the UK Government and the devolved Administrations consider the following four areas for reform to further strengthen farm animal welfare. Before I set them out, I want to pay tribute to the work of our farming sector. I am well aware that the majority of our farmers take this issue very seriously, and that our farming sector’s record compares well to anywhere else in the world. Many farmers I know go beyond their legal obligations to safeguard the welfare of their livestock, but there is still more to be done.

The first area of reform should be to phase out farrowing crates for pigs and replace them with free farrowing systems. As with sow stalls, which were banned some years ago, pigs about to give birth cannot turn around in those crates. cramped conditions mean that the sow can barely move and there is not even enough room for her to lie down, much less carry out the nest-building behaviour normally seen in pigs about to give birth under more natural conditions.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I apologise for the late arrival—several of us were caught up thinking we not also be shouting that loud and clear, not only from Parliament but right across the UK?

Mrs Villiers: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is no point having rules unless they are properly enforced. It is vital to see all countries subject to the rules enforce them properly.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. To add to that point, it is estimated that 70% of pork imports that come into the UK fail to meet the welfare standards of home-produced pork, as I am sure she is aware. Should we not also be shouting that loud and clear, not only from Parliament but right across the UK?
Mrs Villiers: That is a concern. One of my worries is that so many consumers buy products that are not domestically produced and not subject to our animal welfare rules without recognising or realising the extent of the cruelty that sometimes goes into producing them. We need to look afresh once we leave the EU at the rules and transparency of production method labelling, because that may help to deal with the problem that my hon. Friend describes.

Secondly, our new system of financial support for agriculture should provide incentives for farmers to move away from industrial livestock production towards free range systems. I am particularly concerned that intensive indoor production of broiler chickens can involve tens of thousands of birds in a single shed, each with less floor space than the size of an A4 sheet of paper.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): There is quite a lot of misunderstanding about floor space and broiler chickens. The average life of a broiler chicken is between 32 and 36 days. At what point is the floor space measured? Is it when that chicken is a tiny chick or when it is about to be taken away for slaughter? Obviously, the floor space is determined by the size of the chicken.

Mrs Villiers: My hon. Friend makes a useful point. It is important that we bear those considerations in mind, but one of my concerns is that chickens raised in such conditions may lack exercise and be disturbed or trodden on while they are resting. Many thousands may die if ventilation systems fail. I also worry that chickens bred for fast growth have a higher than normal rate of leg deformity because their bones struggle to grow quickly enough to keep up with the weight that is put on them. The litter on the floor to absorb droppings is generally not cleared throughout a chicken’s entire lifetime, meaning that the air can become highly polluted with ammonia from droppings, which can lead to damage to the chicken’s eyes and respiratory system and cause painful burns on their legs and feet, heightening the risk of disease and infection.

I believe that Britain should be a pioneer of free range and pasture-led farming, and a world leader in the skilful management of such systems.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I appreciate the point that the right hon. Lady is making, but does she agree that the vast majority of poultry farmers do not treat their animals like that? Poultry farming is an expertise and relies on the farmer being able to produce a bird that is healthy, wholesome and good for the British market. That is the main priority. Although it is right to make the points that she makes, they affect only a very small minority of farms.

Mrs Villiers: I certainly agree that, happily, many farmers have far higher standards than the intensive means of production that I have been talking about.

One of our goals should be to end zero-grazing for dairy cows. Research by Compassion in World Farming indicates that as many as 20% of UK dairy cows rarely or never graze outside. I fear that disturbed or trodden on cattle indoors all year round simply are not capable of delivering high welfare standards, no matter how well managed they are. Evidence suggests that it is essential for cows to be able to access pasture to engage in normal behaviour, including the exercise needed for bone and muscle development. A review of the scientific literature by the European Food Safety Authority concluded that cows that are not kept on pasture for at least part of the year were at increased risk of lameness and disease.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I come from a wet area of west Wales. Our dairy cows are largely indoors for half the year anyway, and they flourish and are sustained to a high welfare standard. I am not quite sure how my right hon. Friend’s proposal would work for the wet winter months when cattle are actually healthier if they are kept indoors.

Mrs Villiers: I think everyone would accept that keeping cattle indoors for part of the year is not problematic. The concern that I am raising is industrial methods of production in which cattle are indoors all year and can never graze. My concern is not with the farming methods my hon. Friend describes.

Another cause for concern and a reason to discourage intensive farming methods is that they can lead to overuse of antibiotics to fend of diseases and infection caused by keeping animals in unnatural and overcrowded conditions, which compromise their health and immune responses. Antimicrobials are often given to whole herds or flocks of intensively-farmed animals via their feed and water. Antibiotic resistance should be viewed as one of the greatest challenges of our time. Unless we halt the trend of antibiotics growing gradually less able to protect us, we face the risk of a return to the pre-20th century situation where small injuries and minor operations routinely resulted in a fatal outcome. We must take action to prevent that disaster.

Admittedly, heavy use of antimicrobials in human medicine is probably the greatest cause of the problem, but there is important scientific evidence to show that regular prophylactic use of antimicrobials in farming contributes to the transfer of resistant bacteria to people. That has been acknowledged by the World Health Organisation, the European Medicines Agency and the European Food Safety Authority, and in the 2016 O’Neill report. That independent review, set up by the Government, called for a substantial reduction in the use of antimicrobials in farming as an important element of an effective strategy for combating resistance. Research shows that high stocking densities are a risk factor for the spread and development of infectious diseases, and such densities can allow rapid amplification of pathogens. As the O’Neill review put it:

“large numbers of animals living in close proximity...can act as a reservoir of resistance and accelerate its spread.”

Efforts to reduce overall antibiotic use in, for example, the poultry sector have had success, but other sectors such as pig farming have not taken such decisive action. Our goal should be higher-welfare farming where animals are kept healthy through good husbandry practices rather than routine antibiotic use.

Finally, I urge the Minister to bring an end to the export of live animals for slaughter. Everyone present for the debate will be well aware of the suffering that can be caused by long-distance transport of live animals. Once exported, animals can be in transit in crowded and stressful conditions for protracted periods. As we
have heard, enforcement of welfare rules in Europe is patchy, which means that there is a risk that animals will suffer from extremes of temperature or be left without sufficient food, water or rest. We cannot always be confident even that welfare rules regulating slaughter in the country of destination will be complied with. Export from Northern Ireland to south of the border does not raise the same concerns, because the distances are generally short—it is essentially local transport, so any future ban should treat exports to the Republic of Ireland as equivalent to domestic ones and allow them to continue, as long as there is not evidence of immediate re-export.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I have been listening carefully, and it is fantastic that the right hon. Lady is looking for such care and welfare for animals. She will appreciate that Northern Ireland farms are very small, and that increasing costs will make things harder. Would there be a long consultative period in what she asks for, including sitting down with farmers to find out how to go about things? When it is wet in Wales or soaking in Fermanagh, we could find a solution.

Mrs Villiers: Absolutely. There should be a long process before changes are made. However, I hope the hon. Gentleman will have noted from my speech that one of the tools at our disposal is positive incentives—ways of rewarding farmers whose welfare standards are high, when we allocate farm support payments. I am not always necessarily talking about changes in the rules or things of that nature. In certain situations we may use incentives rather than penalties. However, a change in the law to introduce a ban is justified in relation to live exports.

I appeal to the Minister to bring forward legislation to ban live exports for slaughter or fattening that can take effect as soon as the UK leaves the EU. That trade is far smaller than it used to be. I believe it would have been banned years ago if that power had rested in Westminster rather than in Brussels. The referendum vote means that the House will soon have control over that decision once again. We should seize the opportunity to end that trade. Now is the time to press ahead and get it done. Many of my constituents would support it. I urge the Government to press ahead and do exactly that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. This is an hour-long debate that will finish at 5.49 pm. The guideline limits for Front-Bench spokespersons are five minutes for the SNP and Her Majesty’s Opposition, and 10 minutes for the Minister, with the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) having three minutes to sum up at the end. That means I have to call the first Front-Bench spokesperson no later than 5.26 pm. Five Members are seeking to catch my eye, and I am determined that each and every one of them should be able to speak. That means that hon. Members will have only three minutes each in which to speak.

5.10 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) for bringing the debate. She spoke extremely eloquently on a number of points I had hoped to raise—I will no longer be able to do so with only three minutes in which to speak, but I thank her for getting to the heart of animal welfare and what needs to be done in future. I also thank my constituents in East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow for, as always, placing animal welfare at the heart of my postbag every month, which shows that they are principled and empathic in all that they do.

Animal welfare is a devolved issue, and Brexit negotiations will therefore have a significant impact on what animal welfare protections are adapted, amended and brought to the Scottish Parliament. Will the Minister comment on that? We expect that the devolution of animal welfare legislation to the Scottish Parliament will continue. Furthermore, our rural economy benefits from a share of the £4 billion received in EU funding. Will he comment on funding for farmers and particularly Scottish farmers?

Animal welfare standards have to be at the heart of everything we do. Ensuring that our farming animal welfare is world class is something of which we can be extremely proud.

The zero-grazing of dairy cows was brought to my attention when I attended a meal with people from the dairy farming industry. I was told that cows prefer not to graze, as though they had been asked for their opinion on the matter. I was somewhat incredulous, as it seems wholly unnatural for a dairy cow to want to be cooped up all year round. I am aware of research that shows pasture-based cows have lower levels of lameness, hoof pathologies, hock lesions, mastitis, uterine disease and mortality than zero-grazed cows. We must adopt a pragmatic approach, as has been said, but I ask that those issues are taken into consideration, and that those animals have the very best welfare.

I do not have much time to speak about crates for sows, but I briefly say that I have written to the Scottish Government regarding CCTV in slaughterhouses. I believe coverage is at about 95% now across Scotland, but I urge them to do all they can to reach 100%.

5.13 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I must declare my interest in farming in my constituency. Last week, I argued that Brexit presents opportunities as well as risks for farmers. We are now at liberty to replace the common agricultural policy with a policy that is tailored to suit the farms and farmers of this country—sustainable, profitable, high-welfare farming that is good for consumers, good for farm animals, good for the environment, good for farmers and good for Britain.

However, we must protect against the importing of meat that has been subject to lower welfare standards than our own, which threatens the livelihood of our farmers. We must ensure that we have appropriate restrictions on the importing of low-quality, low-welfare animals because it would be hypocritical to insist on high-welfare standards for our own farmers while financing low-welfare farming in other parts of the world. We saw the impact of the Irish horsemeat scandal on our industry, so we must ensure that food labelling reflects British farming’s commitment to higher standards—the red tractor needs to mean so much more.
Honest food-labelling standards can and should be implemented once we leave the EU to protect the reputation and high standards of our farmers. The problem is particularly acute for caterers, especially with the European Union. We will make a success of it.

Brexit provides many opportunities for British farming to take its rightful place at the forefront of world animal welfare standards, and for British farmers to be well rewarded for producing higher-quality food. Animal welfare standards must and will be kept at the highest levels in this country as we strive for the profitable, sustainable, high-welfare farming sector we all deserve.

5.18 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) for securing the debate.

Brexit is a great opportunity for the UK to enforce more transparency for farm-to-fork traceability to enable British consumers to make more informed choices about what they are buying and what life an animal has had in the production of food. We should therefore focus on a thriving trade for our farmers, because they operate to some of the highest standards. As I pointed out in my intervention, standards for farrowing crates for sows have been flouted in other countries, whereas our farmers obey the rules.

We will have the opportunity to ban the export of certain live animals, such as the live transportation of horses, which I feel very strongly about. Brexit will allow us to protect endangered species from being transited through the UK, and to ban imports of wildlife trophies, body parts and extracts of bodies. It will allow us to have stronger regulation of animal testing and research, banning that which is causing severe suffering.

UK farmers must not be undermined by lower welfare production units operating abroad. It is vital that we get labelling right. I tried to have a debate on labelling. The EU labelling directive is so tortuous that many years are spent achieving little. The traffic lights system on some of our products was voluntary. Italy kicked up a huge stink because it did not want olive oil labelled as a high-fat product, because it felt that that was discriminatory. I think most of us are fully aware of what we are buying when we buy a bottle of oil or a pat of butter.

Leaving the EU will allow us to be able to take things into our own hands. It will allow us to limit the diseases that sometimes come across from other countries. The Schmallenberg virus, for example, is now widespread across much of the EU. It was not made a notifiable disease, despite Governments seeking to limit its spread. As a result, the US banned bovine semen exports from the EU, including from our significant UK export market, despite our stocks being less badly hit. The EU standing veterinary committee operates through a bureaucracy. With foot and mouth disease, its rules caused delayed response times and exacerbated the risk of spread.

We have many, many opportunities within the wildlife sector, the food production sector, the farming sector, the export sector and the labelling sector to take back control in this country and put our farmers at the forefront. We can stop hiding behind rules that are bent despite our stocks being less badly hit. The EU standing veterinary committee operates through a bureaucracy. With foot and mouth disease, its rules caused delayed response times and exacerbated the risk of spread.

I welcome this timely debate. Time is short, but the very fact that so many Government Members are taking the matter seriously means that we will certainly have a great deal for farmers in this country post-Brexit.

5.21 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): There are many aspects of Brexit that we have not fully explored, and farming and the common agricultural policy is one of them. Some 15 million sheep, 9.8 million pigs and 2.6 million cattle were raised and slaughtered in the UK last year. There is always that perceived conflict between cheap food and decent animal husbandry, and I do not think it need be so; both can go hand in hand.
For too long, the EU has cast its shadow over British farming, and one area that has been affected more than many is abattoirs. The 1991 directive created huge changes in structural and procedural rules and in costs. Costs for small abattoirs rose by two and a half times. Not surprisingly, there were substantial closures. We can see that in the south-east, which is virtually devoid of abattoirs. The numbers speak for themselves. There were 495 pig abattoirs in 1990; there are just 130 today. That means huge transport distances, increasing costs and animals’ distress. Of course, increasing abattoir costs mean higher food costs.

The question of abattoirs leads me conveniently to live animal exports, which have been raised this afternoon. There were just 40,000 live sheep exports last year, out of 15 million sheep raised. Every single one of those passed through the small port of Ramsgate. I take this opportunity to thank the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, the RSPCA and Kent Action Against Live Exports, which has kept me fully informed about what is happening in Ramsgate.

I proposed a ten-minute rule Bill to change section 33 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847 to allow the local port of Ramsgate, which is owned and run by Thanet District Council, to have discretion to stop the trade. The council faced a £5 million bill following its unilateral decision to close the port after a truly dreadful event that led to the euthanasia of a number of sheep on an overloaded lorry. Part of the High Court judgment referred to section 33 of the 1847 Act, but my ten-minute rule Bill was not supported by the Government for a good reason, which is that we were members of the European Union. We can change the legislation when we become an independent country in a couple of years’ time, but the High Court judge referred to article 35 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. Free trade rules, foisted upon us by the Government for a good reason, which is that we are members of the European Union. W e can change that now, as we lead farming into Brexit.

I would be grateful to receive an assurance from the Minister that he is looking carefully at transport times. A maximum transport time of eight hours, which many have asked for, would solve the problem and stop live animal exports out of Ramsgate and any other affected harbour.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now come to the Front-Bench speeches. I have asked the Clerk to help our speakers by putting up the five-minute guideline limit to help them with the length of their remarks.

5.25 pm

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) on securing this debate and, indeed, on her excellent speech.

The UK Government’s plans for a hard Brexit, including taking all the nations of the UK out of the European single market—in Scotland’s case, against our will and against our interests—will not only inflict, in our view, catastrophic damage on Scotland’s agricultural sector but bring the serious possibility of damage to the welfare of farm animals. The Minister knows that the people of Scotland voted decisively to remain within the European Union and to continue to enjoy all the benefits and opportunities our membership provides. Short of continuing EU membership, we believe that full membership of the single market and the customs union is the best outcome, not only for Scotland but for each country of the UK, not least in respect of animal welfare standards. Outside the single market, within a UK that has isolated itself in the world, Scottish farmers would face the prospect of paying the same high tariffs that apply to countries outwith the EU such as Ghana or Mozambique, for example. That is hardly the preferential access we currently enjoy.

The consequences will be profound—much lower sales or much lower prices paid to our farmers and food producers. The potential loss of the animal welfare controls we currently have in place to protect both human health and animal health will make future trade agreements considerably more difficult to achieve. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) noted, if Scotland is forced to leave the EU, we would expect powers over animal welfare and protection to be fully devolved to Scotland to enable us to address this challenge.

EU regulatory regimes, enforcement, financial support and legislative frameworks help to protect workers and the environment, and create a level playing field. Beyond their importance for trade, regulatory regimes for food safety, animal health and plant health are essential for protecting Scotland’s consumers and environment, and enabling mutually beneficial technical and scientific co-operation. Most of the animal welfare legislation, regulatory controls and enforcement for which Scottish Ministers currently have policy responsibility is derived from EU legislation. The EU legislates on issues affecting the protection of the domestic market and the free movement of animals. Indeed, Council directive 98/58/EC, on the protection of animals, is kept me fully informed about what is happening in Ramsgate.

However, on 4 January 2017 the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said:

“By cutting the red tape that comes out of Brussels, we will free our farmers to grow more, sell more and export more”.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Rolling back on animal welfare standards will create serious uncertainty for potential markets, as will the developing view that any legislation that has animal welfare at its heart might be further diluted by the UK Parliament. If the overriding Government policy becomes cheap food, animal welfare will suffer.

EU law is at the heart of our animal welfare regulations, which protect our animal health, our consumers and our environment. The UK leaving the European Union will mean the renegotiation of EU competencies in agriculture, and Scotland’s devolution settlement must change to reflect that. Under no circumstances will we accept the use of exiting the EU as a pretext for centralising control in Westminster. Nor can there be any question of the UK Government attempting to reserve powers that are currently devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The future of Scotland’s agriculture, including animal welfare standards, must be determined in Scotland.

5.29 pm

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet
Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): If the Minister concludes his remarks no later than 5.46 pm, that will allow the Member in charge to sum up.

5.34 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): Thank you, Mr Hollobone. I apologise for being late. I was given some unreliable intelligence from my Whips about the possibility of a second vote.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers) on securing this important debate about the importance of animal welfare in farm policy once we leave the European Union. The debate about agricultural policy is often characterised by a tension between agricultural production on the one side and environmental outcomes on the other, and there is often antagonism between the two. Animal welfare, which is the third issue in this debate, is all too often overlooked, but it is of equal importance. The kindness and compassion that we show to animals that we raise for food are a hallmark of a civilised society.

I begin by paying tribute to the fantastic work of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation. My hon. Friends the Members for St Albans (Mrs Main) and for Southend West (Sir David Amess) have been actively involved in that group for many years, and they have done sterling work in the Conservative party. I also pay tribute to individuals such as Peter Stevenson of Compassion in World Farming, who for the best part of 20 years has been a calm and cogent voice of reason in this debate and provided really incisive analysis on some of these issues, and to the progress that groups such as the RSPCA have made to develop assurance schemes that have improved consumer transparency in this area.
The Government made two key manifesto commitments on farm animal welfare: first, to promote animal welfare in international trade negotiations, and secondly, to place greater emphasis on animal welfare in the design of agriculture policy. The Conservative party was the only one of the main parties to put such specific pledges about agriculture in its manifesto. I am heartened to see so many colleagues taking such an active interest in what is a manifesto commitment for this Government.

The UK has a good record on animal welfare. World Animal Protection rates the UK in the upper tier of its league, in joint first place alongside other countries. We used during the slaughter of pigs, and pigs’ version to things. For instance, the latest science raises some concerns about the very prescriptive nature of the gas mix that is used during the slaughter of pigs, and pigs’ aversion to that. There is an argument for revisiting the nature of gas mixture. It will be easier for us to do that and to improve standards during slaughter once we are free from the European Union.

It is important that we do not have a “glass half empty” view and say, as some Members often do, “That means you’re going to have a race to the bottom and reduce standards.” There are areas where current EU standards are wanting and we may want to review things. For instance, the latest science raises some concerns about the very prescriptive nature of the gas mix that is used during the slaughter of pigs, and pigs’ aversion to that. There is an argument for revisiting the nature of that gas mixture. It will be easier for us to do that and to improve standards during slaughter once we are free from the European Union.

However, some things will change. The UK will regain its own seat at the World Organisation for Animal Health, or the OIE—an international body that promotes animal welfare standards. While we are in the European Union, it is literally unlawful for us to express an independent view without first getting permission from the European Commission. That will change when we become an independent country again; we will be free to make the case internationally for higher animal welfare standards and share some of our great scientific expertise to help other countries around the world raise their standards too.

Mrs Main: Rothamsted in my constituency has been looking into bee decline. We often do not have a voice on scientific advancements such as those to do with neonicotinoids, sprays and pesticides, because our voice is subsumed in the EU voice. I would like our voice to be stronger.

George Eustice: My hon. Friend is right. I do not want to divert from this debate, but in all the international wildlife conventions, we will regain our voice, our voting rights and our seat at the table.

Most importantly, leaving the European Union gives us the opportunity to deliver the second manifesto commitment that I mentioned at the start of this debate, by placing animal welfare at the heart of the design of future agricultural policy. We should recognise that there are some limits to how far increased regulation can go. As a number of hon. Members have pointed out, there is no point raising standards here so high that we effectively end up exporting our industry to other countries because we have exposed producers here to unfair competition from countries with far lower animal welfare standards.

We are seriously considering the possibility of introducing incentives to encourage and support higher animal welfare standards and different approaches to animal husbandry that can reduce our reliance on antibiotics, improving animal health while delivering animal welfare outcomes. In the past couple of years, a number of countries have been doing interesting work in the area. Denmark has developed a voluntary three-tier system for its pig sector to reward producers who show commitment to higher animal welfare standards. The Dutch have a similar system called “the better life system”.

Germany is particularly interesting. It has something called the Tierwohl system, which financially rewards farmers who adopt standards of animal welfare that go above and beyond the regulatory minimum. I have had representations from organisations such as the RSPCA and others that would like us to explore similar options here in the UK. As part of our policy development, we are considering all those ideas. As I said earlier, we have a manifesto commitment to place greater emphasis on animal welfare in future policy.

I turn to a few of the points made by hon. Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet raised the issue of trade and the context of the World Trade Organisation. As a former Minister who understands the issues well, she will know that yes, there are WTO rules. There have been disputes about the degree to which reliance can be placed on animal welfare standards in trade negotiations, but equally, there are legal precedents and case law to support the use of ethical bans on certain practices and the reflection of animal welfare in trade agreements. I do not believe that anything along the lines that we would propose will cause any difficulty whatever with WTO rules.

My right hon. Friend mentioned farrowing crates. I declare an interest: my brother has a pig farm, and raises a rare breed of outdoor pig. There is a danger of sows lying on their piglets; I put it to hon. Members that that is not great for the welfare of the piglet concerned. It is a genuine management challenge, and it is not straightforward. She also mentioned the possibility of offering incentives to encourage free-range systems and perhaps pasture-based grazing systems. Those are exactly the kinds of idea that we are at least willing to consider as part of our work.

Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), raised the issue of zero grazing. There is some academic research showing that by a small margin, depending on the weather, cows prefer to be outdoors in pastures rather than housed indoors. More importantly—I used to run a farm where we had livestock—any farmer
who has turned cattle out to grass in April and watched their reaction knows that cattle prefer grazing, all other things being equal.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) raised trade, which I believe I have addressed. My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay), a long-standing campaigner on the issue, mentioned live exports, as did others. While we are in the EU, it would be against free movement rules to place an ethical ban on the export of live animals, but once we leave the European Union, we will be free to do so, if that is the decision of the UK Government; there will be nothing to stand in our way. The only thing that I would say is that it is a little more complex than one might think in that we export breeding stock, pigs in particular, and that is a different issue. There are also matters to do with different animals travelling better than others. The area is complex, but certainly one that we would be free to look at after leaving the EU.

Finally, a number of hon. Members mentioned CCTV in slaughterhouses. A report by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee, which advises all the Administrations in the UK, highlighted some of the benefits of CCTV. Method-of-slaughter labelling, however, is contentious. The European Union did some research and we are waiting to see the next steps. We have always been clear that we do not rule out looking at some kind of labelling for method of production or slaughter, although again the issue is complex.

We have had a fantastic debate, with many interesting contributions. I hope that I have been able to reassure Members that the Government take the matter very seriously.

5.46 pm

Mrs Villiers: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, and the Minister for his reassurance on a number of the points that I made and for his strong support on behalf of the UK Government for the highest standards of animal welfare. As others have done, I also thank Compassion in World Farming, the RSPCA and the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation for their helpful input to the debate.

I was very struck by something that my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) said. The sheer volume of animals reared and slaughtered in agriculture in this country and around the world demonstrates how important it is to pursue the highest standards of animal welfare. Anyone who takes animal welfare matters seriously must put the welfare of farm animals at the top of their priorities, not only because of that sheer volume of animals involved, but because we are all responsible as consumers of the products of the system. We all have a responsibility to work for production to take place in as ethical a way as possible.

I very much welcome the strong support that we have heard from all parties today for high standards of animal welfare, for the efforts that our farmers are already making on animal welfare and for ensuring that we do not see our farmers who apply animal welfare standards being undercut by cheap imports from jurisdictions that do not pursue the same level of ethical concern for animals. I welcome the debate and the reassurance that we have heard in response from the Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered animal welfare standards in farming after the UK leaves the EU.

5.48 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Chris Bryant: It is not a bogus point. One of the problems with the building is that it is not very well compartmentalised, which is why fire could move from one part of the building to another very quickly. That was one of the problems in 1834. Just prior to 1834, Sir John Soane had built a beautiful corridor from the old House of Lords to the old House of Commons Chamber, which took the fire from one to the other. The problem in the building at the moment is that, if we were to have a fire, it could easily spread very quickly across a large part of the estate.

Simon Hoare: I remember from my induction being told by the House staff that the reason why the fire spread was nothing to do with the corridor, but to do with the vents over Central Lobby being open for ventilation purposes. That is what caused the draw of the flame.

Chris Bryant: We should all read Caroline Shenton’s book and debate that later. The truth of the matter is that everybody was predicting a fire long before 1834 and we did not take any of the action necessary to ensure that we preserved the building. It is only good fortune that we ended up being able to save Westminster Hall, which is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.

Another problem new to us in the 20th and 21st century is the substantial amount of asbestos in the building, which simply has to be removed. There have already been several asbestos scares.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. On the subject of asbestos, I walk around the estate all the time seeing the little “a” stickers everywhere. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we stay in the building over the period of renovation, asbestos is a health hazard for staff and Members?

Chris Bryant: There is a very serious point here. Some people are arguing—I will come on to this point later—that we should stay in the building while the work is being done. That incurs a very significant risk to our safety and that of the people who work here. If we were to take the measures necessary to protect people properly while removing asbestos, that would dramatically increase the cost of and the risk to the project and the public.

Water is penetrating much of the stonework and doing lasting damage. Many of the 3,800 bronze windows, which were a wonderful idea when first installed, no longer work properly and have to be refitted.

We should be thoroughly ashamed that disabled access in this building is truly appalling. It is phenomenally difficult to get around the building for someone in a wheelchair or who has physical difficulties. The roundabout routes that many have to take to make an ordinary passage through the building are wrong. We still expect members of the public to queue for more than an hour in the pouring rain, which is not acceptable in the 21st century.
[Chris Bryant]

We have to act because this is one of the most important buildings in the world. It is part of a UNESCO world heritage site. The walls of Westminster Hall date from 30 years after the Norman conquest, the ceiling dates from the time of Richard II at the end of the 14th century and the cloisters date from the time of the Tudors. Every single tourist who comes to this country wants to be photographed in front of this building, and every film, Hollywood or otherwise, that wants to show that it is set in the UK or in London shows this building.

The people of this country have a deep affection for the building. One poll—I am very sceptical about polls, but none the less I am going to use this one—showed this week that 57% of the public want us to do the work and 61% think that we should move out to allow it to be done more effectively, more quickly and more cheaply.

Today’s MPs and peers hold this building in trust. It is not ours—we hold it in trust. Our predecessors got it hideously wrong in the 19th century. They kept on delaying necessary work. That delay made the fire in 1834 not only possible but inevitable, and so we lost the Painted Chamber, St Stephen’s Chapel and what was reputedly the most beautiful set of medieval buildings in the world. They then insisted on staying on site while the new building was built around them and constantly complained about the noise and the design. The result was long delays and a massive budget overrun. They started in 1840, but it was not completed until 1870, by which time Barry and Pugin were dead and their sons were battling about the ongoing design issues. If we do the same today, we will not move back in until 2055 at the earliest.

Of course we have to be careful about money, which is why the Joint Committee, which started with a very sceptical point of view on the project, recommended what we believed to be the cheapest and best option, which is a full decant. I say “cheapest” because, however we cut the numbers that have been put together on a very high-level basis for the two Houses, the option of full decant comes in at £900 million less than trying to stay in the building.

The Earl of Lincoln, the first commissioner of works, told MPs in 1844 that

“if I had been employing an architect in the construction of my private residence, I should have a right to fool away as much of my money as I thought fit; but in the case of a public building, I consider myself acting, to a certain degree, as guardian of the public purse, and to have no right to sanction any expenditure, either for the gratification of any pride, or the indulgence of any fancy I might entertain, as to the proper and efficient construction of the building.”

We should adopt that same attitude today. We should be going for the cheapest option—our constituents would expect that of us—but not a cheap option that does not do the job properly.

Our argument in Committee did not hinge entirely on the money. Three Members in the Chamber were on the Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), and the hon. Members for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) and for North Antrim (Ian Paisley). They would agree that, when we started our consideration, we all assumed we would come up with some kind of plan that meant we stayed in the building—a kind of half-and-half solution. We consulted widely, but every single person we asked told us that that was simply not workable. “Not workable, uneconomic, impracticable, foolhardy, risky, and dangerous” were the sort of words people used. We should listen to them.

I want to deal with some of the things that other people have been suggesting. First, something I have heard often, though not so much in the Commons or Parliament, is that we should move to elsewhere in London or outside the capital. I disagree. This is the home of Parliament and should remain the home of Parliament, but there are good reasons beyond the romantic association. If we were to leave the Palace forever, we would still have to do the work to protect it because it is a world heritage site, and we would not save a single penny. If we moved elsewhere in London, we would have to find a space that can accommodate everyone not only in the Palace but on the rest of the parliamentary estate—Portcullis House, Norman Shaw North, Norman Shaw South, Parliament Street, Millbank and all the Lords’ offices—which would be a considerable piece of prime estate to find. If we moved outside London, we would have to move the whole of Government as well, because all Ministers are Members of the Commons or the House of Lords. That option is impracticable and very expensive.

The second thing I hear—is the most common—is that, if we leave we will never come back. I have been told that by four Members of Parliament today alone. They argue that the Commons should sit in the House of Lords, and the Lords should sit in the Royal Gallery. That is basically the proposal of the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh)—he is not right hon., but he should be, and learned and gallant and all sorts of other things as well. I have discussed the issue with him many times and we can be friendly about it, but there are lots of problems with his proposal.

That proposal would add £900 million to the cost—I have already quoted the point made by the Earl of Lincoln in 1834. Furthermore, public and press access would be very restricted under the hon. Gentleman’s plan, and it would be difficult to have any kind of fully functioning Public Gallery in his scheme, whether for the Commons or the Lords. His plan would rely on keeping a large part of the building open around the work, because of the need for Whips Offices, rooms for Doorkeepers, police officers and Ministers, and—who knows?—some people might even want a Tea Room.

Mark Tami: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Chris Bryant: On the Tea Room?

Mark Tami: Not actually on the Tea Room itself, however vital that is. Some Members who may think that proposal a good idea do not realise that there is one system for the plumbing and all the electrics. The House of Lords is a separate House, but it does not have a separate supply system. We would have to build some great structure outside to ensure that one part of the building could carry on working.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Basically, there is one electricity system, one drainage system, one central heating system, one cooling system—the building is a unity. If we want to keep part of it open,
especially a whole corridor, we would have to put in temporary services to accommodate everything. That is an expensive and, I would argue, risky business.

Simon Hoare indicated dissent.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman is shaking his head, but the specific work done by the House authorities on the proposal of the hon. Member for Gainsborough shows precisely that: it would be very expensive. The proposal is theoretically feasible, but it is very expensive.

Simon Hoare rose—

Chris Bryant: I will not give way. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will catch your eye later, Mr Fundle—you have very good eyesight and, well, you have your glasses on anyway.

Another point for hon. Members to think hard about is that if we were sitting down at the other end of the building, the 240 or so MPs who now have offices in the historic Palace would by then have their offices in Richmond House—quite some distance from where people intend us to sit. Most importantly, however, we would either have to walk along a corridor specially created as some kind of bubble for us while work was going on all around, including the removal of asbestos—a risk in itself—or, alternatively, walk outside along the pavement; 650 or 600 MPs walking in a hurry along the pavement at known times of day for votes is a security risk that I would not be prepared to countenance.

For all such reasons, that proposal simply does not wash. The truth is that the Chambers are not hermetically sealed units. They rely, as my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside said, on services from the rest of the building. Both the Chambers themselves will have to be closed, and the cost of temporary mechanical and electrical services would run into millions of unnecessary taxpayer pounds.

People also ask, “What about Westminster Hall?” Personally, I have a romantic attachment to Westminster Hall: I like the idea of sitting in the Hall where Richard II was removed as King by Henry IV in the shortest ever government elections, which lasted one day. We could sit back and take inspiration from the angels carved on the ceiling. The Committee looked at the suggestion very seriously, but the problem is that the floor is not as solid as it looks. It is not sitting on the ground; the flagstones actually sit on a pillared grid, which simply could not take the weight of the large construction necessary to sit 600 or 650 MPs, members of the press and public, and all the other paraphernalia of the Chamber. In addition, such a Chamber would have to be heated, and all the advice we had from restorers and people who know about ancient buildings and historic wooden artefacts is that that would pose a risk to the ceiling that simply could not be countenanced. The roof of Westminster Hall is one of the most beautiful and precious things on the whole parliamentary estate, so that is not an option.

Some people have said—one Conservative Member present has said this to me several times: “You did not really look at the option of our staying in at all.” Yes, I am looking at the hon. Gentleman—or he is looking at me—

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): North West Cambridgeshire.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Member who represents North West Cambridgeshire—I am very grateful to him for helping me.

The truth, however, is that we did look at the option of our staying in, and so did the original report. The IOA, or independent options appraisal, costed and evaluated both a rolling programme and two different versions of staying in the building. That is all part of the original report provided, so it is simply wrong to say that we did not look at the idea of staying in. We looked at it very seriously, but we came to the conclusion—all of us, from different political parties of different persuasions—that it was simply unfeasible, unworkable and impracticable for us to stay in.

Some people have also asked me, “If the work is so urgent, why don’t we get on with it now?” The truth is that we are getting on with work now: the cast-iron roofs are being restored; three years of work is about to start on the Elizabeth Tower, or Big Ben, which will cost £29 million; and last year we spent £49 million on repairs alone. The point is, however, that the mechanical and electrical elements constitute one very large, single project that needs to be well prepared for—we cannot just start tomorrow.

Furthermore, the Palace authorities do not have the requisite capacity or skills. I am not doing them down; they themselves would argue that they do not have the capacity or the skills in-house to manage such an enormous infrastructure project. We need to put a sponsor body in place, with Members of both Houses sitting on it, and some others, to commission a delivery authority with the expertise and technical know-how to do things properly, much as with the Olympics.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Timing is important in this whole thing. If we are to meet the 2023 target start date, we need to set up the delivery authority pretty soon. It will require a statute of this House to do it, so the authorities need to get on with the matter.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we should have started some considerable time ago.

About 10 years ago, when I was Deputy Leader of the House for five minutes, we were already arguing that we needed to get this work on the road. The Committee was asked to delay publishing its report until the local government elections were done, until the referendum was done, until we had a new Prime Minister, and so on, and still there has been no debate. We have to get a move on.

Mark Tami: Does my hon. Friend agree that the amount that we spend on just patching things up grows every year, and it will continue to grow if we do not bite the bullet now?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In addition, when all that minor work is going on, which still costs millions of pounds, there is further risk in the building. There is building work going on. Indeed, a few weeks ago, the House of Lords decided that it could not bear the noise that was going on and had to suspend its sitting. I think that if we tried to sit in the building while work was going on, we would do that every single day.
I can just see the hon. Member for Gainsborough standing in the Chamber in 15 years’ time—if he gets his way—saying, “I can’t even hear myself think, let alone speak!”

Another thing that has been said is: “What about giving up on the September sittings?” That is quite popular with quite a lot of colleagues, especially when they are asked in September. That was specifically factored into the rolling programme option in the independent options appraisal. It was termed “scenario E1A”, because it would be enabled by longer recesses and what the IOA called an acceptance by MPs of considerable disruption for three decades. That option also assumes that there will be alternative Chambers for use during an unexpected recall of Parliament. It is worth bearing in mind that recalls are a simple fact of life. During the last Parliament alone, we were recalled twice in 2011, twice in 2013 and once in 2014, and of course we were, horrifically, recalled last year after Jo Cox’s murder. There will be recalls—that is just a fact.

I have heard one other argument: “We need to put on a good show in times of Brexit. We can’t just meet in a car park.” Let me be absolutely clear: the temporary Chamber will not be some cardboard cut-out. It will be a properly impressive Chamber with full access for the public and the press. Moreover, any half-and-half proposal will delay our full return to the building and keep the scaffolding up for another decade or two.

But there is a much bigger point. The last thing we want as we leave the European Union is to look as if we are hanging around in an old ancestral mansion like a dowager duchess, running with buckets from one dripping ceiling to another. Nor can we risk a catastrophic failure, such as a flood or major fire. That really would give the world the worst possible impression. We want to show the world that we can take tough decisions—that we value our heritage but have a strong, modern, outward-looking vision for the future. What better way is there of showing that than by taking this 1,000-year-old building, restoring what is beautiful and historic about it, and renewing it so that it really works for the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th centuries?

As a Labour Member, I think that we should see this as an opportunity. The Committee was advised repeatedly that the workforce in this country does not actually have all the skills to complete this project. After Brexit, we may have even fewer qualified builders. We should see this project as part of our industrial strategy today, and use it to show that this country can deliver a massive infrastructure project on time and on budget. We should train youngsters now in the craft and high-tech engineering skills of the 21st century, so that young people from every single one of our constituencies can work on what is the best-loved building in the world—an icon of British liberty, democracy and the rule of law.

Sever al hon. Members rose—

Robert Fello (in the Chair): Order. May I point out to hon. Gentlemen—they are predominantly gentlemen, although there are a few hon. Ladies—that I will begin calling the Front Benchers at about 10.30 am? With that in mind, I call Sir Alan Haselhurst.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Fello. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing this debate and on his telling opening.

I understand that there is enormous attachment to this home of Parliament. That attachment has led to a drift: for at least 20 years, to my knowledge, people have known that something has to be done and have been thinking about what we should do. Every time someone has been brought in, the report has shocked people and they have said, “We can’t do that,” so things have been left for a while. More experts have then been brought in two years later and said, “It’s worse,” and people have said, “Oh, no, we can’t tackle that.” This problem has been getting steadily away from us. It is to the credit of the current administration and those in the House who support it that work is now being done to come to a decisive conclusion. I believe that some of my colleagues are blinded by their attachment to the place into supposing that the problem is not really all that bad somehow, and we can work around it.

During the last Parliament, when I was Chairman of the Administration Committee, I was privy to some of the work that was going on, and I came rapidly to the conclusion that has been reached in similar circumstances by the Parliaments of Austria, Canada and Finland: if a major exercise of this kind has to be done, the only sensible thing for us to do is to get out of the building and let the work be done. Some 12 months of study were undertaken by our colleagues in the other place and in the House of Commons, and having gone into the detail and consulted independent experts, they are persuaded that that approach is right for us, too. Colleagues can rake over the independent options appraisal—they can look at it and play with the figures and estimates as much as they like—but it is crystal clear that option 3 would take less time than option 2, option 2 would take less time than option 1, and in each case, less time means less cost.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned some of the objections, and I will refer to some of those and perhaps others. I have been told that our leaving would deprive some Members of ever serving in this building. There is in fact now a way around that. The timescale is such that it is possible for the work to bridge two Parliaments, so that if that is a real problem, it can be overcome. But the honour and responsibility of being elected as a Member of Parliament lies first in doing the job, not in carrying out the job in a particular place or building.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the argument that if we leave, we will not come back. I have heard level-headed people say, “They won’t let us.” Who are the “they” in all this? We are sovereign. We can decide that. Frankly, it is unthinkable that we would not come back to this Palace at the first opportunity. It has also been said that Westminster Hall might be needed for a major state event. I think that we can rely on the fact that the royal household has been consulted and has not blocked what is recommended.

It has been said that an appalling message would be sent out to the world during Brexit, but I think an even more appalling message would be sent if we soldiered on in this place in difficult conditions and there was a
catastrophic failure. That really would make it look as
though this country and this Parliament were breaking
down.

It is said that too much public money is involved.
However much we look at them, the alternatives to
option 1 are more expensive, but the fact is that the
public are solidly behind us on this matter. They love
this place and believe it is an important symbol of our
democracy. They have been very understanding, as has
the press, so if we are responsible about this, we should
not worry on that front.

Another objection—in contrast to some of the others—is:
“If there is a risk of catastrophic failure, why are we
waiting and not getting on with it?” The reason we are
not getting on with it is that people have baulked at
doing so every time a report has been produced since
the 1990s. There has been delay, delay and delay. The
risk is mounting. That is the problem. We will do the
work as soon as we can, but there have been difficulties
to overcome to make the arrangements for it to be
approached logically.

I cannot help feeling that the distrust that has manifested
in many parts of the world has also manifested here;
people want to kick the establishment at every point
and think that experts cannot be trusted, so we must
take their advice with a large pinch of salt. Frankly, if I
feel ill I want to get the advice of my doctor. If I want to
have a legal instrument drawn up I go to a lawyer. If I
want help with my accounts I go to an accountant.
That is a normal thing to do. It is always possible, of course,
to have a second opinion. We have had a second, third,
fourth, fifth and sixth opinion—and still there are those
who distrust those opinions and say, “Oh, well, they
would say that, wouldn’t they? They are in it for themselves;
they will line their pockets.” I do not think that that is
fair to the Royal Institute of British Architects or the
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, which have
given unbiased advice to our colleagues on the Committee.

Mark Tami: The right hon. Gentleman has reminded
me of a previous employer of mine: when we got legal
advice that he did not like he would always say, “Get
another lawyer.” That is the argument that some people
are putting forward, when they do not like the expert
advice they are given.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: I agree; that is the problem. At
some point we must make a decision. Continually putting
it off is causing the bill to rise and the dislocation to
increase.

If the Palace is loved as much as I believe it is by
almost every person elected to Parliament—it is certainly
loved by the staff who serve us here, and the hundreds
of thousands of visitors who clamour to come here and
take great pleasure from being in the Palace and standing
on the Floor of the House of Commons where great
names of the past served—it is our duty to put safety
on the Floor of the House of Commons where great
heroes of our nation stand, and look as if the Palace
is a normal thing to do. It is always possible, of course,
to have a second opinion. We have had a second, third,
fourth, fifth and sixth opinion—and still there are those
who distrust those opinions and say, “Oh, well, they
would say that, wouldn’t they? They are in it for themselves;
they will line their pockets.” I do not think that that is
fair to the Royal Institute of British Architects or the
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, which have
given unbiased advice to our colleagues on the Committee.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I am sure
that the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan
Haselhurst) will not misunderstand when I say that
neither he nor I will be likely to sit in the reconstructed
Chamber. It can safely be said of both of us that we are
not speaking out of personal self-interest.

In a debate in November 2012, I urged that work
should be undertaken so that we can be prepared from
2020 onwards, so I have some form on this. I congratulate
my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden, why the work is
essential. I hope that whether we agree to option 1,
2 or 3—and there is bound to be division not only today
but when the matter is debated in the Chamber—we
will agree on one thing. I hope that even the hon.
Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who intervened
earlier, will agree on this: the work is essential. I fear, as
I said in the Chamber four years ago, that we will find
ways and means of delaying the decision—because of
finance, because there are other problems that the
Government or Parliament must deal with, because it is
not possible to reach a decision along the lines that so
many of us want. The decision I want is simple: that
from 2020 the work will begin, either through a total
decant—I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member
for Rhondda that that would be right—or otherwise.

However, the Parliament elected in 2020, if that is when
we have a general election, would sit in a different place.

Simon Hoare: May I just clarify something? No one
doubts—I certainly do not—the scale of the work that
needs to be done, the need for it, or the underlying
urgency. We question the means of delivery of the
works.

Mr Winnick: I do not disagree, obviously. The hon.
Gentleman clearly accepts that the work needs to be
done. One reason for today’s debate is to look at ways of
delivery; but obviously there must be a major debate in
the Chamber.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda mentioned
the possibility of a meltdown of mechanical and electrical
services. It is all in the report, and I am sure we have all
read it. In many instances the cables and pipes are
surrounded by dangerous asbestos. The report says that
much of the building is riddled with asbestos. As to
water penetration, we know from experience that when
there is heavy rain there is flooding in parts of the
building. We have seen it with our own eyes, let alone
what the report states about the situation.
Mark Tami: The key issue about asbestos, with which my hon. Friend rightly says the building is riddled, is that we do not know where it is. When there is drilling, or when things are taken out, the starting presumption must be that there is asbestos there. That would add massively to the cost of working in a fully occupied building.

Mr Winnick: My hon. Friend certainly makes a powerful case for a full decant.

It should not be forgotten that, as has been mentioned, every year the cost of maintaining the building goes up. The figure given in the report for 2014-15—the latest figures, unless the Deputy Leader of the House has further information—is nearly £50 million. That is public money that is essential just so that the building can be in some kind of working condition. I agree that full decanting is essential. I understand why some feel that for historical and ceremonial reasons, and so that people can come to this building, there is a case for partial decanting, but in practice and when we consider the amount of work involved on what would be a huge building site, how on earth could we continue to debate in the present Commons or Lords Chambers, or the Robing Room? Imagine the constant pleas to the Speaker or Lord Speaker: “It is impossible to hear. Can the work stop for a while?” and the rest of it. It is not practical—and I do not understand how anyone could argue otherwise—to work with the constant noise and disruption and constant changes of location between the two Chambers. That is not the way to proceed, even if it was done after the 1834 fire. I think we have made some progress since then.

James Heapply (Wells) (Con): I am the chairman of the all-party group on the events industry; is the hon. Gentleman aware that the delay in making a decision is having an impact on event and conference bookings at the Queen Elizabeth II centre, and that, more generally, the cost of a decant in which the conference centre was used for the Lords would have an impact of hundreds of millions of pounds on the wider Westminster economy that comes with all those conferences and events?

Mr Winnick: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point.

I am speaking in the debate because I want to urge that a decision be reached as quickly as possible. It has been said in some parts of the media that the work is for historical reasons, and that is a complete nonsense. The report from the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster says that we do not know where the asbestos is, and we do not know where the services are. We have a huge amount of asbestos in the building that is encased in all kinds of different systems, and when any system or service has failed in the past, there has been simply a “make do and mend” response—a pipe added here or a wire added there. The high pressure steam heating system is encased in asbestos insulation, which has remained well beyond its designed lifespan and original capacity. It could burst and produce asbestos fibre at any minute. The main sewage pump needs replacing, as does the electricity supply, which is liable to major failure. It is unacceptable that Parliament could be plunged into darkness at any minute during great occasions, such as the Queen’s Speech during the state opening of Parliament. There is no doubt in anybody’s mind that this work needs to be done.

The timing of the restoration and renewal works is crucial. As a chartered surveyor, my view is that the entire building must be cleared so that all of the asbestos can be removed in one go, as has happened in some parts of the media that the work is for ourselves. It is not: we come and go; we are tenants. Neither is it for our staff, the officers or anyone else working in the building. That is not why the work should be undertaken, despite the cost. It is for the democratic process. It is for British democracy to have its traditional home, which is recognised throughout the world. We should take pride in the building, and we should take pride in the fact that British democracy is recognised in the way it is, especially in countries in which, unfortunately, the rule of law and civil liberties are totally absent. That is why it is so essential that a decision is taken in the very near future. I want to see a building fit for purpose, a place that ensures the continuation of the democratic process and the rule of law.

Of course, we could go elsewhere. Parliamentary democracy in the United Kingdom certainly does not depend on one particular building—it would be farcical if it did—but this is our traditional home, and hopefully will be for future generations. That is why it is so important that what the report outlines should be seriously considered and a decision should be reached in the near future.

When the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons responds, I hope he has the authority to say that a major debate will take place on the subject this year—in the first part of 2017. The House itself can then reach a decision on option 1, 2 or 3. Whatever it may be, at least the decision will be reached that work should commence following the 2020 general election.
status of the temporary Chamber in Richmond House. For goodness’ sake, surely we can design something that is worthy of this Parliament? If that cannot be done in Richmond House, let us put it in the Foreign Office or the Treasury. That problem can surely be overcome.

I will address the fourth concern for a minute or two. A lot of concerns have been raised, including by me, about the cost and delivery of this enormous project. I have done a little bit of research, and the nearest comparable project I could find was the demolition of Chelsea barracks, which cost £3 billion. That was a third smaller than this place, which covers 73,000 square metres. It is therefore likely that the cost of this project will be well in excess of £3 billion. That cost is well substantiated by Deloitte in its report.

The report is excellent on financial grounds, but the problem is that the report has not scoped the work properly, so I do not know how it can be completely costed. That is why a shadow delivery authority needs to properly scope the work, consult parliamentarians on what is needed in this place and come up with realistic costings. However, Deloitte makes the important point that, for every year of delay, we add £60 million to £85 million to the cost of the project.

The only option is a full decant and a continuous, unbroken period of restoration and renewal. It is our responsibility to get on with this work, so that future generations and parliamentarians do not make the same mistakes as previous generations. Indeed, we are in grave danger of making the same mistakes ourselves if we go for a partial or continuous repair option—options 1 and 2 in the report.

The public support the project. We need to appoint a shadow delivery authority as soon as possible to scope the work, consult parliamentarians on what facilities they want in place—as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said, the disabled access is appalling and it is a scandal that we have such poor facilities for our guests—produce proper costings and report back to Parliament. The work must then be enshrined in statute, so that a statutory delivery authority can begin to get on with the work as early as possible in the next Parliament.

10.16 am

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the debate and that, at last, the matter is before the House. I urge the Government and the Deputy Leader of the House to drive this matter, get behind it, get it on to the Floor of the House and ensure that a decision is taken as urgently and expeditiously as possible.

The public and, indeed, Members are right to feel confused. I feel a little bit confused because people who are leavers in another debate are coming to me and saying they wish to remain, and remainers from that other debate are coming to me and saying they wish to leave. Let us be absolutely clear: we need to leave the House as urgently and expeditiously as possible to allow the work to commence, so that we can come back to a new and better Palace that serves generations to come.

What are we? We are parliamentarians. Let us be the generation of parliamentarians that gets this right. Let us not have it said of our generation that we missed the opportunity, or that we could have got it right but we failed like the generations before us. We have it in our grasp. Let us seize this moment and seize it right. We must take those decisions, drive this matter, and ensure that we at last put in place a board, with parliamentarians on it, and the finance to deliver the project once and for all. We have a duty to do this. We would be derelict in that duty if we failed. Future generations have a right to come to a wonderful Palace of Westminster, as it has been for 1,000 years before, to see what has happened and what will continue happen in this place.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is absolutely right that there is no cheap option. Let us not kid ourselves that there is a way around this, or a way of doing it cheaper. There is not. This is a multibillion pound project whichever way we cut it. The sooner we get on with it, the better for future generations. I served on the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, and I arrived there a traditionalist and as somebody who was going to do his damndest to ensure we stayed in this building. It is not possible. All of the evidence is compelling, and it suggests that we are sitting on a ticking time bomb—that the House will have either a catastrophic flood or a catastrophic fire. How would we feel waking up one morning to that news? Where would fingers be pointing that morning? Now is the time to act and get this right.

It is a financial fantasy to think that we can do this in some other way. I urge the Deputy Leader of the House to speak to the powers that be, to encourage the Government to get on with this matter and to get it in front of the House. It is important for the House to realise more than 8,000 incidents since 2008 have been recorded as significant. Sixty of them could have brought it to a pile of rubble. Are we prepared to wait for one of those incidents to be catastrophic? I say, “No.” I say, “Let’s get on with it expeditiously.”

10.20 am

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) that the Government need to get on with this and that we need a proper debate on the Floor of the House. It is not acceptable—this is not the fault of the hon. Gentleman—that we now have only 10 minutes, if my hon. Friend the Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Varadkar) is called now, to hear an alternative point of view, and there is an alternative point of view. It is held by people who are just as committed to maintaining safety as anyone else.

I congratulate the Committee. We all love this place and we all want to preserve it for future generations, but there is an alternative point of view. I urge the Government to bring a motion to the Floor of the House. If the building is at such risk and if there is a real danger of fire, we need this debate. We were promised it yesterday, so let us have it in two or three weeks and get on with coming to a decision. We should base the debate on the draft motion provided by the Joint Committee of both Houses on page 100 of its report. I for one will seek to table an amendment to it. We already have scores of names on that amendment and we will have a full debate and the House will make its mind up. Let us get on with it.

My view is well known and my amendment will say that we should start work now. We are already spending £100 million, so we should start work now. We should
retain ultimate control, although I accept that no one is suggesting that Members of Parliament should be telling builders, architects and surveyors which part of the building to close at any time. There is doubt about passing too much control to an enabling authority, so we must retain ultimate democratic control.

The third vital point of view, which is held by many Members of Parliament and many peers, is that, as during the second world war, the House of Commons debating Chamber should, at all times, retain a presence in the old Palace of Westminster. The hon. Member for Rhondda briefly alluded to the fact there is an alternative, expert, independent point of view that, instead of building what I would deem to be a folly costing £85 million of a replica chamber in the courtyard of Richmond House, we should, as in the war, use the House of Lords Chamber with a line of route through Westminster Hall and St Stephen’s chapel to the House of Lords Chamber.

The Government have come up with a reply to my proposal and, as the hon. Member for Rhondda mentioned, stated it will cost £900 million more. We dispute that. My architect tells me that people persistently miss the point that our option is a total shutdown, not a hybrid of options 2 and E1. The point is that our proposal is a total shutdown of the mechanical and electrical systems with a full strip-down from day one. The temporary services of the Lords and Royal Gallery are just that—temporary, not lash-ups keeping part of the existing services going. Both the financial impact in section 2.5 most importantly, and the timing in section 2.3, are based on a false premise and exaggerated. The problem is that the writers of the report are not engineers. A properly briefed engineer would pick up that point immediately.

There is an alternative point of view and we will put it during this debate—time is short and I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for North West Cambridgeshire a chance to say a few words. He will talk primarily about the figure. I want to talk about the 1 million visitors to this place every year. We are talking about those who propose a full decant. By the way, I must repeat that the report says the matter is so urgent, that if there were a rolling programme of works and we would pass a way control. I gently suggest that my figures come to a whole lot back. We will eventually move back, but I do not believe it will be in five years. When we lose control, it could be six years. When I was shown round on a tour of the basement, I was told privately that it would be eight years. It is a long time and we would pass away control.

This is not just about us, but about the 1 million people who visit this iconic place every year. My proposal, which I believe is a sensible compromise—services could be taken into the House of Lords Chamber if necessary from outside, so we could shut down all services in one go if we wanted to—would at least keep Westminster Hall open to the public and keep the debating Chamber.

My final point is that, during the second world war, both Attlee and Churchill made an absolute political decision that the Nazis would not bomb us out of this building. We decided to stay here which is why, despite the massive damage to the building, we kept the debating Chamber of the House of Commons in the House of Lords throughout the second world war. Although the issue is not primarily about sentiment or emotion, this is not an office block. If it were I would agree we should move out, but it is not. It is the centre of the nation and the nation should keep its debating Chamber in this building.

10.26 am

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): I wish to take issue with the argument in the Joint Committee’s report that it would cost £3.5 billion to decant and that that would be the cheaper option. I start by pointing to the opening page of the summary, which says in the third paragraph:

“However, there is significantly more work to be done by professionals before budgets can be set, buildings are vacated and works can commence.”

I deeply regret that that caveat is not being emphasised a lot more—indeed, it has not been mentioned by anyone in today’s debate.

It is dishonest to say that leaving here would cost £3.5 billion and be the cheaper option. That figure does not take account of the fact that some £600 million would be spent until 2023 when the full decant would take place. Nor does it take account of the fact that if we fully decant, there would be rental costs for the offices and space that would be needed outside this building. The figure does not show up in the costing on page 39 of the report. It simply says that professional advice will be required. We are talking about millions and millions of pounds of rental costs that are not accounted for.

There is an issue with security costs. If the peers go to the QEII centre, that will mean additional security. A full decant would require additional space outside the Palace of Westminster. Those security costs have not been factored in either—again, it would be serious millions of pounds. The tourism industry was mentioned. If the QEII building closed, that would affect the conferences normally held there, which attract significant sums of money to the local economy; I have heard that it would affect our local economy by some £200 million. Nearby hotels are worried because they will not be able to let out their rooms to people who go to conferences at the centre. There will be an impact on restaurants and taxis.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said that if there were a rolling programme of works and we stayed here, that would be £900 million more expensive. I gently suggest that my figures come to a whole lot more than £900 million; had they been factored into the calculations in the report, we might be having a different debate.

The argument that we must move out is simply not the only one in town. Work is being done at Buckingham Palace. It has 100 miles of cables and 20 miles of pipes, yet the work will carry on while Her Majesty stays there with the entire royal household. Work will be done in segments. During the fire at Windsor Castle in 2002, 20% of it was burned down, yet Her Majesty and the royal household continued to operate from there. They did not have to move out.

As for the advice sought from experts, let us be clear: one does not need to be an expert to work out that the work will be easier if everyone leaves the place of work. That is a given, but the point is that this is no ordinary
building. It is the seat of Government, and we have to take account of that fact. At the time of Brexit, when we seek to make new friends overseas and secure favourable trade agreements, do we really want to convey the image of a temporary building in the courtyard of another Government building? We have to take into account the soft-sell power of the iconic building that is Parliament. I put it gently to hon. Members that the selling power of this building far exceeds any figures for costs that have been produced here. As we have been told, it is an iconic building.

Furthermore, at a time of austerity when we are writing to our constituents and saying that they cannot have an additional few pounds for whatever they are seeking money for, do we really want to go to the public and say that, nevertheless, we want to spend billions of pounds on our place of work? I do not think that in the present economic climate that is sustainable.

The question that should have been put to the experts is not what the best way of working from here is, because the best answer is obviously that we should all clear out. What they should have been told was, “This is Parliament—the seat of Government. Go away and work out a plan for how we can continue to operate on this eight-acre site.” I can guarantee that they would have come up with a proposal had they been given that option.

10.31 am

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate on behalf of the Scottish National party and with you in the Chair, Mr Felly. I wish all hon. Members present and everyone else a happy Burns day.

It is customary to acknowledge and congratulate those who secure debates in Westminster Hall, but today is slightly different. I cannot merely offer ordinary congratulations to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). After all, he has managed to do what the Ministry of Public Building and Works, and then by Parliament itself. Cheekily, I will mention the poll this week that the hon. Gentleman cited: 25% of those polled would happily see the place bulldozed. However, I feel that that is more an indictment of its incumbents than of the building itself. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman made a very good speech to set out his case. He did that very well.

The right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst), a colleague on the Finance Committee, absolutely right: being elected is about doing a job, not about doing it in a particular building. He made a very good speech, as did the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who made a very salient point: the work is not for us. We can be sceptical about the project and criticise elements of it, but we must be clear—that work is not for us; we are merely tenants of the building. I say again that at the present time I am campaigning for my eviction—I will leave that one hanging.

The hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), another colleague from the Finance Committee, highlighted the decades-long neglect of the building and its appalling disabled access—he was absolutely right to place that on the record. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), a colleague from the R and R Committee, made a typically witty speech and a very powerful case for his position. That is on the record very strongly.

The hon. Members for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara) put forward their case. I disagree with it, but they have put their points across and I am sure that they will also do so when the matter comes to the Floor of the House, whenever that may be.

For me, today’s debate is not about the rights or wrongs of the project. The hon. Member for Rhondda will, I am sure, acknowledge that despite my early stated scepticism about the project, I did my best to be constructive in my role on the Joint Committee. I helped to secure a public consultation and some significant improving amendments to the text of the report. There is no doubt in my mind that if the two Houses vote for the project to go ahead, the recommended full decant is the best way to proceed.

For me, a sceptic about the project, and for the hon. Member for Rhondda, a champion of the project, the situation is clear: delaying the debate and the vote does not help anyone. I struggle to understand why the Government have been delaying it. First, we were told that there would be a debate and a vote before Christmas; then it was to be yesterday. Are the Government so concerned about the objections being raised by Conservative Members who are coalescing around the idea that somehow MPs could remain in the Palace while the works are going on?

Some hon. Members are worried that if Parliament does not sit in the Palace for a time, it will not return; others are concerned that customs may be replaced. It is an idea built purely on sentiment. The right hon. Member for Saffron Walden called it romance. It is a romance and sentimentality about a building. The idea does not make engineering or financial sense, as was explained so well by the hon. Member for Rhondda. Working around Parliament sitting in the Palace would add considerable time, cost and risk to the project. The savings from not building a temporary Chamber in Richmond House would be outweighed by the added time to get the work done, the added engineering complexity and the considerable added risk. It is now just shy of five months since our report was published. I say to the Government: get on with the debate and get on with the vote.

Robert Felly (in the Chair): The hon. Gentleman may wish to know that I had a bowl of porridge oats in deference to the bard this morning.
10.36 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Mr Flello. So did I. It is very good for us, I understand.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and the other members of the Joint Committee, who worked very hard in the lead-up to this debate. I also congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Hon. Members will know what my hon. Friend is like: he is blustering and blarneying and very frustrated about this, so it is great that he has had the opportunity to secure the debate. He is right to do that, because the report was published in September 2016.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have been talking to me, and it goes without saying that all hon. Members are concerned about the immediacy and urgency of the work. They are also concerned about costs, and they note that other events and priorities may be occupying the Government’s mind. However, we come to this debate with a background of reports. We have the very good report from the hon. Members who served on the Joint Committee, and the Public Accounts Committee is also considering this matter, although it may not report until March. We also have the Treasury Committee report. Without doubt, whether for engineers, architects or whatever, the costings from September will be different even from the costings now. The hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara) is right to be concerned about that issue. My view is that the debate will clarify all that. The important issue for our side is that hon. Members have a say. That is the key thing. All these questions and concerns can be aired with new information—against the background of the information from all those reports.

The right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) mentioned Canada. I had the opportunity, with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, to visit Canada. Quite by chance, we were taken to the mock chamber that the parliamentarians there had and, in the best tradition of “Blue Peter”, I have here one that I made earlier—a picture of it. Obviously, it cannot be read into Hansard, but it does give a nice flavour of what can be done, if hon. Members want to see it later. It is a beautiful chamber. All of us may feel very comfortable debating in this Chamber now, but if we were given a chamber in the Department of Health that had desks, we would realise how good it would be to debate like a proper, modern Parliament and we might even not want to come back to the old Chamber. Canada’s temporary chamber is not just in a courtyard. It is a beautiful building and, engineering-wise, it shows what can be done—a visit to Canada might be in order.

I want to knock another myth on the head. Again, I am not an architect or an engineer but Members should understand that although we may be moving out of the building, we will not actually be moving off the estate. We will still be around and will not be leaving the parliamentary estate. I am pleased that the work on the cast-iron roof is also being done.

The Joint Committee was tasked to look at this, and has fulfilled its remit, but Members are right to be concerned about costs. We had the same debate when the Labour Government decided they wanted to put money into the Olympics and there was a lot of chuntering that it was going to be too costly. In the end, sadly, there was a change of Government and we did not get the benefit of how brilliant the Olympics were and how, under the Olympic Delivery Authority, everything was done to time and, to a certain extent, cost. The hiccup, as the Deputy Leader knows, was the security—we finally had to get public service in, rather than G4S. We need to be careful that Members are not excluded from the delivery authority. The key point for me is that Members should decide and the only way they can do that is if we have the debate. The one main thing I would ask the Deputy Leader is that we have the debate as soon as possible, based on the information that the other Committees are looking at.

A building is only a building with people in it. It is nothing without people in it. Whatever we decide to do, and if there is only one option, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda suggests, we need to take that decision. However, we need to take an informed decision because, in the end, MPs are always blamed when things go wrong and, rightly, we will take responsibility for that. We need to do this on an informed basis, with everybody abiding by the result.

10.43 am

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Flello, and to close this debate. There have been powerful contributions, if I may say so, from all Members who spoke today. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing the debate and on his service on the Joint Committee. I also commend the service of all the other Members—most of them are here—who served on it. The House owes a debt of gratitude to the members of that Committee for the intensiveness and seriousness of their work. It was,
I believe, a year of hard work. I know that the hon. Gentleman in particular enjoys the history of this place and has written about it.

As has already been said, this is one of the most recognisable and renowned buildings in the world. That is in part because of its architecture—the grandeur of Victorian Britain combined with the historical depth and resonance of Westminster Hall. In part, it is because of what this place represents. The United Kingdom Parliament is for everyone in this country, and it is precisely because Parliament and the Palace of Westminster belong to the British people that we as parliamentarians have a responsibility to ensure that it is preserved for future generations. It is also an edifice that sends a powerful message around the world representing, as it does, the strength of democracy. We are ultimately its custodians for generations to come. People love this building, hence, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) mentioned, it is visited by nearly 1 million people a year. It is one of the few structures around the world that is recognised the world over. Our generation must accept responsibility for the active steps that are needed to preserve it.

We have reached a point where make-do-and-mend is simply not an option. That approach has already been taken and has led to decades of under-investment, which we are now forced to confront. Much of our infrastructure is well past, and in some cases decades past, its life expectancy for its planned working life. Most of the systems put in place in the post-war refurbishment, which was the last time there was a major renovation, were meant to last only a few decades and have now lasted twice as long. Since then, the backlog of maintenance has steadily grown, in part because those working on the structure cannot be entirely sure where all the pipes and wires lead. It will no doubt surprise some, particularly perhaps those outside this Chamber, to know that in some instances the authorities here have to cut a wire and wait to see who complains that the electricity has gone off, or block a pipe and see where there is a later complaint. We do not know, necessarily, where everything leads.

In a sense, Parliament’s maintenance team have been so good at their work that they have been victims of their own success. Members have tended not to be troubled by the headaches that the team face on a daily basis that are mostly hidden in basements, voids or the vertical risers, which have been referred to and of which there are nearly 100 spread across the building. Often, we see only a small proportion of the true scale of the work that takes place every day to keep this Palace going. Again, that is testament to the dedication with which those workers work in difficult, and sometimes dangerous, conditions, particularly because of the presence of asbestos in so many locations around the building.

Yet the task is steadily becoming too great even for those make-do-and-mend measures and the ongoing renovation measures that have been happening for so long. Decades of under-investment mean that the risk of a major fire, flood or other catastrophic failures increase every year. For example, parts of the sewerage system were installed in 1888 and are still in use. The costs of avoiding the inevitable eventual calamity or major emergency, if we do nothing, are also rising. As the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) mentioned, we are facing rising ongoing annual maintenance costs, which reached almost £50 million last year.

Jo Churchill: Will the Minister give way?

Robert Flello (in the Chair): Order. With the greatest respect to the hon Lady, you really cannot come into a debate while the wind-ups are taking place and expect to take part.

Michael Ellis: We need to cover the issue that the ongoing maintenance costs the taxpayer £50 million last year. All told, some 40% of the mechanical and engineering systems will be at an unacceptably high risk of failure by 2020, and five years after that the figure will have risen to 50%. In other words, we are just eight years away from being in a situation in which half the Palace’s systems are so dilapidated that they could cause a major emergency that stops Parliament’s work and forces our evacuation without warning, perhaps overnight. For all those reasons, it is clear that we cannot pass the buck any longer.

Mr Vara: The Minister has emphasised how urgent it is that we get the work done. Does he therefore agree that the work should commence immediately, rather than waiting for six years, as page 91 of the report says? It states that a full decant will take place in six years’ time.

Michael Ellis: It is fair to point out, as was mentioned, that a great deal of work is ongoing while Parliament sits, including, for example, repairs to the roof and other essential items of maintenance. That is a monumental undertaking, and a great deal of work undoubtedly needs to be done in order to set that into train.

We have heard what the Joint Committee has recommended: that a full decant is the cheapest, quickest and lowest-risk option. It also proposes the establishment of a delivery authority, overseen by a sponsor board, which would first be established in shadow form to draw up budgets and a business case, before a final vote in both Houses to approve the plans.

The Government have undertaken to provide time for a full debate and vote in due course on the Committee’s report. The hon. Member for Rhondda will recollect from his duties in this place that time is always at a premium for business managers, particularly so the moment.

Chris Bryant: That is all very well, but to be honest, “in due course” is the kind of phrase that weasels use. It means that someone does not really intend to do something in any expeditious way. Nearly 20 weeks have now passed. We have been told that, every year we delay, the project costs an extra £85 million. The finger will be pointing at the Minister if something goes wrong, as he has just described—so get on with it man!

Michael Ellis: Shall we put it this way? It will happen if not in due course, then as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): I am not sure about weasels, but this sounds like a sketch from “Yes Minister”—Sir Humphrey Appleby’s next line would be “at the appropriate juncture”. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said that each year we delay costs £85 million. We have heard how the public support the decant and improvements to the
House, but the longer we delay, there is a risk that we will lose public support, so I encourage the Minister to get on with it. He seems to be putting forward a case for a full decant, which many of us support, but we need to get on with it.

Michael Ellis: What we decide to do is a matter for the House. I reiterate that we aim to bring the matter to a vote as soon as possible. We have to take the time—and have taken the time—to consider very carefully the details of the proposed recommendations and their implications. It is not simply a question of reading a report that has taken a year to prepare. We want to consider those recommendations and their implications carefully. We have taken advice on a range of technical and governance issues made by the Joint Committee report by, for example, consulting with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. It is only right, too, that Members consider the report of the Joint Committee carefully. I urge all of them to read it in full if they have not done so already.

Mr Winnick: The House rises for the Easter recess on 30 March. Is there a reasonable chance that we will have the debate before then?

Michael Ellis: We aim to bring the matter to a vote as soon as is reasonably practicable. As has been made clear this morning, in recent weeks colleagues have suggested a number of alternative proposals, some of which the House authorities have commissioned additional research on. Those also need to be considered, and that includes the proposals made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough, which have been analysed in detail. A copy of the House’s report will be placed in the Library later today and is available electronically now.

The House authorities have been keen to engage with Members, most recently through two well-attended drop-in sessions—we organised those—with the programme team. Members are also encouraged to arrange to be taken on a tour of the basement areas. It is not compulsory to go with the hon. Member. Member for Rhondda—

Chris Bryant: But it is available.

Michael Ellis: It is available, but other tours can be organised.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I have listened carefully to the Minister’s speech. With great candour and great respect, I say to him that I think he is making excuses on the Minister’s behalf. We need to have this debate and to establish a shadow authority as soon as possible, to have the time—and to consider very carefully the details of the proposed recommendations and their implications. It is not simply a question of reading a report that has taken a year to prepare. We want to consider those recommendations and their implications carefully. We have taken advice on a range of technical and governance issues made by the Joint Committee report by, for example, consulting with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. It is only right, too, that Members consider the report of the Joint Committee carefully. I urge all of them to read it in full if they have not done so already.

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Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I have listened carefully to the Minister’s speech. With great candour and great respect, I say to him that I think he is making excuses on the Government’s behalf. We need to have this debate and to establish a shadow authority as soon as possible, so that the work can be scoped and costed accurately, and we know how to move forward.

Michael Ellis: My hon. Friend knows that time is a precious commodity in this House. Business managers are always under time pressure, now more than ever, but the matter is being given very careful consideration.

Mr Vara: The Minister is being generous with his limited time. He said that alternative proposals are being considered by officials. Given that the report took a considerable amount of time to produce, has huge caveats in it and says that professional advice is still needed for costing purposes, I put on record that, whatever decisions the officials come to, it is assumed that they will have the usual caveats and that we will not be able to rely on those figures to the extent that it is hoped.

Michael Ellis: Once an initial decision has been taken in response to the Joint Committee’s recommendations, focus will shift to the details of developing plans for how the work should be done. However, it is hard for detailed scrutiny to take place now because line-by-line budgets have not been prepared, and cannot be yet. That can happen only when the delivery authority has completed its necessary preparation work.

The Joint Committee was clear that it could not provide detailed budgets. Only establishing a shadow delivery authority will allow a true picture of the costs to emerge, before Members of Parliament and peers of the realm have the final say. The Committee’s headline figures for the cost of the three options under consideration range from £3.52 billion to £5.67 billion—a difference of £2.15 billion—but everyone following the debate should be clear that those are preliminary estimates and not guaranteed costs.

Whatever the differences in approach, clearly no one disputes that we must act to preserve this historic building. On that we have no choice. As part of a UNESCO world heritage site, the Palace simply cannot be allowed to fall into terminal disrepair. Doing nothing is not an option. What happens is up to the House, and ultimately it will be for Members of both Houses to decide on the right way forward. The large sums of money involved and the importance of this building to our nation’s prestige mean great care is needed when weighing up the options.

It is clear from the speeches we have heard that the responsibility of getting the decision right as custodians of this place weighs heavily on all Members of the House. The Government, for our part, will work with Parliament to ensure that whatever is decided is delivered in the right way to preserve this place for the country and for future generations.

10.58 am

Chris Bryant: It has been enlightening to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Fjello. We have heard very good speeches. I particularly congratulate the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) on his very important contribution.

I take a completely different lesson from the fire at Windsor than the hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara). I take the lesson that there will be a fire in this building. It could take a wing or the whole of the building down, which is why we need to act. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) talked about sitting in the House of Lords. He should listen to Winston Churchill, who said in 1943 that there would be a real problem with the House of Commons sitting in the House of Lords, because the Division Lobbies were not big enough. During the war, only 20 or 30 Members sat in the House of Lords or in the House of Commons every day, so their experience was completely different.
The most important thing we have to do is take issue with the Government, because the Minister made a wonderful speech on why we should do what the Joint Committee advised, then issued a whole load of waffly platitudes, as though he was speaking on Her Majesty’s behalf. They were excuses for doing nothing, as the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) said. We have to get on with it. We must have the debate so that we can hear the opposing views and thrash it all out, and it should be before the February recess. Let us just get on with it so that we can make a decision.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I beg to move, That this House has considered the photonics industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Flello.

The usual reaction to any comment about photonics is, “What’s photonics?” It is worth pointing out that photonics is nothing to do with fold-down sofas and that it is not the study of protons. Photonics comes from the word “photon” and is the science of light.

Scotland has a great tradition in science, with figures such as Lord Kelvin, James Watt and Thomas Graham featuring strongly. The most famous physicist in the photonics field, although he is probably much less well-known than those other figures, is James Clerk Maxwell. Maxwell was born in Edinburgh in 1831 and brought up in rural Kirkcudbright, before moving back to study at Edinburgh University. A brilliant mathematician and physicist, he moved to Cambridge at the age of 19. On arrival, he was given a list of rules and told that the 6 am Sunday church service was mandatory. Reportedly, Maxwell paused before replying, “Aye, I think I can stay up that late.”

Maxwell’s most notable work was formulating the classical theory of electromagnetism, which for the first time brought together electricity, magnetism and light. His development of the Maxwell equations, which describe a wave as having an electric and magnetic component, are fundamental when describing the propagation of light. Many argue that Maxwell’s contribution to physics is on a par with those of Newton or Einstein. Indeed, Einstein himself said:

“The special theory of relativity owes its origins to Maxwell’s equations of the electromagnetic field.”

Those equations changed the world forever and are the bedrock of photonics. In recognition, 2015 was designated the international year of light, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Maxwell’s electromagnetic theory of light, thus marking his contribution as the father of photonics.

I knew none of that when I was considering university courses. I chose my course—laser physics and optoelectronics—because I enjoyed physics and, frankly, because the name sounded impressive. As a 17-year-old, I had no idea that Strathclyde University was one of the UK’s leading institutions for photonics. I want to make special mention of Professor Robbie Stewart, whose enthusiasm for and expertise in photonics was matched by his burning desire to see every young person—even those who were sometimes reluctant students, such as myself—achieve success in physics.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a very interesting speech, although I suspect that she will be too modest to say that she has a PhD in photonics—

Carol Monaghan: It is not a PhD.

Joanna Cherry: Well, a postgraduate qualification in photonics.
Carol Monaghan: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and I will talk later about some of the applications of photonics. As she suggests, the central belt of Scotland is a hotbed for photonics, from Glasgow and Strathclyde in the west to Heriot-Watt and Edinburgh in the east.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this matter to Westminster Hall for consideration. Whenever we did research on this issue, one point that emerged was that UK photonics companies export between 75% and 90% of their products, so their importance to the UK economy is immense, even though it is not well known and often overlooked. Does she agree that if the photonics industry across the UK is going to continue to succeed, it needs to be supported, which is something the Minister should consider?

Carol Monaghan: The hon. Gentleman makes some really important points and I will come on to some of the challenges that the photonics industry faces. Of course, one of them is that it is a relatively unknown area of the economy.

In Scotland, the presence of a number of major multinationals, combined with the outstanding research base, has enabled the central belt to become a world leader in the design, development and manufacture of high-value lasers. Laser sales are in excess of £200 million per annum and 90% of those sales are exports, bringing significant wealth to the region.

Scottish companies in the laser sector currently provide employment for around 3,000 people. The largest industrial players in Scotland are Thales, which is based in Glasgow, and Selex, which is based in Edinburgh, but other small and medium-sized enterprises are doing excellent work.

Another renowned company, Coherent Scotland, has gone from strength to strength in the last decade. It is not in my constituency but in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). It manufactures lasers for industrial environments, such as the semiconductor market, as well as focusing on microscopy and micromachining. In the same area, we also have M Squared Lasers, which has won a string of awards for its innovative work in sensing.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and I join her in paying tribute to those two outstanding companies, which are based in my constituency. It has been a real delight to welcome representatives of M Squared to the House of Commons on several occasions.

My hon. Friend has spoken about both the importance of the research base—Glasgow University, which is in both of our constituencies, is important to that research—and the significance of exports. Does she share my concern about the potential impact of Brexit on both the research base and the opportunities for exports?

Carol Monaghan: Brexit is one of the biggest challenges that the photonics industry faces just now, and we need some clear answers about how the industry will be supported through the Brexit process. I will come back to that point later in my speech.

The strength of the Scottish photonics industry is underlined by the fact that when the UK Government invited the Fraunhofer Society of Germany—Europe’s largest research and development provider—to work with the UK, the first centre was established in photonics and was in Scotland at the University of Strathclyde. Of course, photonics features in every part of the UK and there are other major photonics clusters around the UK—Southampton also has a high photonics concentration.

I will give some facts and figures about the UK photonics industry. It is a growth sector, with 1,500 companies employing more than 70,000 people. Its economic impact is impressive, with a sustained growth of 6% to 8% per year over the last three decades, and an annual output of £10.5 billion. That is comparable to the pharmaceutical industry, but of course photonics is far less well-known, partly due to a lack of public understanding, but also to the industry’s high number of businesses, including SMEs. In order to give the industry a voice, the Photonics Leadership Group was set up, with John Lincoln at the helm, and I was delighted that he was able to be present at the inaugural meeting of the all-party group on photonics in October.

A key point about the photonics industry is that it enables other industries to be competitive, with 10% of overall UK jobs depending on it. Photonics is a key enabling technology, encompassing everything from lasers and cameras to lighting and touch screen displays. Photonics is also critical to increasing manufacturing productivity, delivering efficient healthcare, and keeping us digitally connected and secure.

The range and depth of the photonics field is vast, but I will highlight a couple of examples. The first is sensing systems in autonomous vehicles. Those cars navigate using radar, lasers and cameras linked to a computer. A horizontal laser can send out pulses, and by measuring the time taken for the pulse to return, the distance to obstacles can be established, in much the same way as bats use echolocation, so the cars can detect hazards and slow or halt as appropriate.

Lighting and displays are one of the most visible expressions of photonics as an enabling technology. Light emitting diode—LED—lighting is progressively replacing traditional fluorescent bulbs and is finding its way into new areas including signage, illumination, consumer electronics and even clothing. LED technology is projected to become the dominant lighting technology before the end of the decade. By 2020, more than 95% of lighting turnover will be based on the technology.

Another area where photonics has been revolutionary is in the detection of counterfeit goods, which are estimated to cost businesses £3.5 billion per annum. A technique has been developed by the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington to determine whether items of clothing are fake. The technology involves terahertz

[Joanna Cherry]
radiation. When a fabric sample is placed within the beam, the composition and structure can be ascertained, as different types of materials give rise to varying rates of scattering and absorption. The fabric’s unique signature will indicate whether it is genuine or a clever copy.

In healthcare, we are all aware of laser eye surgery and endoscopy technologies, but the photonics impact in that area is massive. A new technology known as photodynamic therapy, or PDT, uses light-activated drugs to kill cancerous cells. Plasters embedded with LEDs developed by the Scottish firm Ambicare Health are being used to treat skin cancer in combination with light-sensitive drugs. PDT is simple to operate and portable, meaning that patients can go about their daily routine while receiving it.

The timing of this debate is particularly useful, coming off the back of Monday’s industrial strategy Green Paper. While the 10 pillars of the strategy have the potential to support the continued development of photonics, the vital role of enabling technologies, such as photonics, needs to be fully recognised. They provide the competitive edge in product performance and manufacturing.

Joanna Cherry: My hon. Friend has spoken much about entrepreneurship and SMEs in the area of photonics. Does she agree that universities such as Heriot-Watt in my constituency are important engines in entrepreneurship and innovation in photonics? For example, in the past five years alone, three spin-off companies have come out of the institute at Heriot-Watt.

Carol Monaghan: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for her intervention. What we see with a lot of these industry-facing universities is great and rich partnerships between industry and research that allow SMEs to flourish.

Less than 5% of the value of high-technology goods, from mobile phones to aircraft, is in the final assembly. Most value is in the design, the critical components, which are often photonics such as cameras, screens, sensors, and the manufacturing equipment, which is also often photonics, such as laser marking or cutting. Manufacturing strategy must therefore be refined to ensure support for the research, design, development and manufacture of the hidden technologies that will secure a productive future. The UK has globally leading photonics research and manufacture of the hidden technologies that will underpin our economy. As an enabling technology, it underpins a wide range of sectors and applications, including aerospace, eye surgery, LED lighting, counterfeit detecting and all the other important examples that the hon. Lady gave. There are more than 1,500 photonics manufacturing companies in the UK, together employing more than 70,000 people. They generate an economic output of £10.5 billion. Our industrial strategy looks to build on that kind of success, further strengthening our science and research base while helping to bring new goods and services to the market more simply and more rapidly.

The photonics industry has been built on the UK’s outstanding expertise. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West mentioned that it was particularly evident in industry-facing institutions such as Heriot-Watt. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council maintains a significant portfolio of photonics research spanning across multiple themes such as ICT, physical sciences and manufacturing. The total portfolio exceeds £170 million in value, and its significant investments include £10.2 million in the national hub in high value photonics manufacturing at the University of Southampton; £7.2 million awarded to University College London for the photonics systems development project; £5.6 million to the University of Sheffield to research semiconductor quantum photonics; and £4.9 million to Heriot-Watt University in the hon. Lady’s constituency for its industrial doctorate centre on optics and photonics technologies.

Joanna Cherry: I thank the Minister for making an interesting and detailed speech and talking about the success of the university sector, particularly Heriot-Watt in my constituency. However, he will be aware that academics in centres such as the institute in my constituency are worried as a result of the Brexit vote about two things: funding and the international pool of academic and postgraduate talent on which they draw. They are
looking for assurance beyond 2020 that the sources of funding and international brain power will not be lost to them.

**Joseph Johnson:** We are sensitive to such concerns, which is why the Prime Minister in her speech a week last Monday made clear statements as to her objectives for our Brexit negotiations. She detailed the importance that she puts on continued collaboration with our European research partners, and on continued access to the brightest and the best—the people who make such a difference to the success of our scientific endeavour in this country. As she underscored in her powerful speech, we are leaving the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe and we remain an outward-looking and globally focused country committed to being the global go-to centre for science and research.

The Government recognise the importance of research to the UK, which is why, at the spending review in 2015—the spending review before last—we protected the science resource budget in real terms at its 2015-16 level of £4.7 billion for the rest of this Parliament, and pledged to increase the science capital budget to £1.1 billion in 2015-16, which will rise with inflation to a total of £6.9 billion over the period 2015-21. At this year’s autumn statement we made the significant announcement that we would make an additional investment in research and development of £2 billion a year by 2020-21. As I have been at pains to say on many occasions, that is the biggest single increase in investment in R and D in this country since 1979.

**Carol Monaghan:** The funding is very welcome and much needed, but we also need certainty over what people can do now and how able they will be to travel in future.

**Joseph Johnson:** We certainly recognise that concern. That is why, to refer back to the Prime Minister's speech a week last Monday, she again repeated her desire to be able to guarantee as quickly as possible the rights of EU nationals residing in the UK. If other countries across the European Union are able to offer the same assurances to our nationals living in their countries, we will be able to put those uncertainties to rest.

As I have mentioned, it is important to ensure that the excellent research carried out in the UK can be successfully commercialised where appropriate. This is why we provide support to that effect through Innovate UK. Photonics is one of Innovate UK's enabling technology areas. Companies can apply for funding for photonics projects in all the so-called emerging and enabling technology calls, as well as calls related to the application of photonics in healthcare, manufacturing and elsewhere. Over the past six years, typical spend has been in the range of £5 million to £10 million per annum, with most funding going to SMEs working in collaboration with research organisations and larger companies. More than £3 million has already been invested in projects in the Glasgow-based firm, M Squared Lasers, since 2008, helping the company to reach an annual turnover that now exceeds £10 million.

Up to £500,000 has been invested in innovative research and development projects through the north Wales photonics launchpad. At the Fraunhofer Centre for Applied Photonics in Glasgow, Innovate UK has funded 20 projects for the centre to collaborate with UK companies.

We have an edge in photonics, but we are not taking that for granted. Our economy has great strengths, but while many people, places and businesses are thriving, opportunities and growth are still spread too unevenly around the country. That is why it is so important that a modern industrial strategy delivers a high-skilled, competitive economy that spreads benefits and opportunities to people throughout the UK.

The Green Paper that we published on Monday marks the beginning of a dialogue to develop a strategy that will also ensure the UK remains one of the best places in the world to innovate, do business and create jobs. We acknowledge the challenges we face. Growth has not been even. Prospects and opportunities for businesses and people vary too much. We have world class businesses and sectors, but some are not yet achieving their potential. Now is the time to face up to the challenges with an industrial strategy that ensures we have a resilient economy for the future.

**Question put and agreed to.**

11.25 am

*Sitting suspended.*
UK-West Africa Relations

[STEVE McCABE in the Chair]

2.30 pm

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con):
I beg to move.
That this House has considered UK relations with West African countries.

Before diving into the substance of the debate, I bring Members’ attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. The reason for the debate was to probe the Government on their reaction to the recent election in Ghana, but in my mind, and I suspect in the minds of other hon. Members, the debate has somewhat morphed into a veritable tour de force of pan-regional issues. I hope it will be an opportunity for Members to delve into specific countries and highlight specific thematic trends and general trajectories across west Africa and the UK’s relationship with that region.

I start with Ghana, which I had the privilege of visiting relatively recently, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) in his role as the prime ministerial trade envoy to Ghana. That was a very interesting time. It preceded the election and built on the relationship I already had with a number of Ghanaian politicians, including Hannah Tetteh, the ex-Foreign Minister, on whom I heap praise for her work across the region. I felt a measure of sadness about the transition of people with whom I was used to doing business, but equally I am optimistic about the new Government, which is perhaps ideologically slightly more closely aligned to the Conservative party.

The new President, President Nana, has a strong team but does not have the benefit of Short money, as we would have here. I would urge the Minister to see what we can do to help the structure of Government in Ghana and addressing that country’s challenges.

One challenge is that of customs, with goods going in and out. There was a horrendous amount of corruption throughout the 20 processes. I did jokingly ask the excellent high commissioner Jon Benjamin to put in the diplomatic telegram that I had suggested at a number of points taking the head of customs to one side and shooting him by way of example. Clearly, that is not something that I would literally encourage, but such was the need for shock therapy in Ghana. I hope the new Government of Ghana will take the opportunity to engage in that challenge.

I saw a number of good companies, including Blue Skies, which provides fruit to the UK. As well as praising my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor in his role as the prime ministerial trade envoy to Ghana, and Jon Benjamin the high commissioner, I thank the high commissioner here, Victor, who was very good in exposing issues around the region and introducing me to west African colleagues based in the United Kingdom. I wish him well in his future.

Perhaps the view from the Foreign Office and the Minister is that Morocco is part of north Africa, but it looks towards west Africa more and more. Only this January there was a Ghanaian-Moroccan economic summit in Accra to look at how they could do business. The King of Morocco has reached out to west Africa over a number of years for trading relationships. I note that Morocco was reported in the African press as having the numbers to formally enter the European Union—sorry, not the European Union! That was a Freudian slip. I meant to say that it has the numbers to enter the African Union, which I think would plug a gap that has far too long been an anomaly in the African Union, notwithstanding Western Sahara.

One of the advantages of the Minister’s new role is that, for the first time in recent times, north Africa has been linked up with the rest of Africa. Over the past 20 years, our UK Government ministerial response to Africa has been disjointed and spread, wrongly, across a number of Departments. Sometimes that was for good reason and sometimes it was just for historical reasons. The reunification in the Foreign Office of Africa is positive, and I will come on to describe other trends and changes that I would like to encourage in the Foreign Office in relation to the structure of Government. The role carried out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps) for a number of years is probably the right role in terms of Government structure, with Ministers operating across the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office wholly dedicated to the African continent.

It would be odd not to mention in a debate on west Africa the topical issue of Gambia. I particularly praise the Minister for going down and visiting the crisis centre and also for the way in which he let everyone know about it. I compliment him on his Twitter feed, which showed a video of him giving a speech praising the excellent work that they do in the basement of the Foreign Office, looking after British citizens when there is an international crisis. That is excellent work and it is brilliant that he could visit and publicise it.

West Africa is not often in the popular press, but Gambia started to hit the Daily Mail and The Sun. I was uncomfortable with some of the things that I read and the characterisation of the new President as the “ex-Argos security man”. There was more than a whiff of colonial snobbery to that. No one has ever described me as the guy who used to stack the shelves at Bejam’s, which preceded Iceland, but I am indeed the same person. Simply because of the nature of people’s view of Africa, that is how they described the new President, an entrepreneur whom I am sure will make a great President. Gambia cannot go the way of Mali with security and migration, which the prime ministerial envoy to the Sahel so ably dealt with. That role has sadly not been refilled, but it is very difficult to find someone of the skillset of Stephen O’Brien.

I note that Nigeria is offering refuge to the retiring, or ousted, President of Gambia. That is difficult and somewhat distasteful, but it is the practical and effective thing to do. I ask Members to reflect on providing soft landings to other leaders as and when it comes about. By no stretch of the imagination can one consider Zimbabwe part of west Africa, but there are parallels, not only for Nigeria but for other countries, in relation to soft landings for exiting world leaders.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. While he is on the issue of the various nations in west Africa and the leaders and incoming leaders, does he agree that one of the best things we can do is encourage active participation by Governments in west Africa on
corruption to try to ensure that those nation states and their citizens benefit from the assistance that we in the UK offer them, and that it is not siphoned off, as has been so often the case in many instances in Africa?

James Duddridge: The point is well made. I had the privilege of being alongside David Cameron when he held the corruption summit with the recently elected President Buhari of Nigeria and others. Tackling corruption right from the top is very effective, but I think more of the Africa of opportunities rather than the Africa of downsides. Corruption is not an African issue—it is a global issue—but it does flair up more in specific countries.

There is a massive opportunity in Nigeria. I cannot remember whether Lagos is referred to as little London or Nigerians in London refer to London as little Lagos, but there is a strong connection, a strong diaspora connection and a massive opportunity. By 2050 a quarter of the world’s population will be in Africa, and a quarter of them in Nigeria. Clearly it would be foolish to ignore such a massive opportunity.

I commend the work of PricewaterhouseCoopers in Nigeria, in Lagos with the governor, on improving the ease of doing business, which is a catalyst for getting more money into the system. I also praise President Buhari for taking the tough decision to float the naira, which will be a catalyst for greater investment in the longer term and which removes a previous deterrent to investment.

Francophone Africa is anchored in west Africa. As a result, with the Commonwealth countries, we think more of southern and east Africa rather than west Africa as our natural bedfellows, but we should not do so. We can do more in west Africa. I have worked in Ivory Coast and travelled to places such as Senegal. We need a bespoke operation in francophone west Africa. The Foreign Office and the Department for International Trade need to co-ordinate to get people whose first language is French, or who are properly bilingual, and to have them travelling to Accra and Abidjan, rather than on a traditional trade mission that might have a stop in Ghana and then a francophone country. We need to be using that sort of bloc of people—the City is pretty full of very competent French bankers who are attracted to the United Kingdom and some of our values. Using some of those French bankers or City workers on transactions in French west Africa would be a good idea.

I mentioned that I used to work in Ivory Coast, which is a beacon of opportunity and growth in west Africa. President Ouattara is forward-thinking. I am particularly impressed that, despite the tendency to extend presidential terms that so blights Africa, he has said he will step down in 2020. Since I worked in Ivory Coast, there has been a long civil war, a recovery and a subsequent significant increase in GDP per capita.

The country is not without its problems. Only a few weeks ago there were what we might euphemistically describe as some problems—the head of the police and of the army were summarily sacked as a result—but stability was restored. Generally Ivory Coast is a beacon for growth in the area and shows what can be done. I have had the privilege of returning to Grand Bassam, where I used to go for a Sunday beer and lunch and where that terrible incident of tourists and Ivorians being killed coming in off the beach was. It was good to show solidarity and I encourage people to return to Grand Bassam and not to let terrorists get us down. People should go back there as a tourist and a business area.

In Guinea-Conakry, one of the biggest private sector investments, Simandou, was proposed, but almost immediately we found ourselves fighting Ebola, which I will come to later. I am interested in any update from the Minister on the project and, in particular, on Chinese involvement. My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor has a degree of knowledge about that and, off the back of his work as the Prime Minister’s trade envoy to Ghana, the President of Guinea was keen on him playing a similar role in his country, but I will leave it to my hon. Friend to update us—I am not sure where that ended.

Continuing our tour of countries, I very much commend the counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics works in Senegal. I also commend to British business the opportunities as the airport moves out of the capital—that big tract of prime land is available for development, commercialisation and businesses to generate tax that will grow the country out of poverty.

In a bizarre segue from Senegal, I will talk briefly about the soft power of the United Kingdom. Go anywhere and people are very interested in, first, the Queen, then premier football and, tailing off, lots of other things depending on their view of the United Kingdom. There is a battle for influence in Africa and, interestingly, it is not only French and English but, for example, American—the National Basketball Association has just set up a college in Senegal. All those things are soft power, and I encourage the Minister to look even more at what we have done previously with the British Council and the premier league at how we project British values, whether through football, the monarchy or business. Other countries including America are certainly doing those things.

I am interested in the role of the Economic Community of West African States and in an update on its activities. I have always found that the region is a stronger building block than the African Union as a whole, but it will be interesting to see what happens in the next couple of days at the African Union meeting, presumably in Addis, where I very hope that Amina Mohamed, who was the Kenyan Foreign Minister, will get elected. I am sure Her Majesty’s Government would not want to take a proactive position and will work with whomever replaces Madam Dlamini-Zuma, but if Amina Mohamed wins the election, it would be very positive for the African Union building out and going forward.

We need to do much more business. Only yesterday I was with a group of African businessmen and an excellent prospective Foreign Office prosperity team. The question was asked: how well are the British Government doing at connecting with business? I was quite self-critical and said that we were doing about four out of 10. Of the others, most people were around six or seven out of 10, but I said—I will use this language, although I am not sure whether it is orderly—that our performance historically had been pretty crap. Compared with other countries and their interaction, I feel that we are not very good. In summarising, one ex-Foreign Office official—bless him—said that he appreciated my comments, and that I was...
“much less crap” than many of the other Ministers. I am sure he was not referring to the Minister present today, but was making an historical reference. I was hoping for something more complimentary from former colleagues, but there we go. We take praise where we can find it.

Understanding the Brexit deal for Africa and looking at a post-Brexit economic partnership arena, Brexit might be an opportunity to look towards a continental free trade agreement in the African continent. I was positive about and pushed EPAs, or economic partnership agreements, as a liberalisation of trade in Africa and with the European Union, but Carlos Lopes previously of the United Nations and now of the AU was critical of my position, because he felt, rather as we felt that Britain should not just look towards the European Union, that Africa should not be focused on dividing itself into four blocs that refer back to the European Union, which is a relatively stagnant body for future trade.

I am interested in what we can do to leverage bilateral negotiations with African countries to allow them to buy into trading with one another. I do not know whether it is even possible under World Trade Organisation rules for lesser developed countries to trade quite freely. There are some significant middle-income countries, but I am not quite sure whether we can get one deal that fits all or how things would happen.

I am fascinated to find out more about the Commonwealth Trade Ministers meeting in February or March, which could be really good for building blocs for Brexit. We need a Commonwealth strategy, a non-Commonwealth strategy and a strategy for the Department for International Development and the countries in which it operates.

I said I would mention Ebola. I do not want Ebola to fall off the table, as it were. I compliment HMG on what they did in Sierra Leone. One of my proudest moments in the Foreign Office was handing out Ebola medals, including to a lady who works in my private office, Rachel Chetham. She had gone to Sierra Leone and put herself in harm’s way to help those people. I was very proud of what she did specifically and what the Foreign Office and HMG did overall.

Looking back on the Ebola crisis, we should learn some lessons. In that one year of crisis alone the international community spent 15 times more than had been spent in all three of the Ebola countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the previous 15 years. If we can invest early in the resilience of the health system, that would be incredibly positive. That point was made to me by Results UK about Ebola.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He makes a good point about what lessons can be learned. We should all be proud of how the Foreign Office, the Government and the national health service responded to the Ebola crisis and the support they provided. In that context, does he believe that there are opportunities to forge stronger links between the NHS, and indeed our universities and medical schools, and many west African countries?

James Duddridge: I have great respect for my hon. Friend’s views on health, and he hits the nail on the head. It is ludicrous for DFID to promote health when there is vast expertise in the Department of Health that we should leverage. The same goes for the Department for Education. We can do a lot more. We must also support parliamentarians. I recently met the Sierra Leonean Select Committee on health through the good offices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It was clear that it was not getting the leverage in its Parliament to move things forward and propose changes.

I have recently started engaging on tuberculosis, which I had really associated only with being a by-product of HIV. The World Health Organisation estimates that more than 800,000 people in west Africa fell ill with TB in 2015, and nearly 300,000 people died. The mortality rate in west Africa for TB is around 36%, which is double the global average. I am keen to work with the Global TB Caucus, and I encourage other hon. Members to do so. Parliamentarians can play a great part in dealing with TB, and that caucus mobilises parliamentarians from across Africa. Will the Minister see whether his good offices in west Africa—ambassadors and high commissioners—can be used alongside the Global TB Caucus to encourage parliamentarians of those nation states to get more involved and collectively work with us to deal with this issue?

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning TB, which is absolutely vital. Does he agree that tremendous progress has been made in west Africa in the past 15 years in reducing both the incidence of malaria and mortality from it, not least given the support from DFID and the UK Government more generally? There is a real issue in the Sahel with intermittent malaria, which DFID is trying to tackle. As Nigeria is one of the two countries in the world where malaria is most prevalent, it is vital that we continue that support.

James Duddridge: My hon. Friend has a great reputation on those issues and on international development more generally. He is entirely right gently to reprimand me and say that we must look at the successes as well as the problems. The successes show that the aid budget works and that we should do more of it—they do not show that there are so many problems even after we have done all that work. Aid works and we should do more of it.

I turn to the perennial subject of Donald Trump—he perversely even a debate about west Africa. Will the Prime Minister raise the subject of Africa when she meets Donald Trump? I think she should. We should find out his views about Africa and aid in Africa. We have heard his views about family planning, and there may be a vacuum that the UK and other countries will need to step into, but what is his view of AFRICOM, the US’s African command? What is his view about stepping in if things deteriorate in places such as Burundi, where the Americans would have been well placed to offer support if regional forces did not? Will the Americans be prepared to step up? What discussions has the Minister had with his French and American counterparts about the global effort if there is a need to surge forces into Africa?

There were many places that I did not get to visit. I encourage the Minister to travel the road less trodden and visit the likes of Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. I wish I had gone to Gambia. If one has visited some of those smaller countries, when things kick off—for
want of a better word—and there is a problem, one sometimes has a rough idea and can pick up the phone and speak to people. The UK Government’s understanding, knowledge and penetration of Africa means that they are able to do that.

I have taken far too long—I apologise to Members—but in summary, I ask the Minister to do three things: help Nana in Ghana, look to set up a Francophone group of businesspeople, and lobby for structure of government changes so that Africa is better represented by HMG here in the United Kingdom.

2.55 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) on securing the debate and thank him for raising many important issues, on which I hope to comment.

The Department for International Development currently spends nearly £307 million in Nigeria, making it DFID’s third largest country project budget. I had the pleasure of visiting Nigeria in 2015 with the International Development Committee to see the fantastic work that is being undertaken there, particularly on girls’ education. That visit followed the distressing abduction of the Chibok girls, which people around the world heard about and which left an indelible impression on me as a parent of two girls. Parents sent their children to school one day and then got the news that they had been abducted, purely because they valued education—and education for girls. That must have been a traumatic experience for anyone affected. That trauma continues to this day, as most of the girls remain missing. I met the “Bring Back Our Girls” campaigners who campaign every single day outside the Nigerian Parliament for those girls’ return. We also met Government officials who have pledged to return the girls and fight Boko Haram’s extremism with all that they have. Will the Minister continue to assist with that? We must never let prevail extremists who wish to suppress women and girls, their education and their liberty.

I read with absolute disgust on Monday that Boko Haram has taken to sending female suicide bombers into Government and civilian territory with infants strapped to their backs. Such atrocities and such a lack of concern for human beings—are barely understandable. What are the UK Government doing to counter extremism and support the Government of Nigeria in dealing with Boko Haram? It is also important that DFID provides all the support it can to help the girls who are returned to reintegrate. I have read reports in newspapers that girls who have returned may be being stigmatised and ostracised by local communities, but given all that they have been through, they need all the support they can get.

On transparency, as a member of the International Development Committee, I believe that DFID must apply stringent criteria to its aid. Corruption has been rife right to the top of the Nigerian Government. I commend President Buhari for his stance that no one should be above the law, and for investing in anti-corruption measures.

What are the United Kingdom Government doing to support him? Jobs and livelihoods will be extremely important in both countering extremism and providing alternative opportunities and hope for a population that has seen great inequity for as long as it can remember. When I was in Nigeria, people were reluctant to take money from me via credit or debit card, even at the airport. The society appears to be cash based, and little of that cash is accounted for. I therefore expect that little cash makes its way into the Government’s coffers. Helping Nigeria to integrate technology for mobile phone transfers and banking will be an important step forward in making cash count for the whole of its society and helping tax collection initiatives.

I also briefly visited Senegal and was impressed by the British industry there. I met representatives from Cairn Energy, a Scottish energy company that has invested in drilling for oil there. I believe there are important trade opportunities for the UK across Africa, but I would like to see that being sustainable trade that involves all strands of society and that offers jobs to local people, once again reducing inequality. I would be pleased to hear an update from the Minister on trade relations—explicitly on sustainable trade relationships across Nigeria—that will complement DFID’s strategy to reduce poverty.

I also believe it is important to briefly mention the Committee’s work on the Ebola crisis. I commend all of those involved during the crisis for their work, including Pauline Cafferkey—a nurse who is based locally to me. The Committee heard evidence last year that one of the lessons to be learned from that crisis was the lack of ability to act swiftly enough on the ground by engaging with small, community-based interventions at the frontline. Further work must be done to enable DFID to do that.

The Committee also heard evidence that HIV/AIDS continues to be endemic in Africa, and we know it is one of the biggest killers of adolescents. An HIV/AIDS strategy is required, and I was extremely disheartened to learn that DFID does not currently have one. Those are some of the issues that I believe we must continue to raise and take forward. The Government are perhaps not ready to develop their own strategy across Africa, meaning that the withdrawal of aid money from middle-income countries is a pertinent issue that should be looked at across Government. If we withdraw too quickly, there is a real concern that we may not be able to meet our global goal of eradicating HIV/AIDS by 2030.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The hon. Lady is making a powerful and important point on how Government funding is allocated in order to provide support for countries across Africa. It is important that that funding does not dry up before good results are able to embed themselves and last in perpetuity. That is why we have introduced the prosperity fund, which allows us to move away from DFID funding per se—which is more humanitarian-focused—to what can actually help to build economies and support people in the longer term.

Dr Cameron: I thank the Minister for that helpful intervention; I am pleased to hear it. As I say, I believe that jobs, livelihoods and trade will provide an excellent way forwards for people by giving them alternative opportunities, thereby driving them away from extremism in their local areas. However, DFID’s work should include developing an HIV/AIDS strategy. The Government
should take that seriously, because great strides have been made on that issue, and I would not like to see transmission rates increase as we withdraw from middle-income countries that are not ready to develop their own policies.

There is a balance of aid work, sustainability, jobs and livelihoods and trade opportunities across west Africa. It would be helpful to hear an update from the Minister, and I look forward to his giving one.

3.3 pm

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): I am delighted to be able to make a short contribution to the debate. I will primarily focus on Ghana, as I am the Prime Minister’s trade envoy to that country. Many people need to be thanked for both the development that has taken place in Ghana and the development that is about to.

First, I thank the outgoing Africa Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), for calling the debate, for the fantastic work he did there, and for the great time that we had when we were last in Ghana together. His legacy lives on among the Ghanaians, and his contribution is very much valued. Secondly, I thank the high commissioner, Jon Benjamin, and the staff at the high commission in Ghana. The tremendous team includes Gavin Cook, Sharon Ganney, Elorm, Selasi and many others. They are an interactive and energetic team, and they prepare the ground very well for when Ministers visit and for when I arrive to try to negotiate trade arrangements.

Thirdly, I thank the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people in general. There is a great presence from companies such as Subsea 7 and all sorts of oil and gas exploration companies. All the expertise in Aberdeen and other parts of Scotland is certainly bearing fruit in Ghana, in helping in the oil extraction and transportation industries and in improving the expertise and the jobs available to Ghanaians. Fourthly, I thank the Minister, who is a long-time friend of mine, not only for his dedication to his role as Minister for Africa—I know it is now a very broad role and includes parts of the middle east—but for joining us on a visit in the not-too-distant future for the 60th anniversary of Ghanaian independence.

Fifthly, I thank not only the current Government but previous Governments for the support they have given to Ghana, in particular, over the years. Some £80 million from DFID was given in the last year, with plenty earmarked for the current year. The Government have also provided support for Ghana’s regulatory regime and governance. As the Minister mentioned, the prosperity fund is a real opportunity not only to provide aid and support to Ghanaians in difficulty and for issues that we in the United Kingdom care about, but to ensure that Ghanaians are not just dependent on aid—trade helps to lift all boats.

Sixthly, I have to thank British businesses. We have £1.3 billion of international trade with Ghana, as of a year or two ago, of which half is contributed by UK companies, including Scottish companies, that have taken the step of investing and working in Ghana. That brings not only foreign exchange and benefits to UK businesses, but expertise, benefits and employment to Ghanaians. In many ways, it is those trading and business relationships that really make the difference in developing nations.

Finally, I have to thank the Ghanaians people. There has just been a peaceful transition of power in Ghana, which was one of many consecutive peaceful transitions. The outgoing President Mahama needs to be thanked for gracefully accepting defeat at the election and, above all, Nana Akufu-Addo needs to be thanked for his magnanimous victory. He made an immediate commitment in his first speech to ensuring that opaque business practices—corruption—are brought under control, which bodes very well for our relationship in the years to come.

However, there is no doubt that Ghana—and the whole of west Africa—faces challenges, including opaque business practices; a lack of transparency in the tax and investment regimes; and sometimes a lack of consistency in the application of the law across the country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East pointed out, there are huge challenges around customs. If the first experience of a business, or a country such as the United Kingdom, coming into Ghana or west Africa involves huge challenges in just getting its goods and services through the port, it can act as a massive deterrent. I am glad that the incoming Administration will focus on resolving that. There is also an issue if one cannot be confident of one’s intellectual property rights or ownership rights of land. That has been a challenge in Ghana, and I hope it will be tackled, with some support from the UK Government, in the not-too-distant future.

I do not want to be down in this debate; I actually smile when I think about the Ghanaian election result. A peaceful transition of power—not even a wobble—in an African state is a tremendous achievement. The chair of the Electoral Commission of Ghana must be thanked for declaring the result as soon as it became clear, as must all participating parties. The UK played a role in helping to make sure that the election ran smoothly, and all of the international observers during the transition should also be thanked.

Let us look at the opportunities. There is no doubt that a stable, democratic set-up creates business stability, and an environment in which UK and other overseas businesses are prepared to trade, with the certainty that no sudden change in leadership will occur. So we have huge opportunities on national security and opportunities to continue to work with the Ghanaian people on visa fraud and issues that relate to visas. We also have an opportunity to support Ghana in its transition to becoming a more accountable state for its people and more transparent and visible in its business practices and institutions. Above all, we have a huge opportunity—putting our selfish hat on—to massively boost and increase our trade with Ghana.

Ghanaians are completely open to us. They are English-speaking. They have the same language and the same common law legal system. They are anglophiles. Almost every Ghanaian President has been educated in and has strong connections with Britain. It was very clear from the incoming President’s inaugural speech that he fully intends to work with the United Kingdom on trade. Furthermore, we were pretty much the only country to have an audience with the President on his first day in office. That says a lot about the relationship and good will that we enjoy between our countries and it says a lot about the opportunities in Ghana and the certainty with which British companies can operate there.
UK Export Finance made its first direct loan to GE Oil & Gas for 100 MW of electricity generation. Lonrho in the UK has a major interest in the Atuabo free port. If the free port proceeds, which I very much hope it does—I am pushing for it—it will be one of the most magnificent, effective and efficient free ports in the whole of Africa. It can revolutionise how the whole of west Africa works, including the way in which goods and services are accessed and oil and gas transported.

We have huge interests in hospitals, but I want to highlight one area: professional services. Often in Ghana there may be a lack of capital to invest in partnerships in Ghanaian businesses and also sometimes a lack of the professional expertise that is required for Ghanaians to help themselves by starting their own businesses and making a success of them. That is where Britain comes to help themselves by starting their own businesses and the professional expertise that is required for Ghanaians in Ghanaian businesses and also sometimes a lack of capital to invest in partnerships.

It strikes me that Ghana is a prime opportunity for the United Kingdom’s new outward-looking international profile, which looks to be integrated with the rest of the world as we begin to adapt our relationship with the European Union. Ghana should be right at the top of the list when it comes to looking at free trade arrangements. There is an opportunity there. The Ghanaian people are very comfortable with Britain: so comfortable that perhaps up to 500,000 of the Ghanaian diaspora are British citizens now. There is a depth of good will on which to draw between the two nations.

When I was appointed as the trade envoy to Ghana by the Prime Minister, I was delighted because I feel I embody the relationship with Ghana. Having a father from Ghana and a mother from Britain, it is as though our relationship is embodied within my very soul. We have a great opportunity to really get ahead in striking free trade arrangements and working out our new relationships with developing nations once we are free of the customs union and European Union strictures.

I have visited many other parts of west Africa, including Guinea, and I will make an observation to back up what my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East has said. We often say that the francophone countries, the ex-French colonies, play second fiddle when it comes to dealing with the United Kingdom. From my experience of speaking to the President of Guinea and several other leaders in west Africa, it is exactly the opposite. We have a huge opportunity with French-speaking countries. Let me put it this way. Their detachment from the colonial past with France means that they are very keen to get rid of that history and to join in the English-speaking world, the anglosphere. So I put it to the Minister that we should make efforts to reach out to ex-French colonies across Africa because they are so keen to ensure that they create that relationship with the United Kingdom. They recognise that English is the international language of business and they really want to connect with us. Often in my conversations—quite unguarded among some African leaders—many of them are clear that they want to make English their official language. They get upset when ministerial visits are paid to English-speaking African countries and French-speaking countries often play second fiddle. So there is a huge opportunity there as well to form strong and deep connections with former French colonies.

There are also opportunities in terms of charitable activities and skills, training and transfers to Ghana and other parts of west Africa. A fantastic organisation called Field Ready sets up schemes in technical colleges and universities in Africa, primarily in Ghana, through which 10, 20 or 30 highly skilled Ghanaian students are given placements in the oil and gas industry. Not only are they thankful and warm towards the United Kingdom when they take up the placements, but they ensure a deep well of good will on which to draw in future. Putting down indigenous roots where students and young people are friendly with the United Kingdom in some of the most important industries in which we operate, particularly the oil and gas industry in Scotland, is a really solid part of providing not aid, but trade, skills and training that enable Ghanaians to lift their own living standards with our support.

I thank the Minister for agreeing to come to Ghana in the not-too-distant future for the 60th anniversary. I have two asks: please let us put Ghana and west African states at the top of the free trade agenda in negotiations, and let us welcome those nations as proper partners and allies in the fight against terror and in the pursuit of national security. Let us welcome them as equals in our outlook on the world, which now recognises that it is trade and business that lift all the boats, not just aid. Finally, the Ghanaian President has said he does not want Ghana to be seen as an aid recipient. He wants it to be seen as a trade recipient, and that is something we must focus on.

3.17 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) on presenting an excellent debate for us all to participate in. Excellent speeches have already been made. It is great to make a contribution, especially in the light of my role as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief. As the Minister and shadow Minister know, I take a human and moral standpoint when it comes to foreign aid, especially when it comes to religious freedom and religious liberties, issues that are regularly in my postbag in my constituency. Other Members I have spoken to tell me the same.

It is well documented that UK relations with west African countries are different with each individual country. Our influence waxes and wanes, so policies and aid vary according to the needs of the people who live there. As different and multicultural as they are, they all have one thing in common: they rely on our aid, support and assistance. We must ask ourselves whether we are effectively exerting our influence to bring substantial and lasting change to those nations, or simply handing out plasters in a situation that calls for surgery at the highest level.

Hon. Members have asked how our foreign aid will be affected by Brexit. How will it impact on our efforts with economic development and clean water? Some of the churches in my constituency of Strangford are directly involved in such aid. How will Brexit impact on...
stability in west Africa? How much protection and assistance will the Christian Church get from the UK Government in countries threatened with Islamic extremism and persecution?

One of the main west African recipients of aid in the financial year 2016-17 is Nigeria, which is getting some £306 million. It has a population of 160 million, more than 100 million of whom live on less than £1 a day. The main aims of our Government are to provide help with better services—education and health care—and to do some excellent work. The Library background information outlines some of what we do. Another aim is the establishment of an enabling Government who tackle corruption and enhance transparency and accountability. Corruption is a key issue, to which the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East referred. How many of the aims have not been reached? Recently UNICEF researchers and workers in northern Nigeria have spoken of the worst situation of hunger in the world. We cannot ignore that.

More than 3 million people in the region have been forced out of their homes, and aid agencies can reach many of the refugee camps only by helicopter. Oxfam workers accuse the army of doing nothing instead of securing access roads for aid agencies. As to Ministry of Defence and British forces assistance to the Nigerian army, we clearly have a commitment through the MOD and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The RAF regiment is also there assisting the army in training. However, we must ask why the roads are not being cleared and made accessible for aid. If 3 million people are starving, why is the Nigerian army not doing what it is tasked to do, and what has it been trained to do by our Army? Are we doing enough to provide for the people there? Is there any way to get the Nigerian Government to do more?

There have been small successes since Muhammadu Buhari became president in 2015, with Boko Haram being pushed back from occupied territories in northern parts, but despite his intention to fight Boko Haram, he has seemed reluctant to respond to continued violence against the Christian population in the middle belt of Nigeria. In October more than 40 people were massacred in cold blood by Fulani herdsmen, for no other reason than that they were Christians. There is something seriously wrong when those things become small print in the papers, or we do not know about them at all. What advice or assistance has the Minister been able to give Nigeria with a view to helping our brethren? If he is not able to outline that in his response, I should be worried about what would happen: would the inauguration of the joint French and Malian military intervention the country has looked more stable; however, the small Christian population is still living in fear in Mali. What are we doing to assist them and give them succour?

We can see at first hand the destruction and the violent nature of radical Islam. Last week a bomb attack by al-Qaeda in the city of Gao killed 77 people and injured hundreds more. Were Members aware of that? It is a reflection on us all—including myself—if we do not know about such things taking place, and about what is happening in Mali. As to its relationship with France, will there now be a joint effort to support France in ridding Mali of al-Qaeda influence and stabilising the country?

I want to congratulate the aid workers, charities, churches, doctors and nurses and everyone involved in making Sierra Leone Ebola-free as of January 2016. What good news that was, and what a response there was from our Government as part of the plan. The country has a population of only 5.75 million, and more than half of the people live on less than £1.50 a day. With the state completely ravaged by Ebola, we know that a lot of work is needed to begin to get the country back on its feet socially and financially. As the Minister knows, British Army personnel have been there, as have aid workers; and we have given direct assistance. The Library note explains what has been done practically, and it is good news.

Our aim is to improve the education system, especially by giving more encouragement to girls, children with disabilities and the most marginalised in society: to support the private sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises—again in practical ways; and to help to tackle corruption through the innovative “pay no bribe” programme. Such practical changes are good steps forward. However, in the past week the news has been released that millions of dollars in funds to fight the Ebola virus have not been accounted for. Where did that money go? I would like to know what the Government have done about requesting an independent inquiry into where the funds we allocated have gone. How many lives could have been saved with the money that went missing? We need to get feet on the ground to source the misappropriated money, and help the relevant state institutions to hold those who were involved to account.

I want to mention the question of Yahya Jammeh, the former leader of Gambia—whose name probably sounds wrong pronounced in my Ulster Scots accent. Although he has finally been disposed of—boy, is that good news—after losing the election to Adama Barrow, I believe that there should be an international investigation into the war crimes of Mr Jammeh. After 22 years of holding office he has left the country in controversial circumstances, with accusations of embezzling some £8.8 million, which equates to what the country requires to pay for the civil service for a year. The hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) said that he has gone to Nigeria, although I am not sure whether that is true.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Last week I met some London-based members of the United Democratic party of Gambia. They were desperately worried about what would happen: would the inauguration
“The Slave’s Lament”, he wrote:

was an opponent of the slave trade on the west coast of when we celebrate Scotland’s great humanitarian. He debate, which is perhaps appropriate on Burns night (James Duddridge) on securing this timely and consensual to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) said in her intervention.

I hope that in response to today’s debate the Government will see the need not only to protect the people of west Africa from radical Islam but to give them the impetus to develop their nations socially, financially and politically. It will be a positive move forward if we can engender that; if we can enable them to do it, and encourage them. Those nations can then give themselves the future they want and deserve. The old adage applies, about giving a man a fish or a net. I want to be sure that we are providing nets—I am sure that the Minister will respond to that. As the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East said, that region does not always get the attention it deserves for a range of historical reasons, so it is good that we have had this opportunity. As has happened in other recent debates about other regions of Africa, the definition always stretches a little when Members want to mention specific countries. I want to reflect on some of the countries that have been mentioned and then some of the regional challenges and opportunities that the Government can respond to.

Ghana was the clear focus of the hon. Members for Rochford and Southend East and for Windsor (Adam Afriyie). Like everyone else, we welcomed the peaceful transition of power and congratulate President Nana Akufo-Addo on his election and John Mahama on standing down. There is sometimes an issue across the continent with big-man politics, but the real measure of a man in such situations should be the willingness to accept the result of a democratic election and to hand over the baton with good grace.

I always associate Ghana with fair trade chocolate. Trade, customs and so on were raised by both hon. Gentlemen and the countries’ economic potential came through clearly in their speeches. Free trade is important and, hopefully, will allow countries to become less dependent on aid, but free trade must also be fair trade; the principles behind the fair trade movement are exceptionally important. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East touched on Morocco and its access to the African Union. I may say a bit more about the AU and the Côte d’Ivoire as a beacon for growth.

Gambia has been in the news a lot recently, as we heard from all hon. Members. It was a bit of a rollercoaster; when I first saw that this debate had been scheduled, I thought we would be calling for action and asking what we could do, but there now seems to have been a peaceful transition. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) said, people are experiencing some hope, although there are concerns about Jammeh’s legacy, not least the reported theft of the finances and infrastructure of west African countries. As a developed state we need to encourage and develop ECOWAS so that in the future it can develop those countries; they can then lead the way for other African states, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) said in her intervention.

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The situation in Nigeria was touched on powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). The size of
the country and its challenges are vast, but so too are the opportunities. The ongoing instability in the north-east and the continuing threats from Boko Haram need to be addressed in any way we can. The “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign continues after two years.

I pay tribute to all the expat and diaspora communities from west Africa that enrich and enliven so many of our cities and towns, not least in Glasgow. There is a large contingent of Nigerian priests in Glasgow; I remember attending a service to pray for girls who had been kidnapped. Every name was read out by Father Thaddeus Umaru, who was one of my parish priests at the time. It was incredibly moving, and to think that those girls are still imprisoned and displaced is dreadfully worrying.

Displacement continues across the country. Over 2 million people have been displaced; the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke about the level of hunger. That shows the challenge to middle income countries and the real inequalities that can exist, which is why making sure the appropriate support is provided in a range of different ways, whether through the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or different sorts of trade, is important.

That brings me to issues ranging across the whole region and the continent as a whole. The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) touched on health in his intervention and the former Minister, the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), raised the challenge of TB, malaria and other neglected diseases.

In the transition to middle income status, Nigeria, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire are all listed by the World Bank as lower middle income countries, but that is perhaps the most precarious situation because of the risk of backsliding. That is why the role for regional co-operation is so important. Both the regional blocs and ECOWAS, as has been mentioned a couple of times, have played important roles in intervening in the different instabilities we have heard about.

The African Union as a whole is where there may be a bit of divergence because we have taken quite a step by choosing not to be part of the European Union and that diplomatic bloc. I am not sure what message that sends out. We must be sure that regional bodies do not encourage countries sometimes to hold their neighbours to a slightly higher standard than they want. It would be interesting to hear some of the Minister’s reflections on that. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East was right to talk about the importance of the UK’s diplomatic influence and the various different kinds of soft power.

DFID’s role was discussed recently in a debate in the main Chamber about the Great Lakes region; I was pleased to hear the Minister commit so strongly to the 0.7% target. It is important to reiterate that at every opportunity. It is ultimately in our own interests to halt flows of people. If we want to improve stability in these countries, it makes sense to invest in stability and civil society. The hon. Member for Strangford has a debate here tomorrow on civil society, when we can explore some of the issues in more detail.

Finally, the impact of Brexit and trade deals have been a big focus of the debate and are important. As I said at the beginning, they must be fair trade deals as well as free trade deals. It is important that any deals reflect the range of human rights commitments that the UK and, hopefully, many of these countries are signed up to and that they take account of climate change and emissions reduction.

When preparing for the debate, I read an interesting piece about regional co-operation to reduce the harmful emissions of diesel that is sold into many west African countries. Action is being taken to tackle climate change, but we must also tackle the pollution of air quality and the impact on health on many people’s day-to-day lives. Again, it is encouraging to see such developments. I hope the Government will commit to continuing to take them forward.

The slave in Burns’s lament had no choice but to be weary, but we cannot allow ourselves to be. Much of the situation in west Africa and the continent is the result not just of historical decisions, but of present day ones made in this part of the world. If we can continue to show the compassion and solidarity that Burns promoted, perhaps there will be less lamenting and more cause for celebration the world over.

3.38 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I thank the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) for raising the debate, and for his excellent and wide-ranging introduction to the subject. I know this area is of great interest to him, given his previous role in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and to sum up in this debate, which has covered a wide range of issues. We have spoken about DFID and our aid, notably mentioned by the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). We have talked about healthcare, touching on malaria, TB and Ebola. We have also discussed elections, democracy, Governments and corruption. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East—or, as I will always think of him now, the guy who stocked the shelves at Bejam—spoke at length about the various elections, notably the successful election in Gambia. I will move on to discuss that country. We also had an excellent talk on business and trade, with specific reference to Ghana, from the hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie). I look forward to hearing the Minister’s responses to those discussions.

A major issue in the region of west Africa is terrorism, which some hon. Members touched on. West Africa has seen a rise in radical activity. Boko Haram is seen as the biggest threat to security and peace in the region—mainly in the Lake Chad Basin region, including Nigeria and Niger, although its presence has recently reached into Senegal. Boko Haram is estimated to be linked to more than 150 deaths from direct violent activity since the beginning of 2016. It has also contributed to a rise in food insecurity, with threats to the security of agricultural land and livelihoods, displacement of farmers and reduced productivity.

The United Nations reported only last month that 400,000 children were on the brink of starvation owing to Boko Haram’s actions. Even worse, it said that 75,000 of them could die from hunger within the next few months. Last week, the United Nations called on “the international community to immediately support the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance”.

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The region also has an al-Qaeda presence in the Islamic Maghreb. It launched an attack in Mali last November and attacks in Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast just this month.

Earlier this month, the Secretary of State for Defence announced the training of UK armed forces alongside Sierra Leonean troops. That is in addition to the more than 350 British troops deployed to Nigeria in 2016 to train Nigerian armed forces fighting Boko Haram. Are the Government in further talks with west African nations to deploy troops in that region? If so, could the Minister tell us where and how many?

Other factors, outside terrorism, have cost thousands of lives in previous years. The region’s resilience was tested during the outbreak of Ebola that began in 2013. The Ebola virus swept across Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, claiming tens of thousands of lives. That could have been a pandemic, but the international community’s action and contributions, including £427 million provided by the UK, stopped the escalation.

I recently visited Sierra Leone myself and saw a country that was struggling, although it was declared Ebola-free on 17 March 2016. I must praise the UK Government’s response and contribution to helping to ensure that that was possible. That highlights the importance of retaining our commitment to spend 0.7% of our gross national income on aid every year and our substantial contribution to the European development fund. Can the Minister outline whether the UK will contribute an amount equivalent to that which we currently give the region through the EDF once we have left the European Union?

Given the severity of a disease such as Ebola and the pace at which it can spread, I want to press the Minister on what the Government have learned from the Ebola crisis. What additional measures and apparatus do the Government need to put in place so that, should another outbreak like that occur, they would be better equipped to deal with the emergency?

Last week, as many hon. Members have said, President Adama Barrow was sworn in as President of Gambia. I am sure that the whole House welcomes his success. Yesterday, we also welcomed his vice-president, Fatoumata Tambajang, to her role in the new Administration. I am pleased to see a woman in such an important role. However, it seems that objections are now being raised because Fatoumata is 67 years old. Apparently, in Gambia, that is two years over the legal maximum for serving in the post. I can only say that it is fortunate for us in the UK that we do not have such a rule here—we would be having several by-elections.

There are obviously issues still to be resolved in Gambia, but what has just happened there has been seen as a huge success story for Africa, and it could be a turning point for Gambia itself. This is the first time since becoming independent, which happened only in 1965, that Gambia has changed its Government through the election system. That continues on from successful and peaceful elections and the transfer of power in Ghana last December and in Nigeria and Burkina Faso in 2015, showing progress and hope for democracies across the continent.

In Gambia, not only has democracy prevailed but the intervention of neighbouring and international organisations has helped to install President Barrow in high office. The African Union, historically hesitant to criticise its own members on human rights issues and abuses, worked tirelessly, hand in hand with the Economic Community of West African States, to ensure that the election results were upheld. Both the AU and ECOWAS are to be commended for their diplomatic handling of the situation and the eventual military commitment and pressure to force the removal of Yahya Jammeh.

The work of the UN, its Security Council, the United States, the European Union and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation has also played an integral role in condemning the former President to exile. Jammeh was a dictator: he had ruled, repressed and brutalised his people for 22 years, after seizing power in a military coup in 1994. His time in power saw constant human rights abuses, including thousands of forced disappearances, and arbitrary detention and torture for any political dissenters. However, the time for reconciliation has begun, with President Barrow’s commitment to release all political prisoners.

President Barrow has also been working with the Senegalese authorities to repatriate the 45,000 Gambian refugees who fled in the wake of the troubles. I ask the Minister whether there will be additional assistance for those wishing to resettle in their homeland, given the unique circumstances and the need to help reunification to happen.

As many will know, President Barrow lived, worked and studied here in the UK. That presents the UK with a distinctive opportunity. Over the weekend, President Barrow stated:

“There is a strong tie with Britain and Gambia”.

He also stated that he wanted a return for Gambia to the International Criminal Court and the Commonwealth. The Labour party strongly supports that, and I hope that it has cross-party support as well.

With regard to a future trade agreement, the President could not be any clearer, stating:

“Any aspects that’s going on in Gambia, Britain will be our number one partner in terms of trade, in terms of democracy, in terms of good governance. They will be our partners.”

I know that the Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs have spoken directly to President Barrow, but could the hon. Gentleman inform the House of when the first UK representative from Her Majesty’s Government will go to Gambia to meet the new Administration?

That brings me to the Prime Minister’s trade envoys. I accept that this does not fall directly within the Foreign Office’s remit, but it will play an integral part in our future relations with the region, diplomatically and economically, now and post Brexit. There is currently only one trade envoy programme to the west African region, which is to Ghana and is headed by the hon. Member for Windsor, who visited earlier this month. Will the Minister outline the current and future plan for that particular programme and whether the Government will commit more envoys to the region to strengthen our ties with it, given the importance that it will have in the upcoming years? That is important, given our historic links and aid contribution. The ECOWAS commission represents 350 million citizens and is moving towards further regional integration through a common political, security and socioeconomic agenda.
Although the news from Gambia is welcome, the region still faces many challenges, including security challenges, inherent poverty, terrorism, the refugee crisis, lack of sustainable healthcare, famine, piracy off its shores, female genital mutilation and human and drug trafficking, plus other transnational organised crimes. Many of those issues have been highlighted here today.

Progress can be slow, yet Britain can continue to work together and towards strengthening the institutions that we take for granted, through our commitment to aid, opening markets by way of trade and using our soft power of diplomacy—not to mention our premiership football teams—which will contribute to working towards strong and lasting ties between the UK and a peaceful and economically prosperous western Africa.

3.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): It is a pleasure to work under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) on a commanding performance. When I first saw that I was going to take on the responsibility he had looked after so well, I realised that I had big shoes to fill. He has reflected that in his articulation, understanding and grasp of the matters not only in west Africa but right across that amazing continent. I thank him for his contribution today, and thank other hon. Members. This has been a comprehensive, wide-ranging and very useful debate. As usual, I have a few minutes in which to answer a deluge of questions. I am simply not going to be able to do justice to hon. Members and will write to them with more details if I am not able to cover those points in my closing remarks.

First, to focus on my hon. Friend’s opening remarks, he praised the work of the posts—of our high commissions and embassies—not only across Africa but across the piece in the Foreign Office. We certainly punch above our weight. I pay tribute to them and join him, and all hon. Members in the Chamber today, in praising the work of the posts—of our high commissions and embassies—not only in west Africa but right across Africa. I thank him for his contribution today, and thank other hon. Members. This has been a comprehensive, wide-ranging and very useful debate. As usual, I have a few minutes in which to answer a deluge of questions. I am simply not going to be able to do justice to hon. Members and will write to them with more details if I am not able to cover those points in my closing remarks.

My hon. Friend stressed the importance of the crisis centre. I thank him very much indeed for complimenting me on my Twitter feed. I hope, simply because of the number of people who watch Westminster Hall debates, that the number of followers I have will double after his congratulations. The work of the crisis centre is critical in ensuring that we look after Britons abroad when there is uncertainty in any part of the world. For those who are unfamiliar with it, it is a huge area in the basement of the Foreign Office that gets taken over with all sorts of important feeds, linking into other organisations and posts so that we can keep track, provide relevant information and, not least, communicate with the travel authorities. We can provide important information so that, if there is a requirement for repatriation or health issues or others, we can deal with them with a sense of urgency. It was used in regards to Sousse and other events, and was mobilised for the Gambian political dilemma as well.

My hon. Friend underlined the importance of Africa as a nation. It is envisaged that, in 2050, it will be one quarter of the world’s population, so the continent is important to us. As many hon. Members have outlined, we have a history and relationship with it; we have connections and we should certainly take advantage of them. The World Bank states that Africa as a whole will need to create 18 million jobs every single year. We need to be part of that story, and we have a very good part to play. Other connections have been made such as cultural links and connections with the diasporas in this country. Soft power was mentioned, and we can take advantage of that in developing the important bonds that will help the continent, and certainly west Africa, as it takes important steps to an improved democratic space.

My hon. Friend mentioned the opportunities of Brexit. As the Prime Minister has articulated, it is not us looking inward but quite the opposite. It is us saying that we do not have to go through the prism of working with 27 nations in Brussels, but can have direct relationships and direct trade opportunities with countries, including those in west Africa.

My hon. Friend and others praised the work we did for the continent in tackling Ebola. That is a great example, stepping outside the EU, of how a coalition of the willing—a coalition of those countries that are able and committed to doing something good—stepped forward and helped a part of Africa that needed our support. It is absolutely right to praise all those involved, as the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), the spokeswoman for Labour, did in heaping praise on what we did there. Yes, there are lessons to be learned, because this is likely to reoccur again—we need to be prepared for some form of illness or plague.

My hon. Friend asked about the importance of the Commonwealth meeting. It is a great trading opportunity. He knows that we will host the next event in spring. It is a great opportunity for us to embark on and enhance the trading relationships we have with our African friends.

My hon. Friend asked about the Trump Administration. We are all asking that question. What I can say is that the deputy Secretary of State, Tom Shannon, had the job under the previous Administration. He had responsibility for Africa and the middle east, mimicking my entire footprint, and continues in that role. He knows that we will host the next event in spring. It is a great opportunity for us to bring parties to the table and enhance the trading relationships we have with our African friends.

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My hon. Friend asked about the Trump Administration. We are all asking that question. What I can say is that the deputy Secretary of State, Tom Shannon, had the job under the previous Administration. He had responsibility for Africa and the middle east, mimicking my entire footprint, and continues in that role. Terrorism is a huge concern in Africa, not least with Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia. Brett McGurk will continue to lead the counter-Daesh coalition, which will expand its work to look at how it can take advantage of the experience it has gained to help countries tackle terrorism in Africa.

Boko Haram was mentioned by the hon. Members for Heywood and Middleton, for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). When I visited Nigeria, I had the opportunity to meet people from the “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign. There is no doubt that the impact of Boko Haram cannot be over-exaggerated. We estimate that, since 2009, 20,000 people have been killed, more than 2.2 million people have been displaced and more than 15 million people have been affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. The problem is that, in the north-east of the country, access is very limited, the roads are very poor and security is very difficult to enforce. Some of the programmes we are looking at are to improve the
infrastructure so that the security can work there. We have more than 350 personnel training intelligence and helping military forces, so that the Nigerians can provide better security for that area. The humanitarian disaster is huge, which is why we have a number of DFID programmes working to try to help the situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) articulated very powerfully his knowledge and passion for Ghana and his role of trade envoy. I thank him and others for the important role that envoys play. They provide continuity and a steady drumbeat of visits, which Ministers cannot always get out to do. I thank him for the work he has done in Ghana and am pleased to be joining him to visit the country very soon.

My hon. Friend stressed the role of business. It is absolutely right that we work to ensure that Ministers not only go out, but take businesses with us as well. He also talked about the connections and diasporas in Britain, and touched on the Francophone countries. It is important that we do not simply see the region as the French domain, but as one that we can go into. The British Council does amazing work teaching English—there is desire for that right across Africa, regardless of the historical connections.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), the spokesperson for the Scottish National party, spoke about the importance of continuing that commitment of 0.7% in our aid budget. I confirm again that that is certainly our intention and is very important indeed. He touched on something that is not perhaps particularly appreciated: the impact of climate change on Africa in causing what we might call environmental refugee movements—people are having to move because they can no longer grow crops in certain areas because the climate has changed and it is no longer sustainable. We need to focus on that, too.

In the short time I have left, I should say that we are seeing a slight change in west Africa in places such as the Gambia and Ghana, where elections have taken place. There is a recognition that constitutions must be honoured. No longer is it the case—this is not just in Africa but around the world, although there are many examples in Africa—that, when a leader gets used to power, they find reason, cause and excuse to alter the constitution so that they can continue in perpetuity, until such time that they get tired and work out a way of getting their son or daughter to take over. What we saw in the Gambia and neighbouring nations—this point was made in a fairly lengthy, but pertinent intervention—was them saying that they were looking to solve their own problems. We wish President Barrow every success. I was pleased to be able to make that phone call, although I have to say that was prior to President Jammeh saying that he was not going to recognise him. I am pleased that we already have that bond with the country and look forward to visiting.

I am not even going to touch on some of the other countries, but will certainly write to hon. Members with more details on their specific questions. I will simply end by saying that west Africa is a huge and diverse region. People are enjoying stability and growing prosperity, but in other countries, leaders continue to face considerable challenges. What we see right across the whole region is the enormous potential of those countries and their people. It is in our interests and theirs that we work together and help them to realise that potential. That is why we continue to support west African countries’ efforts to deliver peace, stability and democracy.

4 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.
Milton Keynes: 50th Anniversary

Albert Owen in the Chair

4.11 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the 50th anniversary of the new city of Milton Keynes.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen.

I am grateful for the opportunity to mark the golden anniversary of the place that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), and I are so proud to represent. I am also very pleased that he is able to respond to this debate as the Minister.

The new city of Milton Keynes came into being in this place on 23 January 1967, through an Order in Council, so it is right that we mark the milestone in this place, too. It was also the year that the first North sea oil was discovered, the year of the six-day war, the year that Sandie Shaw entered the Eurovision Song Contest, and the year that the first North sea oil was piped ashore.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): And there was a very good Government.

Iain Stewart: I make no comment on that.

Nineteen sixty-seven was also the year when a round of preparatory negotiations started for the UK to join the European Economic Community. It was also the year when a bold decision was taken to construct a new city in north Buckinghamshire, with a vision of a population of around 250,000 souls. That is not to say that nobody lived in the area that is now Milton Keynes prior to its designation as a new city. Far from it—Milton Keynes was built around long-established towns, such as Stony Stratford, Wolverton, Newport Pagnell, Bletchley, Fenny Stratford, Woburn Sands and Olney, together with a patchwork of rural north Buckinghamshire villages. Indeed, there is archaeological evidence of permanent settlement in the area that is now Milton Keynes dating back to the bronze age.

The name Milton Keynes is not new, either. Some people mistakenly believe that the name was made up, perhaps an amalgam of two 20th-century economists, Milton Friedman and John Maynard Keynes. In fact, the new city took its name from the village of Milton Keynes, which is in the heart of the borough and dates from the 11th century.

Part of the motivation behind the creation of Milton Keynes was to take overspill housing from existing large cities, principally London, Bletchley, prior to the designation of Milton Keynes as a new town, had taken such population since the 1950s. But the ambition for Milton Keynes was for so much more than that. Milton Keynes is equidistant from London, Birmingham, Leicester, Oxford and Cambridge, and has good transport links through the M1 and the west coast main line, so the intention was to create a dynamic regional centre in its own right, rather than a dormitory town for other places.

I contend that we have more than fulfilled that ambition and that we have been the most successful of the new towns. The raw socio-economic data show that we have exceeded all targets for population, physical space and economic growth. We have regularly topped league tables for job creation and business start-ups, although that poses some challenges and opportunities for the future—I will touch on those a little later in my speech.

Mr Andrew Smith: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this welcome debate; I extend best wishes from the historic city of Oxford to Milton Keynes; and I look forward to the improved rail and road links between us, which we hope are on the way. May I also pass on the best wishes of his predecessor, my good friend Phyllis Starkey, who remains a firm friend of Milton Keynes and an advocate of its achievement and potential?

Iain Stewart: I am very grateful to the right hon. Member for Oxford East for that intervention and I shall certainly relay his kind good wishes to Milton Keynes. I will touch on the improved infrastructure links between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, if I am allowed to refer to the “other place”, a little later in my speech.

I am very happy to pay tribute to my predecessor, Dr Starkey. We contested quite a number of elections over the years. She was victorious in the first two; I was victorious later on. Although Milton Keynes certainly has political competition at local authority level and parliamentary level, just like anywhere else, it always strikes me that, whatever our party political differences, politicians in Milton Keynes share a passion for the place and want to make it better. That is a very important political culture to have, and so I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for mentioning my predecessor.

I will also mention my hon. Friend the Minister’s predecessor, Brian White, who sadly passed away last year. As a Member of Parliament, as a councillor and—for a year—as the mayor of Milton Keynes, he did an incredible amount of work to promote Milton Keynes and secure its growth.

As I was saying, if we look at the raw data we see that Milton Keynes has been an outstanding success, but at the heart of that success is something more significant than just the raw numbers. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister, my constituency neighbour, will agree that each weekend that we spend out in our constituencies meeting the charities, clubs and community groups, we find a real tangible passion for and pride in Milton Keynes, as well as strong aspirations for our future. Over the last couple of weeks in central Milton Keynes shopping centre, there has been an exhibition documenting our history and development. Talking to residents old and new at that exhibition, I found a deep and palpable sense of belonging and spirit.

I was not even a twinkle in my father’s eye when Milton Keynes came into being. However, having looked at the old films about Milton Keynes and its creation on social media, I know that if we look past the slightly questionable hair styles and clothing fashion of the age, we can see a real sense of excitement and hope among the first residents who moved in, particularly those who had moved from substandard accommodation in London. There was a real sense of optimism about the wonderful new housing that they were able to move into.
People feel incredibly loyal to Milton Keynes. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) is in his place, because his father, Bill Benyon, was an exemplar of that loyalty. He is another of my predecessors and he represented Milton Keynes for more than 20 years. When he was first elected, it was to the old Buckingham constituency, which at that time included all of Milton Keynes. When population growth meant that the constituency was divided in two, which I think was for the 1983 election, Bill Benyon had the option of standing for the Buckingham seat, which is a very safe Conservative seat with a majority of more than 20,000, or Milton Keynes, which has a much more volatile political colouring. To his credit, he chose Milton Keynes, because he was so passionate about the place and had personally contributed to many of its projects. I was at the silver jubilee of the Christ the Cornerstone church just a couple of weeks ago, and I understand that Bill Benyon personally contributed to that church, helping to get it built. More than 25 years after he retired, I still meet constituents who fondly remember him and the incredible work he did. That is just one example of the passion and loyalty that Milton Keynes develops in its representatives and inhabitants.

At its core, I argue that the strong sense of community in Milton Keynes is born from the spirit of innovation that has always characterised the place. Milton Keynes was a new design, unlike any place before it. It brought together new concepts in urban planning and architecture. It was ahead of its time and drew on the garden cities tradition. It is a place of open green spaces and natural habitats. Often, in the heart of urban Milton Keynes, people enter a wood, park, meadow or a riverbank and find it hard to believe they are in the middle of a place with a population of more than 250,000 people.

Milton Keynes has also been home to pioneering new concepts, such as the first eco-houses and new models of education. One of the institutions in my constituency that I am most proud of is the Open University, which has innovated lifelong learning and is cherished the world over. It is not quite as old as Milton Keynes itself; it celebrates its golden anniversary in a couple of years’ time. It was founded in 1969, but the development of the Open University and Milton Keynes have gone hand in hand.

People have moved to Milton Keynes from all over the United Kingdom and all over the world. I came to Milton Keynes after university. My first job was there. When I decided on a political career as my aspiration, it was a natural place to seek election. It took me a few goes, as I mentioned in answer to the right hon. Member for Oxford East, but I chose to stand my ground. I could not think of anywhere else that I really wanted to represent.

Wherever people have come from, they share a sense of ownership of the new city. It is their place; they want to be part of building it up, and they have a passion for its future. We have a rich tapestry of cultures and faiths. While we must never be complacent, we do not have the same tensions between communities in Milton Keynes that sadly can exist in other towns and cities in the UK. Admittedly, we have our detractors. There are people who say that Milton Keynes is a dull, boring place, devoid of character and culture. My experience is that such comments usually come from people who have never visited or, if they have visited, have not taken a proper look at what we have to offer.

A place with no character and culture—really? Milton Keynes is rich in its creative and cultural dynamism, from grassroots art communities to historic Bletchley Park: from the UK’s most popular theatre outside London to Milton Keynes City Orchestra, which attracts world-renowned soloists such as the pianist Ji Liu, who will perform there in March; and from the drama of the rugby world cup, held at stadium mk, to the biennial international festival, which attracts performers and audiences from around the globe. We have more than 7,000 arts and heritage events held in Milton Keynes each year. We have stories of international cultural and historic importance, including code-breaking at Bletchley Park and John Newton writing “Amazing Grace” when he was a curate at Olney. We have music venues including The Stables and the National Bowl, which hosts once-in-a-generation performances from world leaders in music.

We are home to the Formula 1 team Red Bull Racing and are fast becoming a centre of excellence in the motorsport industry. In technology, we innovate some of the very latest ideas in intelligent mobility through the transport systems Catapult and the smart cities project, working in tandem with the Open University. We welcome delegations from around the world who want to learn about our story. Economically, we have a diverse and vibrant economy, from financial services to logistics and distribution and from high-quality engineering to rail industry management.

We have certainly had a vibrant and successful first half century, but what of the future? Having realised the original vision of Milton Keynes in its physical footprint and population size, what comes next? I believe we can enjoy an equally successful next half century, but only if we plan it properly. We cannot just rest on our laurels. Other parts of the country, such as the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine, are upping their game. Projects such as High Speed 2 will change the economic geography of the country, and we must be similarly ambitious for our future. We cannot just allow Milton Keynes to expand in an unplanned way, with more housing developments around our periphery. That would place too much strain on our infrastructure and public services and compromise the core design principles that have proven so successful. We must abide by our city motto: “By knowledge, design and understanding”. We have to plan properly with our neighbours.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward this debate. As a near neighbour—I live in Wootton, so Milton Keynes is within touching distance and my family and I use it often—I bring the good wishes of Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council to the debate and to Milton Keynes. On looking forward and not losing sight of the original concept, does he agree that the environment in which Milton Keynes is set is very special? My wife and I had the pleasure of dinner some years ago with Evelyn de Rothschild, who was the vice-chairman of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation. We asked him what his greatest legacy was, and he said, “The trees.” The trees make the environment in which this vibrant city can look forward with great optimism.
Iain Stewart: I am grateful for that intervention from my right hon. Friend and near neighbour. I thank him for the good wishes from the people of Bedfordshire. He is absolutely right: the environmental benefits of Milton Keynes are enormous. I think I am right in saying that we have more trees per head of population than anywhere else in the country. That was one of the great foresights of the city’s founding fathers.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend intervened, because it leads me neatly on to talking about what I see as the next stage of Milton Keynes development. That includes the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor that the National Infrastructure Commission is looking at and projects such as the east-west rail line, which the right hon. Member for Oxford East mentioned, and the Oxford-Cambridge expressway. I believe they will unlock considerable economic and housing development.

If that development is done in the right way—using the smart city and transport technology that we are innovating locally to develop new types of village communities that people want and not the massive urban sprawl that they fear—we will respect and improve on the basis on which Milton Keynes was founded. In doing so, we need to find a way to develop a new partnership between Milton Keynes and neighbouring authorities, such as Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council, to develop joint planning and delivery mechanisms. I know that my right hon. Friend is setting up an all-party group to look at the creation of the England economic heartland body, which will do a lot of important work in that space.

Last year in Milton Keynes we had the publication of the “MK Futures 2050” report, which was chaired by Sir Peter Gregson of Cranfield University. It presented a bold vision for our future, including the creation of MK:IT, a technical university modelled on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. That absolutely fits with the NIC’s plans and the Government’s industrial strategy, which was outlined earlier this week and will develop our skills base for the future. All those debates and initiatives are live, and I look forward to playing my part in shaping them. We have an incredibly bright future and many opportunities, but I conclude today simply by wishing my fellow residents in Milton Keynes a very happy birthday. I am proud to represent such a wonderful place, and I look forward to playing a part in its next half century.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I remind the Minister that the debate will finish at 4.41 pm. I offer my congratulations to Milton Keynes.

4.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I start by congratulating my fellow MP for Milton Keynes, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), on securing this debate at a timely point in the city’s development. I make it clear that I am speaking in this debate on behalf of the Government with the consent of my ministerial colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government, and that decisions on matters relating to Milton Keynes will be taken by others. I am, however, delighted to be present today to celebrate our successful new town, as a city, reaching its 50th anniversary.

I underline the praise by paying tribute to my predecessor as an MP, Brian White, who sadly died last year, and to the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), Sir Bill Benyon, who did so much in the early years of the creation of Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes has had some colourful MPs: Aidan Crawley was elected in 1945 as a Labour MP, but subsequently became a Conservative; Frank Markham followed him in 1951, another former Labour MP who became a Conservative; and, following them, the famous Robert Maxwell who, though elected as a Labour MP, did not become a Conservative.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South and I both know, Milton Keynes continues to be one of Britain’s fastest-growing cities. It has produced exceptional talent, including London 2012 Olympic gold medallist Greg Rutherford; it set up the Open University in 1971, making higher education more accessible to everyone, regardless of geography; and it is the centre for transport technology in England, with the first trials of driverless cars taking place on Milton Keynes’s streets, and as the home of the transport Catapult centre.

Fifty years ago, permission was given to transform 8,500 hectares of villages and farmland into a town of 250,000 people, a new town. Milton Keynes has since become one of the most successful new towns in England. It has already reached its original target of 250,000 people, but it will not stop there. Provided we continue to follow Milton Keynes’s motto, “By knowledge, design and understanding”, which my hon. Friend cited, the future is bright.

Milton Keynes’s future will be as exciting as its past has been. In March 2016, the then Chancellor asked the National Infrastructure Commission to lead an inquiry into the potential of the arc from Oxford through Milton Keynes to Cambridge, as highlighted by my hon. Friend and the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith). That corridor would support the already flourishing knowledge-intensive industries that exist in the area. The commission’s interim report was published last autumn, confirming the opportunity for prosperity and a high quality of life in the area.

My hon. Friend mentioned the commission that recently produced “MK Futures 2050”, which was chaired by Sir Peter Gregson. It worked with local partners to shape an ambitious vision and plan for Milton Keynes’s future. The plan seeks to drive growth and prosperity for Milton Keynes’s existing and future residents. The council is reflecting on how to bring the recommendations to life to the advantage of the city and its residents.

I am delighted that Milton Keynes remains a centre for growth. The Government have made it clear that an important part of their intention will be to increase housing supply for the next generation. We absolutely recognise that that needs to be done in a way that works for everyone and with the support of local residents. One of the ways in which the Government are doing that is by making significant changes. For example, planning policy has been radically streamlined and the planning system is now faster and more efficient, and we have given local people a much bigger say over new development in their area. Milton Keynes has a lot to offer in helping us to improve our systems and to ensure effective delivery, and it would not be right for the Government to do things alone.
[Mark Lancaster]

The Government’s ambition is to work with all players—local authorities, residents and developers—to cement strong partnerships with clear roles and responsibilities in order to deliver more homes. It is important that we look at the lessons of the past. Milton Keynes has developed collaboratively and has a strong community base and mixed architecture to provide a city for the present and the future. We want more co-operation and shared intentions, so that local partners work more strategically with their neighbours to ensure that together they can meet the housing and community needs of their combined areas.

Milton Keynes is perhaps the pre-eminent example of what can be achieved by a development corporation with strong local leadership and a clear sense of purpose. Many students at school and university today will be studying the success of the city. My hon. Friend and I are, rightly, both very proud of that.

The “MK Futures 2050” report proposed six big new projects for Milton Keynes, the first of which was to be the hub of the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford arc, which we have already touched on, and to realise the arc’s full economic potential as a single knowledge-intensive cluster. Secondly, MK:IT, which my hon. Friend also touched on, will provide lifelong learning opportunities at a new university to promote research, teaching and practice, and realistic solutions to the problems facing fast-growing cities everywhere. Thirdly, “Learning 2050” could ensure that the city provides, and is known for providing, world-class education for all its young people.

Fourthly, by harnessing the flexibility of the city’s roads, the “Smart, shared, sustainable mobility” project will allow everyone who lives, works, studies or does business in the city to move freely and on demand. Milton Keynes is very much a city built for the car. Fifthly, the “Renaissance” project in central Milton Keynes will recreate a city centre fit for the 21st century. Finally, the “Creative and cultured city” project will harness the energy and motivation of the city’s people.

As well as a growing population, strong economic growth is critical to the future success of our communities. My hon. Friend and I have both consistently argued that “i before e”—or “infrastructure before expansion”—and economic growth should be the drivers for our local growth in Milton Keynes. Just this week, the Prime Minister launched our industrial strategy Green Paper, which sets out our approach to developing a modern industrial strategy that improves living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country. We aim to establish an industrial policy for the long term and provide a policy framework against which major public and private sector investment decisions can be made with confidence, ensuring that our country’s success is accessible to everyone.

Having published our Green Paper, the Government want to hear from every part of the country, every sector of industry, businesses of every size, and the people who work in and use them. Milton Keynes can already celebrate successful businesses, including manufacturers such as the Coca-Cola Company and WD-40. The recipe for the latter is known by only six people. Milton Keynes is also the centre of the motor industry. The headquarters of Mercedes and Volkswagen are there, and much of the motor racing industry, including great racing teams such as Red Bull, is based in the city. There are many other businesses in the area, and long may that continue. I therefore ask everyone, both in Milton Keynes and beyond, to engage in this extremely important debate.

Significant investment is already being made to support growth across the country. More than £200 million of the local growth fund has been prioritised to date to support growth across the south-east midlands, and the Government expect to announce further investment in the area through the local growth fund shortly. Projects such as Bletchley station and the A421 improvements have also been supported by that fund. As a runner for European city of culture 2023—I am sure my hon. Friend and I would both very much like that to happen—the city is working with the local enterprise partnership to extend the wonderful MK Gallery, which he mentioned.

In autumn 2016, the National Infrastructure Commission published its interim report about the Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge corridor. Its core finding was that housing supply is the main constraint on maximising the corridor’s growth potential. The Government supported all the recommendations in the report and announced £137 million of additional or accelerated funding to ensure the delivery of the east-west rail project and the Oxford to Cambridge expressway road. The Government are now working with partners across the corridor to ensure that the ambitions in the commission’s report are achieved with the most effective solutions. It is vital that all partners work collaboratively to secure the best future for the area.

In closing, I will touch on some of my hon. Friend’s remarks. Those who are unaware of Milton Keynes probably perceive it as simply a modern city. That is simply not the case. Some 75% of the borough of Milton Keynes is actually rural, and some 30,000 residents live in those rural areas, mainly in my constituency of Milton Keynes North. There is enormous heritage there, not only in the corner towns that my hon. Friend mentioned—Wolverton, Newport Pagnell, Bletchley and Stony Stratford—and my own home town of Olney, which was home to the original pancake race in 1415 and is the former home of William Cowper, the famous poet, and John Newton, the abolitionist and author of “Amazing Grace”, but in other great towns such as Hanslope, where the Church of St James has the tallest spire in Buckinghamshire, Castletorphe, Emberton Park and Moulsoe, to name just a few. The great county town of Newport Pagnell, which was so key in the civil war, was of course the home of George Walters, one of our great residents, who won his Victoria Cross in the Crimean war.

As we celebrate 50 years of Milton Keynes and look forward to a bright future, it is worth remembering that there is tremendous heritage in the area, too. I congratulate my hon. Friend once again on securing this timely debate.

Question put and agreed to.
Green Investment Bank

Albert Owen (in the Chair): As a result of the vote, I remind Members that the debate is an hour long and will finish at 5.41 pm. I shall call the Front-Bench speakers, beginning with the Scottish National party—I believe it is Ms Cherry—at 5.21 pm, for five minutes only, followed by Dr Whitehead, the Labour spokesperson, at 5.26 pm. At 5.31 pm, I shall call the Minister, who may want to give Ms Thomson a couple of minutes to finish.

4.41 pm

Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (Ind): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the sale of the Green Investment Bank.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen; I have not done so previously. I have sought the debate as an independent MP—indeed as to party and mind—in the light of considerable concerns raised about the proposed sale of the Green Investment Bank. I must signal my thanks to Macquarie and to the Minister for recent meetings. I look forward to another meeting with the Green Investment Bank tomorrow, and then another with the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee in the near future. Thanks are also due to the Environmental Audit Committee for the report of December 2015; to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who tabled an urgent question; and to members of the quality press, such as Aimee Donnellan, for ensuring that the matter gets the scrutiny it deserves.

The Green Investment Bank is one of our success stories and has supported 30 green energy infrastructure projects up to the end of 2015-16. Profits were up to £9.9 million in the last year, and the bank committed £770 million to transactions during the 12 months of 2015-16, taking the total capital committed to £2.6 billion. The imperative of a green agenda remains, and our resolve must be increased in the light of President Trump’s threat to step back from previous Paris climate change commitments. Our ambition associated with a green agenda is high, particularly within the Scottish Government, but can the Minister confirm that Macquarie is the preferred bidder, or will he continue with the ridiculous pretence that he cannot mention its name?

Why sell, and why now? I want to make it clear that given my business background I understand why privatisation can be attractive to a business in terms of access to capital and to provide certainty as to future funding. I can also see why being released from state aid rules may be perceived as a benefit. On the other hand, I was struck when a Tory Member commented to me, while the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) was Chancellor of the Exchequer, “If it isn’t screwed down, sell it.” I am also struck by the fact that the Green Investment Bank does not expect to need to borrow until 2018-19. The report of the Environmental Audit Committee quotes evidence from E3G that “the Government has failed to make a compelling case explaining the rationale behind, or consequences of its decision to sell a majority share of the GIB”.

So why now?

I would like the Minister to confirm whether any financial rewards will be given to the board, executive or senior team on a successful sale of the GIB. Will the chair, Lord Smith of Kelvin, remain in his post after the sale and, if so, for how long? The model of packaging up elements of a business for sale to release capital is well understood—I regard the use of the term “asset stripping” as somewhat emotive in this case—but the real point is that the UK taxpayer has provided the funds to bring it to where it is today, but it will not be the UK taxpayer who gets the return on investment.

It is clear from other privatisations that the UK taxpayer did not receive the value they should have done; I therefore question whether that can happen with the Green Investment Bank. The New Economics Foundation in its report “We Own It” notes concerns about future profits versus short-term cash in the continued great British sell-off, whether it is a question of losses incurred as a result of the Royal Mail privatisation or Eurostar. Can the Minister confirm whether full value will be obtained for the UK taxpayer on the sale?

I move on to some more specific considerations. The headquarters is currently located in Edinburgh, but it is not just the location of the brass plaque that marks the HQ—it is the functions of governance, legal services, risk and compliance, comms, finance and business development that really determine where that crucial control lies. The jobs associated with those functions tend to be higher quality. I will be monitoring closely to see whether jobs will be maintained and also whether the number will grow and their quality is maintained. Will the Minister confirm what guarantees he has obtained that the HQ will remain in Edinburgh?

What assessment has he made of any proposed new structure and any potential impact on the quality of jobs and functions retained in Edinburgh?

State aid rules—the so-called additionality considerations—disallow projects that could be funded under conventional routes. That means that the projects funded tend to carry more risk but, if successful, more reward. I am concerned about the risk appetite of the bank after sale. A business that focuses purely on the bottom line will tend to gravitate towards more vanilla projects, which are easier to package and sell for financial churn but are a loss to the sort of research and innovation that, we are told, the UK Government want to ensure more of with their new industrial strategy Green Paper. The Minister notes in answers to written questions that the market failure that the inception of the GIB sought to address has now been corrected, but market failure in all areas will not be addressed if encouraging innovation is not at the heart of what the GIB does.

Scale is also a consideration. Will a privatised GIB support smaller projects, such as the specially designed loan to finance a switch to low-energy street lighting in Glasgow? Will Macquarie back that type of small-scale investment!? It is only £6.3 million, but will save more than 18,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over the next 18 years.

What considerations have the UK Government given to an altered risk appetite after sale? Have the UK Government made any assessment of the potential impact?

I would like to consider the issue of protecting the green purpose of the bank. Responding to criticism, and acknowledging that criticism, the UK Government have put in place a so-called golden share with a worthy and notable set of trustees. In theory, that should give us a level of comfort, in that the trustees must agree to any change of purpose as defined by the five green
purposes—but the very purposes themselves carry risk. They are extraordinarily high-level; the question has already been asked whether fracking—yes, fracking—could be carried out while still ostensibly meeting the green purpose tests.

I would now like to briefly consider UK control. The GIB has already undertaken a number of its transactions via private equity-type funds.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Notwithstanding some of the excellent work that the GIB has undertaken, is the hon. Lady concerned, as I am, about the use and involvement of limited liability partnerships? They are currently the subject of a review and have been involved in criminality in many parts of the world. It is not only the GIB—there are some instances where it is alleged that Macquarie has been involved in projects that have used them.

Michelle Thomson: I am happy to support my hon. Friend on that point. I also note the valuable work he is doing around Scottish limited partnerships. I hope he has great success in that.

The limited liability partnerships used to date by the GIB may indeed be UK-domiciled and registered for tax purposes, but the point is—we cannot forget this—that if the underlying funds or owners are controlled offshore, the UK taxpayer loses the benefit of that tax take. What level of UK control and benefit will there be after sale? What will be UK-based in the wider supply chain? To what extent will the project management and/or technical experience be based in and benefit the UK?

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) on securing this important debate; her last point was key. Under the Paris climate change agreement, a pan-European solution was being looked at for this country to meet our climate change commitments and reduce our carbon footprint. Given the consequences of Brexit, is it not all the more important that we preserve the assets in this country that will help us independently to meet the commitments under the Paris and previous climate change agreements?

Michelle Thomson: I absolutely agree, and I sum up by asking: is this the right time for a sale to anybody in the light of Brexit, when the focus fundamentally must be on innovation and positioning ourselves to take advantage of key growth sectors?

Several hon. Members rose—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. Three Back Benchers have indicated that they wish to speak; I remind them that I will call the Front Benchers to speak at 5.21 pm, so that works out at about seven minutes each. I call Peter Aldous.

4.53 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) on securing the debate; her timing is spot on. I entirely support the principle of privatising the Green Investment Bank, but that needs to take place on terms that are in the whole country’s best interests, and on a basis that will maximise the leveraging of investment in this very important sector.

The Green Investment Bank is a success story. Since its launch in 2013, it has leveraged £10 billion-worth of projects from a £2.8 billion public stake, playing a particularly important role in the offshore wind sector.
It successfully kick-started the Galloper wind farm off the Suffolk coast, securing external investment for a project that will bring jobs both to Waveney and across East Anglia.

Since the sale process started a year ago, times have changed. We are now in a very different world and it is appropriate to pause and to consider whether the sale is taking place on terms that are in the best national interest. Brexit has led to a refocus on the UK’s industrial strategy, with the publication on Monday of the Government’s Green Paper. The pillars of the strategy include the need to upgrade infrastructure; to deliver affordable energy and clean growth; to drive growth throughout the country; and to rebalance the economy. The Green Investment Bank has played a leading role in all those areas, and it is important that it continues to do so, in particular as complementary investment from the European Investment Bank is, as we heard, almost certain to disappear completely.

When the Government circulated the bid documents last year, two possible options were suggested: a full privatisation and the retention of a 25% stake. The latter course should be pursued, because it would be more valuable for the bank, for UK plc and for the taxpayer. The stake would help to target important infrastructure spending; it would enable the Government to hold the bank to its mission of mobilising investment in the UK’s green economy and of maximising its green impacts; and, moreover, that sector of the economy is dynamic and entrepreneurial, so the stake is highly likely to increase in value. In summary—I have been very brief—in a short period of two years the Green Investment Bank has brought great benefits to the UK, and it is vital to the future of the country as a whole that it continues to do so.

4.56 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) not only for securing the debate but for her sterling work on the Green Investment Bank, to which she has applied her usual business acumen and forensic skills. I rise to speak because the bank is headquartered in my constituency and, among other things, I am concerned about the 55 people employed there. The Minister has therefore kindly agreed to meet me to discuss the issue.

I want to say something about the background to the setting up of the Green Investment Bank which, across the group, employs more than 130 people, including renewables investment professionals and technical experts. The Business Secretary at the time, Vince Cable, chose Edinburgh as the headquarters for good reason. Edinburgh came top of a financial and technical assessment, as one might expect of the second most important financial centre in the United Kingdom and, when the bank was set up in 2012, he said:

“Edinburgh has a lot going for it, both in terms of its asset management and finance sectors...also its proximity to green energy activity”.

which—in my words, not Vince Cable’s—has been encouraged by the Scottish Government.

Interestingly, Vince Cable went on to say that choosing Edinburgh as the headquarters of the bank supported what he described as the “wider narrative” of binding Scotland into the United Kingdom in the run-up to the independence referendum. I am anxious therefore that the promises made by the Business Secretary in the coalition Government are delivered on for Edinburgh and that my constituents and those working in my constituency do not lose their jobs.

As my hon. Friend said, the Green Investment Bank is successful. In 2016 it started to make a profit. It is likely to deliver an annual return of 10%. The exercise of asset-stripping the bank, were that to happen, would result in a significant profit for any buyer at the expense of the United Kingdom taxpayer and of green investment throughout the United Kingdom.

The bank offers very real and attractive investment opportunities. It manages the world’s first offshore wind fund, with assets of more than £1.2 billion. Offshore wind is very much a huge part of Scotland’s future for energy production, and the fund attracts investors such as local authority pension fund managers, due to its long-term and stable investment. Five local government pension funds in the UK are investors in the fund, including Strathclyde Pension Fund, which is one of the two biggest local government pension funds. The chairman of Strathclyde Pension Fund has said:

“When you consider that when Pension Funds mature we are always looking to reduce our risk we do that by investing in our asset base with long term stable investments. We are convinced that the GIB “invest in the right infrastructure assets which will lead to a stronger and greener UK economy.”

As I am sure the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) will discuss, the Green Investment Bank supports innovative energy efficacy projects in partnership with local authorities across the United Kingdom. It is a really useful bank, it is a modern bank, it is successful and it is a bank that was established in Edinburgh as part of the project of binding Scotland into the United Kingdom. So let us make sure that it stays a successful bank, that we honour the UK taxpayers’ investment that has been made in it and that we protect the jobs it supports.

5 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) for securing this important debate. Like her, I am deeply concerned by the way in which the Government are proposing to sell off the Green Investment Bank. It is widely known that the Government’s preferred bidder is the Australia-based firm Macquarie. As has now been well documented, there are serious concerns about Macquarie’s corporate record and its commitment to the GIB’s environmental goals.

Macquarie has admitted rigging the Malaysian foreign exchange markets. It has settled charges in the US for violating underwriting laws related to a China-based coal company. It is currently facing legal action in the US for rigging Australian interest rates. In a separate investigation, it was found to have breached market integrity rules in Australia and to have “systemic deficiencies” in its compliance with financial services laws. Closer to home, its ownership of Thames Water has also been deeply controversial, with £10 billion of offshore debt loaded on the company and a €250 million pension deficit allowed to accumulate while profits were extracted.
Macquarie also has an appalling environmental record, funding fossil fuel extraction projects across the world. From open-cast coal mines in China to fracking here in the UK, it has a track record of supporting climate-wrecking projects. By any measure, Macquarie is unfit to be custodian of the UK Green Investment Bank; if anything, there is a very clear risk that it will destroy it.

The Government have so far refused to respond to those concerns. Instead, we see ample evidence that the Government are not only willing to allow an asset strip, but may have actually helped to facilitate it. With the support of Treasury-owned UK Government investment, 11 subsidiary companies of the GIB were set up presumably to allow Macquarie to asset-strip the UK’s Green Investment Bank. The Minister passed on the opportunity to deny Macquarie’s involvement in those changes in response to a written question I tabled last week.

Meanwhile, the Government continue to point to the creation of a special share as the answer to all our concerns. That is simply not true, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh West set out—we know that the special share will not protect the green purposes of the GIB under an owner such as Macquarie. In response to another written question I tabled, the Government made it clear that the special share will not ensure that individual investments are low-carbon. The special share will not stop asset stripping, will not ensure adequate capital is available for future investment and will not ensure an investment focus here in the UK. To protect the GIB as an enduring institution that is investing here in the UK, we ultimately and simply need the Government to stop this sell-off.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way, and add my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) for her contribution in securing this debate. The whole basis behind the privatisation is that the market failure has been corrected. I simply do not agree with that. We may have seen progress in the power sector, but in transport and heat we are lagging way behind what we need to be doing to meet our climate reduction targets—does the hon. Lady agree that the Green Investment Bank can play a critical role in addressing the market failure that continues to exist in those sectors?

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his very informed contribution. He will not be surprised to hear that I entirely agree with him. Anybody who thinks that market failures have been corrected is being extraordinarily complacent. Just a quick scan of the way in which we are not meeting the targets that we have—our climate, environmental and energy-efficiency commitments—would lead people to conclude that market failure remains, and therefore that the need for the Green Investment Bank to be in the public domain remains.

I believe that Ministers have it within their power to cancel the sale and pursue a different path. For the GIB to be properly protected, it should remain wholly owned by the UK Government. That is my bottom line, but if Ministers refuse to do that, various other options are available to them. We know that there was and still is on the table an alternative bid—it is the one that lost out to Macquarie. That bid would help to keep the GIB British, green and growing, so why are Ministers not pursuing it if they do not want to keep the GIB in the public domain?

Roger Mullin: Is the hon. Lady aware of, and as concerned as I am about, potential conflicts of interest involved in the Macquarie bid? Macquarie has used PricewaterhouseCoopers both as advisers and as auditors for many years. The senior independent director of the GIB is Tony Poulter, who at the same time is a partner at PWC and the head of PWC’s global infrastructure advisory unit. Does she agree that that is an obvious conflict of interest?

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I was not aware of that, but as he has now put it on the table, I find yet another reason to be deeply concerned about the Government’s proposals. I thank him for adding that piece to the jigsaw.

There were plenty of options for the Government other than going down the route of flogging the GIB off to Macquarie. I mentioned the other bidder, but the Government could also allow citizens to buy into the Green Investment Bank through green bonds—allowing people up and down the country to own part of this important and dynamic institution. Indeed, there were press reports over the weekend, as the hon. Gentleman will know, about the possibility of an initial public offering. That would at least offer greater protection to the aims of the GIB than the Government’s current plan. Any sense that the sale is the only option on the table must be challenged. There is a range of options on the table. The overriding question has to be why the Government would choose such a damaging option when there are clearly much better ones available.

The launch of the Government’s industrial strategy on Monday gives Ministers another reason to halt the sale. This was the point made very clearly by the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous). With the UK set to miss its climate targets from the mid-2020s onwards, and renewables investment in the UK set to fall by a dramatic 95% over the next three years, the low-carbon economy should be at the heart of the industrial strategy.

The Department’s welcome new focus on battery technology, energy storage and grid technology could all be supported through finance from the Green Investment Bank. That finance is more important now than ever. We have already discussed briefly how the likely loss of access to funds from the European Investment Bank makes that an even more important role that the GIB can play.

Together, the emissions reduction plan due later this year and the Government’s more active approach to supporting the UK economy mean that it is time for Ministers to ditch the sale and embrace the Green Investment Bank as an important ally in a green industrial strategy. Ministers have rightly been applauded for passing into law the fifth carbon budget and for ratifying the Paris agreement. They would be similarly congratulated and applauded for putting an end to the flogging off of the Green Investment Bank.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): We are in the unusual position of having run out of Back Benchers when I thought that we were going to run over our time. That gives the—
George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): It is, as ever, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I join colleagues on both sides of the Chamber in commending the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) for securing the debate. I underline the fact that she is a well-known entrepreneur in Scotland. She speaks not as someone who is simply anti-market, but as someone who has worked very hard in her own right to make markets work in Scotland. It is on that basis that I wish to ask some questions of the Minister.

I agree with most of what has been said so far, but there is one issue we need to take a bit further. Perhaps the Minister in his summing up could explain a bit more the Government’s reasoning. The Green Investment Bank was set up to deal with a very specific form of market failure. I am interested in the subject because when a green investment bank was first mooted, I was a senior journalist on The Scotsman in Edinburgh, which is celebrating its 200th birthday today. We organised a campaign, which I was very much involved in, to bring the headquarters of the Green Investment Bank to Edinburgh, and we were successful.

The perceived market failure is obviously to do with the funding of environmental projects. Some of us, though—I do not say this to make a cheap point—believe that the rush to sell the Green Investment Bank, only two years after it really started being in operation, was a product of the wish of the previous Chancellor to raise capital to meet his target to balance the books and abolish the deficit. That is understood. Now that the Government have given way on the ex-Chancellor’s 2020 target to get into surplus, and given that in some sense his colleagues seem less happy with his activities, so much so that he is not the Chancellor any more, it might be a chance to look more at the nuts and bolts of whether market failure is being addressed, rather than simply to try to raise capital.

The market failure being addressed was not a lack of capital in general, but a much more specific form of market failure. Most large infrastructure projects are funded by consortiums of banks and investment houses, because the projects are usually too large for any one undertaking to take all the risk. The failure in the past decade in the UK has been getting the consortiums together. That was partly exacerbated by the fall in investment appetite and risk appetite after the 2008 banking crisis.

The Green Investment Bank does not put its own money in per se; it puts together the consortium of the banks. It puts up a little money to underwrite some of the risk and show that the risks have been properly addressed, and it brings other people in. That model is growing and has proved successful on a small scale. It would be worth while leaving the model in place until we see at the end of a decade whether it has enabled significant consortiums to be put together for major projects, rather than simply considering the small projects that the Green Investment Bank has been involved in to date. If the Government abandon the GIB now, they have to prove that it will continue under private ownership to address that specific market failure.

When the Minister responded to the urgent question tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), he seemed to suggest that the proof that market failure had now been addressed systemically was that private sector interests were prepared to buy the bank. I challenge that assertion. I know the Minister will not mention Macquarie, but I will. I do not do that to stand by some of the criticisms of Macquarie. I want to address Macquarie’s business model, because it or a company like it may become the owner of the Green Investment Bank.

Macquarie puts together consortiums of investors, but it does that to buy existing infrastructure projects that earn a capital return. In December, it put together a consortium and bought the gas pipeline business of the National Grid. That is understood. It is a very sensible long-term model, and it is very profitable for Macquarie, which might explain why it is known in Australia as the billionaires’ bank—it has made many billionaires. The problem is that buying existing assets is easy, but that is not where the market failure is. The UK capital market is more than able to address that problem. The market failure is in building new asset classes. The Government have admitted in their new industrial strategy that the problem is that we somehow under-invest in infrastructure, despite having a huge capital market in comparison with other countries.

The Treasury Committee is undertaking an investigation and we have uncovered one of the major issues. When an infrastructure project is built, it is not retained in ownership by the people who built it. It is passed on ultimately to the ownership of pension funds and insurance companies. They use it as a long-term investment to pay annuities and long-term pensions. The insurance companies are crying out for regulatory change because they say they are unable—my second question to the Minister is to ask him to look at this—to invest capital in new infrastructure, and the new environmental projects they are desperate to invest in and own, because the regulatory and capital requirements are too onerous. The result is that British insurance companies find it easier to buy into American new infrastructure projects than into British ones. If Donald Trump turns on the spending tap in the United States and spends $1 trillion on investment in new infrastructure in America, inevitably in the present regulated climate, British pension funds and insurance companies will underwrite that investment rather than investing here.

My point for the Minister is that the market failure is still there. Using the sale of the Green Investment Bank to Macquarie or any company like it will simply be using it as a cash cow rather than underwriting risk for a future infrastructure investment. That will not resolve the problem. The Government must prove to Members on both sides of the House that the sale to any company will solve the underlying market failure. The sale to Macquarie, given its business model, will not solve that problem.

One question is whether Macquarie is a fit and proper company to own the Green Investment Bank. The Minister will probably avoid answering that question and will not mention the Macquarie name but, in the most systemic way, can he prove to us that the sale of the Green Investment Bank in such a short period to another owner will resolve the market risk of having a player—the Green Investment Bank—as the referee that brings the consortium together from the rest of the capital market? In the absence of that, the Green Investment Bank must be left in place and we must question why the British
capital markets as a whole do not fund infrastructure investment and have not done so successfully for several decades. That is a regulatory issue and the ball is in the Government's court.

5.17 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): The Opposition's position on the sale of the Green Investment Bank is that it should not be sold. The reason for that is at the heart of what the Green Investment Bank is. It is, of course, not a bank. It does not have the full lending and borrowing facilities we would expect in a bank. Indeed, hon. Members may remember that after it was formed the Chancellor imposed conditions on when it might become a bank. It is not a bank: it can be better described as a public policy instrument. That is what it has always been. It is a public policy instrument that, as hon. Members have said, has a particular purpose of using state-backed intervention to overcome market failure, particularly in green investment.

We know that the market failure issue has not been resolved and that green investment, particularly because of the requirement for patient capital and long-term investment as it attempts to ride a number of waves at the same time, continues to be difficult as we hear from reports coming into this country. We also know that investment is essential if we are to move to the next stage of low-carbon investment. The Green Investment Bank, as the public policy instrument to ensure that happens, has been a remarkable success. It continues to be a remarkable success and to do very well what it originally set out to do, which, as hon. Members have said, is not to give grants out to anybody or take companies over but to pull capital in from elsewhere with the back-up of capital from the Green Investment Bank, which is backed in the first place by Government, to immensely enhance the value of the investments that have been secured. In so doing, the Green Investment Bank has, as we know, secured more than £10 billion of capital investment with an input of just over £2 billion of Government-backed money via the Green Investment Bank’s instruments. It does not seem a very wise course of action to sell that public policy instrument, with all the consequences that may arise from that now and for the strategy that we need to adopt for green investment.

The Government have not only decided to sell the Green Investment Bank, but they have decided to make the preferred bidder for the bank a company that does not have anything like that model in its investment arrangements. As hon. Members have mentioned, that particular company appears to have been involved in specific amendments to the arrangements of the Green Investment Bank so that it would be possible to make that bank work in an entirely different way—setting up, in November and December, 10 companies, which would fit neatly in at least four of the major investments that the Green Investment Bank has been involved in—the Galloper, Rampion and Westermost Rough fields, and GIB offshore wind collectively, amounting to a Green Investment Bank total investment of about £1 billion. It would not be a bad start if we were able to take the Green Investment Bank over, flog off half of the assets that have been taken over, get £1 billion back and then move on to the next stage. To the casual observer, that has the potential to be a pretty scandalous forward move to do to the Green Investment Bank exactly what we fear would happen were it to be privatised in that way.

I personally do not go along with Donald Trump’s view of the press, particularly the quality press and the Financial Times and The Sunday Times. This weekend, the statement in The Sunday Times was simply this: “Ministers are poised to scrap a planned sale of the Green Investment Bank...to Australian investment firm Macquarie, pushing instead for a £3.8bn stock market listing.” I understand that the Minister cannot and will not mention the word Macquarie, but I wonder whether he would enlighten us by using a different formulation, such as, “No, the Government are not poised to scrap a planned sale of the Green Investment Bank to a preferred bidder, and no, they are not pushing instead for a £3.8 billion stock market listing.” That would be a suitable statement for the Minister to make this afternoon in response to speculation in the press. I would take silence on that formulation as an indication that the Government are having second thoughts. If they are, I would fully support them, because they would start to be coming into line with the issues that hon. Members have raised this afternoon and at other times.

If those second thoughts included, for example, an initial public offering that was a minority sale of shares, or even a majority sale of shares with a controlling share retained by Government, that would easily overcome the issue that hon. Members have also raised—the arrangements that we know will be inadequate to stop asset-stripping in the way that appears to be lined up for the bank at the moment. Those arrangements are very narrowly based on the memorandum and articles of association of the company, not on the asset possessions of the company, and would have no real effect in the way that I think hon. Members would want.

If the Government were to decide to float shares in an IPO, I guess that would take about two years. That would give the bank a substantial amount of time to do its work, particularly in view of the likely withdrawal of the European Investment Bank, which other hon. Members have mentioned. We ought to remember that the European Investment Bank has actually invested twice as much as the Green Investment Bank over the past few years in green projects that are difficult to invest in. Upon Brexit, the EIB’s investment is likely to fall to between 10% and 0% of its current investment. That is a further reason why the Green Investment Bank is so important to making investments right now.

I have on previous occasions asked the Minister to wink in the Opposition’s direction if he has had a change of heart. Perhaps nothing as flamboyant as that is necessary today, but it would be helpful if he could indicate whether a different route is being considered for the Green Investment Bank so we can discuss its future in a rather less negative way.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): The Minister has a little extra time to respond to the debate. I remind him that if he wishes, he can leave Ms Thomson a couple of minutes to sum up.

5.26 pm

The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I sincerely congratulate the
hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson), who represents her constituency in a robustly independent way, on securing the debate. She drew on her clear business experience to frame the debate, set it up in the right way and built on the exchange that we had on the urgent question last week.

However, I must say that when the hon. Lady dismisses commercial confidentiality as a smokescreen, she lapses into political rather than business matters. She knows the reality of the situation, however frustrating that is for the House—and, frankly, for me. I will not be drawn into any discussion about the character or values of any potential preferred bidder, or any of the more sensitive aspects of what is a commercial negotiation that has not concluded. I think she knows that, but let me make that quite clear.

Mary Creagh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: May I make a little more progress?

This has been a good, well-informed debate. There is clearly disagreement about whether it is right to sell the GIB, and I respect that, but there is clearly common ground—this is worth restating—that the GIB has been a fantastic success story. In fact, exactly that language has been used by Members on both sides of the House. That success has been achieved in very short order by a relatively small group of people who were given a very challenging mandate. That is genuinely impressive. The Government are therefore keen, as I am sure the House is, to place on the record our appreciation of the work of not just the GIB’s senior management team but everyone who works in that organisation. It is particularly important to show our appreciation for the professional approach of the GIB’s staff, because as those who have been in the commercial world know, these kinds of transactions drag on and create uncertainty and anxiety.

The GIB has been a success story. It was set up to accelerate private investment in green infrastructure. It has a fantastic success record of turning every £1 of public money committed into £3 of matched private sector commitments. It has achieved a series of firsts—not least the first ever offshore wind fund, which has now reached final close having raised more than £1 billion of capital, making it the UK’s largest renewable energy fund. There is also agreement that if we do sell the bank—there is disagreement about that—the Government will be responsible for securing best value for taxpayers and getting a deal that we can justify to the public, whose money has been invested in this institution. It is important that Parliament holds the Government firmly to account for that.

I think something has been missed in this debate. There has been a lot of assertion about the motives of any potential preferred bidder or even the motivations of the Government. There has even been the suggestion that this sale represents a sapping of green ambition on the part of the UK Government, but that could not be further from the truth. I meant what I said on the Floor of the House yesterday.

I will come on to the criteria, which we will be very robust about taking to when it comes to reviewing any proposal before us. However, one of the things that we are looking at most closely when considering a proposal from a preferred bidder is their forward commitment, not only to people—particularly in Edinburgh, which I hope will reassure the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), in whose constituency the HQ of the bank is located—and to an ongoing institution with a clear identity in the future, but, critically, to forward investment. That is because hon. Members are right: we need more funding and we need more private capital coming into our green infrastructure. That is obvious; every country needs that.

Part of our starting premise, which has not been reflected in this debate at all, and part of the motive for privatisation, is to confront the reality that the GIB, however successful it has been, is constrained at the moment by the framework in which it operates. I do not think that people get up in the morning thinking, “Thank God I’m working for an instrument of public policy”—I do not think that is quite how people see things—but they are constrained in what they can do by state aid rules and the number of restrictions that come from being a public sector organisation. We feel that this organisation, when liberated from all that, can do more and we want it to do more. We need to be reassured by any future owner that they share that vision, are committed to it and are prepared to back up that commitment. That will not be just the evaluation of Ministers or officials in Government—

George Kerevan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: I will just finish this point. I want to reassure Scottish Members of Parliament, and I have already told the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West this in our meeting, that when it comes to making any final judgment we will be led by the judgment of the chairman—Lord Smith of Kelvin, who is highly respected—and the board about the credibility and integrity of future commitments made by a bidder, and the degree to which they can be bound into contractual arrangements.

George Kerevan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: I will just finish. That is a dimension to this transaction that has been completely absent from this debate, which has been bogged down a bit by a lot of assertion and prejudice about the character and values of a preferred bidder.

Mary Creagh rose—

Mr Hurd: The hon. Lady has been very patient; I will give way to her and then I will give way to the hon. Gentleman who represents the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan).

Mary Creagh: I thank the Minister for his generosity in giving way and I apologise to colleagues and to you, Mr Owen, for turning up late; I was anxious to listen to the opening speeches in the education debate. I echo what the Minister has said about the patience of the staff, who have been undergoing this process for 18 months amid considerable uncertainty. Am I right to infer from the point that he has just made about the good will of the potential purchaser that there are potentially some issues around that? Can he say when he became aware of the fact that these various other new companies had been set up by the GIB just before Christmas? There has been a little bit of confusion,
Mr Hurd: Regarding the first point, the conversations with the preferred bidder about their future commitment are ongoing. That just reflects the fact that we take that matter very seriously. This is not a case, as I think was suggested, of the Government simply wanting to raise some money, getting the bank off the balance sheet and then off into the hills we go. The issue of the future commitment of any new owner to future investment that will help us to move further and faster along in the transition to the low-carbon economy—a transition that is central to the industrial strategy—is a very important part of the consideration of the bid. That is why, working through Lord Smith and the board, we are taking time to look each other in the eye and say, “Is this enough?” That is the situation we are in.

On restructuring, I think I was pretty clear when answering the last parliamentary question. We agreed some reorganisation in partnership with the GIB to facilitate private capital into certain assets. I make the point—which, again, is a point of principle and needs to be asserted—that there was almost a suggestion during the urgent question debate that the GIB should somehow not be free to sell anything or to bring in private capital. That is completely wrong, particularly when the evidence is that there are buyers for assets that are reaching some maturity. Given what the GIB was set up to do, I do not think that it should be in the business of competing with private capital to invest in assets. It serves no policy purpose to hold on to assets that are valuable to others if that money can be recycled into new investments. That is the critical thing.

Lots of assertions have been made about asset stripping. The Government have no interest in selling to an asset stripper. We want to know about investment in the future; it is okay to sell, so long as there is a commitment to reinvest in future. The GIB portfolio—under any ownership, including public ownership—should not be preserved in aspic forever. It has to be a dynamic organisation, and it should be free to realise capital from packaging assets and to do things that a nimble entrepreneurial organisation, which is what it is, should be free to do.

Michelle Thomson rose—

Mr Hurd: Out of courtesy, I give way to the sponsor of the debate.

Michelle Thomson: I thank the Minister for his comments, but I need to press him on my specific comment about the risk appetite and the nature and type of projects. I fully accept and understand increased access to capital, but I made a specific point about the risk appetite that I hope the Minister will move on to.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. Before the Minister responds, I should say that we only have a few minutes remaining. If interventions are long, we will not get as much as we want out of the Minister.

Mr Hurd: I am happy to address that point, because it is important. The hon. Lady needs to reflect on the motivation of anyone wanting to buy the GIB. It is a special organisation; there are other vehicles that people can buy if they simply want to invest in clean energy or strip assets. The GIB was set up for a special purpose. We put in place governance frameworks—the hon. Lady calls it the golden share; we call it the green share—that we think are robust and that Parliament approved.

Why bother if the only intention is to do easy stuff? The GIB has proven that it can do difficult stuff and make a return. We therefore come back to the motivation of a bidder, and to our doing our job in making sure that we test any proposal against the criteria we have set. One of those criteria is about not just the volume of future investment commitment to the UK, but the degree to which any buyer buys into the ethos and purpose of the organisation.

To draw things to a close, the central point is that the Government set out our case for privatisation and set out the criteria—value for money, declassification, but also a desire to see a credible commitment to the ongoing organisation and to increased levels of investment in the UK’s low carbon economy. We ran a competitive process, we received a proposal from a preferred bidder and we are now evaluating that against those criteria. No decision has yet been taken, because this is a very serious decision.

The debate, and the urgent question debate, have been very helpful—not only in sending a message about the importance of getting this right, which had already been received by Government, but, critically, in sending a message to anyone looking to buy the organisation about the importance that Members from both sides attach to getting the transaction right: it must be seen to deliver value for money, but also show a commitment to the ongoing organisation.

Dr Whitehead rose—

Mr Hurd: I am happy to give way, if time allows.

Dr Whitehead: The Minister has been very generous in giving way. Before he concludes, will he briefly categorically deny that the story in the Financial Times has any truth in it at all?

Mr Hurd: I am confused about what story the hon. Gentleman is referring to; there have been so many stories. I can say that the Government continue to evaluate a proposal from a preferred bidder and that no decision has been taken.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): The hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) has one minute to sum up.

5.40 pm

Michelle Thomson: I can do that quickly, Mr Owen. I thank hon. Members for their contributions, including the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who always adds depth to our debates. I also thank the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead). I make particular reference to the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan) and
his key points—I gently suggest they have not been addressed—on dealing with market failure and systemic issues with infrastructure investment. He made a very clear and compelling point.

I also note that the Minister conceded that he is being led by Lord Smith, who is a worthy gentleman and chair of the board. The Minister, however, is ultimately responsible and accountable for ensuring value for the UK taxpayer and the wider framework of the all-important green agenda—

5.41 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*
Westminster Hall

Thursday 26 January 2017

[Mr Andrew Turner in the Chair]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Civil Society Space

1.30 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered protecting civil society space across the world.

This issue is of some interest to me, as it is to all the right hon. and hon. Members who have turned up to participate in and add their thoughts to the debate. I will focus on three countries: Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Other Members will focus on other countries of interest to them.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the debate to me and my co-sponsors, the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and, on the Front Bench for the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). It is good for the three of us collectively to have the opportunity to bring this subject before the House.

This debate came off the back of a meeting that I had here with Christian Aid and other bodies from Pakistan in September 2016, during a recess week. They presented a clear case about Pakistan and its religious minorities to me and some of my colleagues from the all-party parliamentary group on Pakistan minorities. I will introduce and discuss the three main issues.

Throughout the world, civil society space has been under significant pressure as restrictions on funding, barriers to registration, intervention in non-governmental organisations’ internal affairs and other forms of harassment have proliferated. The phenomenon of closing such spaces has a propensity to disrupt and paralyse the important work of such organisations, which is crucial to build and reinforce a peaceful and stable society. As I outline my case, I hope that hon. Members and the audience here, on television and elsewhere will grasp what we mean by protecting civil society space across the world.

Longer term, the closure of civil society threatens to weaken irreversibly the infrastructure of human rights movements, which, in turn, could endanger hard-won progress on human rights globally. That is an issue of great importance to me.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): We are witnessing a serious escalation of restrictions on civic space by the Bahraini authorities, with travel restrictions, biased judicial proceedings, the vilification of civil society members and—in recent days, following allegations of torture—worrying executions that some organisations believe amount to extrajudicial killings. Considering the millions being spent by the Foreign Office on technical assistance to Bahrain, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the UK should be more outspoken on such matters?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. She is vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary human rights group, so I know the good work that she does. She has been a focal person in speaking out on such issues, and I wholeheartedly endorse that. She has outlined a number of the things that she, I and others have written about to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The nature of restrictions on civil society varies, but common elements of such laws include: targeting activists who scrutinise Government policies; increased scrutiny of NGO activities and sources of funding, which is all very investigative and focused on making life difficult for the NGOs; and, in some cases, the targeting of organisations that work on issues such as women’s rights, freedom of religion or belief, LGBTI or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights, migrants’ rights, and the environment. Those are all critical and important issues in civil society throughout the world. It is important to retain such organisations.

Repressive practices are not limited to states such as Russia, Egypt or Pakistan: they are in danger of spreading across the world, as the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) said in her intervention. Civil society experts have spoken of a contagion effect, whereby repressive laws introduced in one country are copied by its neighbours, who might think, “That’s the way to do it.” It is not.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a good example of what he is referring to is the law against NGOs being deployed in Egypt? Perhaps Egypt is copying the law deployed in Russia. We hope that such things are raised by the FCO at every opportunity in its discussions with the Egyptians.

Jim Shannon: I commend the right hon. Gentleman for his action in this House on human rights. He regularly brings issues to the attention of Ministers and Departments, for which I thank him. In his intervention he gave another example of exactly what happens, which is that spreading across. It is imperative that civil society space is protected; otherwise, repressive practices and violations of human rights could spread further. We need to have debates such as this one and what I hope will be a positive response from the Minister and the Government.

The debate provides an opportunity to identify the many benefits of thriving civil society spaces and the innovative ways in which the UK can support them. Furthermore, we can raise the issue of the considerable pressures on civil society and of civil society’s important role as a driver for positive socioeconomic and political development, as well as for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Unfortunately, there is today an extremely worrying trend in many parts of the world: that those who stand up for those in need are themselves increasingly subjected to various forms of attack for doing so, including physical attack. Today, in this House, we need to stand up for human rights and liberties, such as people’s right to pursue their religious beliefs, not to suffer persecution and to worship their God.
As chair of the APPG on international freedom of religion or belief, I have heard of far too many people far too often being in desperate need of others to support and speak up for them. This is our chance to be a voice for the voiceless—to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves and who might not know what we are doing. We do so because we want to and because we have a job to do in this House. Sometimes, all it takes is for something to be said for a difference to be made. That is what is so worrying about the restrictions on civil society: they are making it even more difficult to let people support, speak out and make positive changes for each other. That is what we should be trying to do.

What exactly is civil society? It includes all NGOs and institutions that manifest the interests and the will of citizens. It includes the family, the private sphere and other special interest organisations. It also includes bodies and individuals who organise to represent a religious, business, academic, social or quasi-political interest within a community. That is a large raft of issues across all of society.

Without input from civil society, both the legislature and the Executive would be less informed and more disengaged from issues that affect members of the community. Such input has been critical to humanitarian and human rights reforms, of which one of the most conspicuous was the abolition of slavery in the early 19th century. Other input was on issues such as child labour laws, property and electoral reform, women’s rights and the maintenance of human rights. We are here because of our interest in human rights, so I want to make that point very clear.

The ebb and flow of information between legislators and civil society is an integral part of modern democracy. Moreover, sectors of civil society frequently possess deeper knowledge and expertise on some subjects than is readily available from Departments. It would be a gross error for the legislature or the Executive to hamper in any way the expression of the views of civil society. Civil society is protected through rights such as those to freedom of association, assembly, expression and religion or belief.

The role of NGOs is significant, but civil society goes beyond simply collective organisations of people. Hence, the definition of civil society must be expanded to include how people organise themselves today in the 21st century, because how it is done has evolved. As technology develops, people increasingly frequently utilise the internet to raise human rights and other issues online, as well as through social media and other platforms. It must be noted that none of those spaces in which civil society operates is immune from the pervasive measures being implemented throughout the world to restrict civil society.

The angle that I am coming from as I set the scene is that of freedom of religious belief and civil society. As everyone present probably knows, that right is an area that I am deeply passionate about and it is deeply linked to and affected by the closing of civil space across the world. When the Pakistan minorities APPG members and I met those NGO administrators and other people in September, I recognised that what they were describing was happening on the ground not only to them in Pakistan, but in other parts of the world.

The link with religious freedom can predominantly be seen in two ways. First, the closing down of civil society directly limits individuals’ ability to exercise their freedom of religion or belief, as civil society often includes people simply coming together to promulgate their faith or beliefs. The restriction of such activity directly contravenes article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights, which includes the freedom to manifest and practise religion or belief in public—it is right there. That is a clear example.

Tom Brake: The hon. Gentleman may be coming to this, but does he agree that two faith communities in particular are being heavily targeted? The Ahmadiyya Muslim community is at risk in places such as Pakistan and, more recently, Algeria, and the Baha’i faith is under threat in Iran.

Jim Shannon: I totally concur, and I will mention those communities. It is good to have a collective positive opinion on behalf of those people.

CIVICUS Monitor has analysed what drives violations of civic space. Government leaders have often taken drastic measures to prevent people from criticising their decisions, engaging in human rights monitoring or calling for their basic social or economic needs to be met. Civil society actors frequently say that “security concerns” were cited as the rationale for restricting their voices and actions. It is easy to do that—it is a simple way of controlling what takes place—but it is wrong if it is used for that purpose.

I turn to Pakistan, which I have a heart for; I know that many people in the Gallery have a heart for it, too, as do all the Members who are here. The shrinking of civil society space can be seen vividly in Pakistan, and it is having a detrimental effect on individuals’ freedom to manifest and observe their religion or beliefs. That is particularly troubling as civil society has played a key role in supporting the country to move forward in the face of adversity. NGOs in Pakistan have advocated for political processes when military dictators have made life difficult for political parties and made it hard for individuals or civil society to make other collective efforts.

Although many people are trying to move forward, some are trying to pull them back. NGOs have assisted Governments whenever public service delivery, developing democratic systems and responding to mega-disasters have become too challenging. We in this House have helped very constructively whenever disasters have taken place. The Minister was part of that process in his former role. NGOs have even provided a voice for the marginalised and kept human ideals alive. For example, 26 million Pakistanis and 1.5 million Afghan refugees are supported by international NGOs to meet their urgent needs for relief and recovery, as well as their longer-term needs for social and political development.

It is heartbreaking to hear reports of the worsening situation for civil society groups and human rights defenders in Pakistan. Those horrendous stories of specific victimisation and persecution are terribly difficult to hear, especially when we consider the many positive activities in which those people have engaged to help the country develop socially and economically.

In a written statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2015, Christian Solidarity Worldwide highlighted the threats against and intimidation of human
rights defenders in Pakistan, which is a highly divided and polarised society. They face constant threats and intimidation from multiple sources, including state and non-state actors, religious and political groups, local communities, district administrators and the police. CSW said:

“The volatile security situation, growing religious fundamentalism, and complex political circumstances in Pakistan make their work very dangerous.”

Human rights activists who speak out about human rights violations are subjected to harassment and targeted attacks, with little protection from the Government or security forces—specifically the police, whose task that is. There is much evidence from across Pakistan to back that up. Lawyers and judges are particularly vulnerable when defending the rights of people accused of blasphemy. Lawyers who take on blasphemy cases are subjected to extreme pressure before, during and after court hearings. CSW reports that activists,

“lawyers and district level judiciary have been threatened and killed throughout Pakistan”.

Rights defenders continue to be harassed and attacked with impunity, creating an air of silence and fear in society.

The murder in 2016 of several activists epitomises what is happening to civil society space across the world. These are specific stories of people who were targeted. Zafar Lund was shot in the head by unidentified assailants and died outside his home in Kot Addu in Punjab province on 14 July. He was a member of a civil society forum that aims to protect water rights. He promoted local Saraiki folklore and storytelling, and supported education and children’s rights. On 7 May, Khurram Zaki, a prominent human rights campaigner and editor, was shot dead by four unknown assailants while he was having dinner at a restaurant in north Karachi. More recently, there have been concerns about the enforced disappearance of four human rights activists who have campaigned for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion and belief, and had a blasphemy case brought against them. They have used their blog to report on human rights violations by security forces and religious extremists in Pakistan.

Those cases feed into the wider trend of silencing civil society that has sparked protests across Pakistan against the abduction of activists. However, the Ahmadiyya community has been subjected to the worst actions against civil society, as the right hon. Gentleman said. On 5 December 2016, 28 armed police from the counter-terrorism department of the Punjab police forcefully entered the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Rabwah. The raid was carried out without a warrant, and four Ahmadiyyas were unlawfully arrested under anti-Ahmadiyya and anti-terror laws. Using the law of the land to target people is a crime, and it should not be allowed to happen. Those people are being held in custody and have been tortured, despite having committed no crime whatever.

That raid followed the arrest and conviction in January last year of an 80-year-old shopkeeper, who was imprisoned for eight years under anti-terror laws for possessing copies of the Koran. There are serious concerns that the recent arrests will similarly result in unlawful sentences, without any justification. The raid marks a turning point in the history of Pakistan, as it was carried out by the Government rather than extremists. There is something seriously wrong when the Government, who we should all have faith in, use their strength and power to target minorities and ethnic groups. It is almost unbelievable. The fact that police are able to enter Ahmadiyya premises without a warrant and against a high court order, make arbitrary and unlawful arrests, subject Ahmadiyyas in custody to torture, and convict them without any evidence sets a dangerous precedent. That concerns me and others who are here today. What discussions have the Government had with the Pakistani Government to end their misuse of anti-terror laws and ensure that civil society is safe and able to thrive for the positive development of Pakistan?

While I am focusing on south Asia, I will also raise the case of Shahidui Alam, a world-renowned photographer and journalist from Bangladesh who has very close ties with us in the UK. Just this morning, he and others were arrested in Dhaka while protesting against the Bangladeshi Government’s plans to build a coal-fired power station near the Sundarbans, the world’s largest mangrove forest and a UNESCO world heritage site. Police allegedly used excessive force and violence, and a bus, to ram down the crowds. Previously, they have used water cannon to dispel peaceful protests.

Security forces in Bangladesh have a well-documented history of using excessive force to prevent protests, which I and others have raised in the House before. There has also been a sharp rise in the targeting of activists and protestors by Government forces, and an increase in restrictions on civil society in general across Bangladesh. Protests against the power station’s construction are ongoing. Those issues are for another debate, but we must look at them. They illustrate the continuing disproportionate response of the Bangladeshi Government, who, in direct contravention of international human rights obligations, shut down peaceful civil society protests and reduced the space for protesters to be heard and engaged with. Again, can the Minister reassure the House and those involved in this debate that, given our close ties with Bangladesh through our diaspora communities and the Commonwealth, the Government will press this issue with their counterparts there?

The issues in Bangladesh go well beyond those I have listed; I will speak on others as well. Organisations have expressed many concerns about Bangladesh and the closure of its civil society. Restrictions on freedom of expression, under section 57 of the Information & Communication Technology Act, 2006, have caused particular concern. It states that any person deliberately publishing any electronic material that causes law and order to deteriorate, prejudices the image of the state or person or causes hurt to religious belief will be punished with a maximum of 14 years and minimum seven years imprisonment.

The Bangladeshi Government have used that section to arrest and charge journalists for publishing what they allege to be fake, obscene or defamatory information in electronic form. The ICT Act has previously been used, and continues to be used, to oppress freedom of expression in Bangladesh, and amendments to the Act in 2013 further increase police powers and penalties for violations. The growing application of section 57 threatens the space for civil dissent in Bangladesh.

Law enforcement agencies and the Bangladeshi Government were slow to respond to the murders of several bloggers. In fact, the Government’s response was negative; they urged the bloggers to curb their
writing and impose self-censorship, which, again, is a curtailment of the freedom of the press. One conservative Islamic group called on the Government to punish atheist bloggers who criticise Islam, and several bloggers were arrested under the law that prohibits publishing such works. Asif Mohiuddin went into exile following accusations of blasphemy in 2015; news editor Proibir Sikdar was arrested after publishing information about a war criminal in August 2015; and Mohon Kumar Mondal, the director of the Bangladeshi non-governmental organisation LEDARS, was charged for damaging the religious sentiment of Muslims in September 2015. It is evident from interviews that self-censorship is occurring as a result of attacks, fear and misuse of the law. There is also a feeling that the current Bangladeshi Government are in denial. Those are some examples of what is happening in Bangladesh.

There are other examples across the world of the silencing of voices that appear to challenge Governments. The words of the former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, offer an apt reminder that: “If leaders do not listen to their people, they will hear from them—in the streets, the squares, or, as we see far too often, on the battlefield. There is a better way. More participation. More democracy. More engagement and openness. That means maximum space for civil society.”

India’s Intelligence Bureau—a sub-agency of the Ministry of Home Affairs—published a report in June 2014 that alleged:

“A significant number of Indian NGOs...have been noticed to be using people centric issues to create an environment which lends itself to stalling development projects.”

Again, that is an attack on expressing oneself on important issues—environmental issues or whatever—in civil society. The report mentioned several campaigns targeting the Government on economic and development issues. Subsequent sweeping measures to clamp down on NGOs receiving foreign funding have undermined the work of civil society. Following the Intelligence Bureau’s report, the Ministry of Home Affairs barred several NGOs and human rights activists with international links from receiving foreign funds by suspending their licences for six months and freezing their bank accounts.

There are significant concerns that human rights defenders and NGOs, and foreign organisations that fund them, are becoming targets for state repression. That is exacerbated by nationalist groups calling on the Government to curb the work of foreign NGOs in the country, claiming that foreign involvement is not conducive to India’s development. The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010—the FCRA—restricts the work of human rights defenders, as do some income tax regulations.

The US Government—whom it seems we will be in partnership with, based on what the President has said—have expressed concerns over the crackdown on the activities of both local and international NGOs in India. The US Government have seen it, and we must back them up on that. Three UN human rights experts—the special rapporteur on human rights defenders, Michael Forst; the special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai; and the special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye—have also recently called on India to repeal the FCRA, as it is increasingly being used to obstruct civil society.

All NGOs receiving external funds are required by law to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs. Again, the Indian Government are using tax regulations to restrict and control what happens. In April 2016, Maina Kiai showed that the FCRA does not conform to international laws and standards. Those are clear issues. The Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have recognised that, agreeing with the Charity Commission in 2012 that there was scope for the UK to contribute more actively to the Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society. However, that is not reflected in that group’s current membership.

DFID’s current civil society partnership review, which was announced by the Secretary of State for International Development, sets out a simplified new central funding system for civil society organisations that supposedly incentivises good performance and pushes for more efficiency, transparency and accountability. While value for money and stemming profiteering is welcome, I ask for more openness and accountability. That means maximum space for civil society.

In December 2016, UNESCO expressed “deep disagreement” with the methodology used in DFID’s multilateral development review, and concern that “values of peace and dialogue” are not anchored in DFID’s new practices. Oxfam chief executive officer, Mark Goldring, echoed concerns that DFID fails to demonstrate convincingly that it is “wholeheartedly committed to building the partnerships with civil society that organisations need.”

When allocating funding, DFID is often fearful of mixing religion with development by supporting faith-based organisations. We must take that on board.

Despite the right to freedom of association, assembly and expression, and freedom of religion or belief, those groups of individuals are frequently shut down and marginalised under anti-terror laws because they are perceived as providing an alternative narrative to the state’s. What is wrong with providing such a narrative? Freedom of expression and religion are vital to society as a whole. After all, some strands of religion have an overtly political agenda, while others promote or condone discrimination against women and violence, including terrorism.

Most major aid agencies have recognised the limitations of not strategically engaging with religious-based groups. By ignoring the underlying religious beliefs that shape attitudes in most parts of the world, secular development has not had the impact on human behaviour it had hoped for. Treating religion as irrelevant has also not prevented the emergence of extremism. Engaging with religious-based civil society needs to be done with care, with bottom-line criteria set out in partnership. It must also be done in a sensible way; with openness and understanding, moving to engagement through open, constructive discussion on differences in values and objectives. Seeking to engage them as equal partners, instead of estranging them, will also be useful.
Faith-based organisations already provide trusted community focal points and have a strong track record of delivering services and eliciting motivated voluntary service religious leaders. Furthermore, those institutions are often the most trusted in developing countries. Such organisations and groups have been at the forefront of advocacy, including in the civil rights movement in the US, the Jubilee 2000 debt campaign and the frequent religion-led resistance to dictatorships in Asia, Latin America and Africa. It is crucial to understand that diverse religious communities often co-exist peacefully, and that the shortcomings of egalitarian Government provision tend to stoke violence that erupts, which, though it may take on a religious garb, may not be about religion itself—as seen with Boko Haram in Nigeria, for example.

I am sure that the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief, which I chair, and other hon. Members would be delighted to help DFID to think through how it works with the religious-based section of civil society. Though often tricky, it is crucial for achieving strategic objectives. I also hope that that understanding can be mainstreamed across all Government Departments and programmes including countering violent extremism programmes, so that civil society groups from a particular faith background, both around the world and in the UK, are not, in practice, targeted and in turn disempowered.

The insistence by some that extremism—which, as yet, has no clear definition—is driven above all by religious ideology must not limit individuals’ right to voice critical concerns about Government action. The protection of individuals’ freedom of expression, and the ability to associate and assemble, are greatly needed, not only for holding the UK Government but for holding all Governments to account. We must watch closely to ensure that counter-terrorism policy does not cross the line it has crossed in Pakistan, Russia and Egypt.

I will conclude, because time is passing very quickly. Where civil society groups are not currently able to raise their voice in countries around the world—we have heard in interventions and, I am sure, will hear from other hon. Members that that is the case—I encourage the UK Government and the Minister in particular, either directly or through organisations such as the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, to support and capacity-build parliamentarians to raise human rights issues in their own countries, providing a voice for civil society.

In this time of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, a move that I fully support, how will the UK work both in its own programming and in conjunction with the EU, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth and international parliamentarian networks to ensure that civil society is protected, supported and heard? We need to ensure that we in this House, who are all now a part of civil society in some way, shape or form, continue to protect our space and those who use that space in order to help one another to be safe and have better lives. For the avoidance of doubt, that is what human rights is all about.

2.1 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner, and to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is such a doughty campaigner in this place for freedom and human rights. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the debate. I also thank CAFOD—the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development—and its representative Ruth Stanley, who a year ago brought to my attention an issue that deserves greater prominence than it is currently receiving: the deeply concerning trend towards the shrinking of the space for civil society to operate, in countries all around the world. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said:

“Civil society is the oxygen of democracy…Civil society acts as a catalyst for social progress and economic growth. It plays a critical role in keeping Government accountable, and helps represent the diverse interests of the population, including its most vulnerable groups…yet, for civil society, freedom to operate is diminishing—or even disappearing.”

In the past five years, concerning developments are increasingly limiting the ability of civil society to function. Indeed, as DFID says in its recent “Civil Society Partnership Review”,

“Around the world, civil society is facing unprecedented pressure, from violent attacks to attempts to close down the space for democratic dialogue and debate. The UK Government, as part of its commitment to freedom of thought, association and expression, will stand alongside civil society against these encroachments.”

I strongly welcome those words. I also welcome the presence at the debate of not only a Foreign Office Minister, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and the Americas, but a DFID Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart). Their presence signifies the importance that those Departments attach to this issue, and we thank them for it.

It is important that we examine why civil society across the globe faces the pressure that it does today. I will talk later about four themes on which we could reflect. I have become increasingly concerned about this issue over the past year as chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, which has been looking into it.

What do we mean by civil society? I suggest that we mean the complex weave of individuals, organisations and institutions that endeavour to manifest the will of a people living in a community or country. That is non-governmental. They endeavour not only to manifest the will of the people—to give them a voice—but to maintain and support their human rights and freedoms.

Tom Brake: I commend the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for the very important roles that they both play in campaigning on these issues. She mentions human rights. Has the Conservative commission that she chairs looked at the case of Nabeel Rajab from Bahrain? He is clearly a very prominent human rights campaigner and he has been detained there for reasons that many of us believe are bogus.

Fiona Bruce: We have not looked at that specific case, but I thank the right hon. Gentleman for drawing it to my attention—we will do so.

Civil society helps by speaking out against the bad, such as corruption, impunity, service delivery failure and electoral fraud, and by promoting the good—identifying and articulating citizens’ development needs.
and priorities. I saw that when I was in remote Nepal with the Select Committee on International Development. There, UK aid workers were helping community groups, including women's groups, to come together to prioritise the basic needs of their area—for example, the need for improved roads and bridges—so that those priorities could be conveyed to regional and then national Government for potential allocation of resources.

Civil society includes community groups such as I have mentioned, but also a hugely diverse range of other structures. Some are loose associations of people mobilised behind a common goal. Some are well-funded and well-organised charitable hierarchies or NGOs. Some campaign for change. Some want just to provide frontline help. In short, civil society is an extremely broad church—if I may use that metaphor. That makes it difficult to generalise about the trends affecting civil society.

The complexity and depth of analysis required really to get a handle on what is happening today does not make for easy headlines or neat, focused campaigns. That is one reason why we do not hear enough about it, and that is why I commendCAFOD and other organisations concerned about the issue, whose workers live and work in challenging environments where they see at first hand how civil society freedoms are being eroded, and then enable us to bring their concerns into this public.

Often, when civil society freedoms are being eroded, it is by creeping incrementalism. The subtle undermining of civil society freedoms is rarely accompanied by great fanfare. A new law may at first seem innocuous, but it might prove to have a devastating effect on civil society—an effect felt only later. We rarely notice these types of changes, so when they happen a sense of urgency is often not present.

I will reflect, in Holocaust Memorial Week, on one of the worst examples of incrementalism in the last century: the actions of the Nazis. At first, relatively small steps were taken, such as discouraging the reading of certain books or the keeping of them in one's home. Then, employing a Jewish housemaid was banned. But where did that marginalisation and exclusion ultimately lead? To the gas chambers.

That is why we need to worry more than we do about what is happening to civil society across the world today. We should not be accused of being sensationalist, when we hear, for example, of an NGO being expelled from Egypt, Ethiopia or Cambodia. We should not assume that those are localised cases even though it is not immediately obvious that they may be part of a wider pattern. The sad reality is that events such as those do reflect a current global trend.

In 2016, the Mo Ibrahim index of African governance included for the first time a specific indicator for measuring civil society space. It captured the extent to which civil society actors are allowed to participate in the political process, as well as the freedom of NGOs to operate without fear of persecution or harassment. The concerning findings are that nearly half the African population live in a country in which civil society participation has deteriorated. Two thirds of the countries on that continent, representing 67% of the African population, have shown a deterioration in freedom of expression in the past 10 years.

The main thrust of my message today is not so much to point a finger at Government or Ministers to do more—I am sure that the Minister will be relieved to hear that, although I will not miss that opportunity—as to say that all of us, from individual citizens to elected representatives such as Members of Parliament to influential global institutions such as the World Bank, need to be vigilant, speak out and do more to protect the civil society space in which our brothers and sisters around the world are working to improve the lives of those around them. I referred to the World Bank because I had the privilege of attending the World Bank gathering in Washington last autumn, when a group of parliamentarians from across the world raised this issue. They said that the increasingly shrinking civil society space, including in many of their countries, really needs to be attended to and highlighted more.

Why do we hear reports of the shrinking space for civil society to function, not only in Africa but around the globe? I will suggest four trends that might help to provide a partial explanation and paint part of the picture for this complex and concerning global issue. First, and perhaps most alarmingly, there is the trend in certain countries for more frequent extra-judicial killings, detentions, torture and disappearances. From Thailand to Bangladesh, to Kenya, to Congo, to Saudi Arabia, violence is a daily reality for many civil society workers and volunteers. In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, kidney by and violence from armed groups remains a daily risk.

According to the “Aid Worker Security Report 2014”—the most recent one that I am aware is available—120 aid workers were killed, 88 were wounded and 121 were kidnapped in the course of their work. Those are the highest figures ever recorded, and yet even they exclude many local people whose situations have gone unrecorded. Human rights violations and allegations include illegal rendition, such as that of Andy Tsege, whom several of us spoke about in this Chamber a short time ago. There is torture and the enforced disappearance of grassroots activists.

To highlight another example, I understand that the Irish citizen, Ibrahim Halawa, is now serving his fourth year in prison for taking part in peaceful democratic protest in Egypt. We are told that in this period, he has endured beatings with whips and chains, blindfolding, solitary confinement, electrocution and psychological torture. We are also told that when he was in solitary confinement, he was kept in a cell measuring half a metre by half a metre. It was impossible to lie down and he had to go to the toilet on his cell floor. We heard from the Egyptian authorities that he is to be released, but that has not happened yet. I hope that they will hear this debate and that his release will indeed happen.

It goes without saying that colleagues are united in condemning such abuses, but the connection to civil society freedoms is made too infrequently and inadequately. Such violations are each rooted in a willingness on the part of authorities to dispense with core human rights: the freedoms of association, expression, thought, and religion or belief. We hear so often of those freedoms being eroded—of people not being able to get a job and of planning permission not being granted to, for example, church organisations for buildings. All those freedoms are essential for a thriving civil society to exist. As I mentioned earlier in reference to the Nazi persecutions, the erosion of those freedoms is often where things...
start, but they end up with the kind of dreadful crimes against humanity, torture, imprisonment and deprivation that I referred to.

The second trend I shall highlight is the proliferation of restrictive legislation; the tendency for certain Governments to impose excessively onerous registration requirements, particularly on non-governmental organisations. That often targets legitimate action and impinges on civil society’s rights of freedom of expression, assembly and association. Some laws restrict the foreign funding of NGOs.

Another example of a restrictive requirement is that in Ethiopia, only 30% of an organisation’s costs can be spent on what is classed as administration. That has a very narrow definition, which severely limits civil society. Legislation in Cambodia has restricted civil society organisations from working on politics, limiting their ability to monitor elections or criticise corruption. Since January 2012, at least 120 laws have been enacted in more than 60 countries to restrict the ability of civil society organisations to register, raise funds or operate.

Organisations are straining to meet the increasingly onerous administrative demands of Governments. In many countries the registration of NGOs has become a lengthy, multi-stage process with uncertain timeframes for decisions. That all requires significant resources, which few organisations can afford. I have heard that in China, if a new NGO with international links wants to set up, they must partner with a domestic organisation, therefore increasing the Government’s ability to subject such groups to checks.

In some instances, organisations have been asked to comply with new regulations by a certain date. Failure to do so means that they are forcibly deregistered. We have heard that organisations are united in the belief that that is the way to silence dissenting voices. Some Government leaders justify the discrepancy by appealing to populism—for example, by seeking to portray international NGOs as a malign foreign influence. This is not the time to open up that debate, but suffice it to say that the end result of those restrictions is that often well-intending NGOs seeking to protect or extend civil society’s rights of freedom of expression, assembly and association, have ended up closing.

The third trend I will speak about is the use—perhaps I should say the misuse—of so-called anti-terror laws to close down, intimidate or restrict the activities of legitimate organisations. In Kenya, for example, there has been a clampdown on NGO operations in the past two years, targeting pro-democracy organisations. Bank accounts have been frozen and the leaders of organisations face criminal investigations, as allegations are made of their organisations being used as a source of terrorism finance.

Most people understand that the rising spectre of global terrorism has resulted in Governments reflecting on whether their anti-terror laws are sufficient for the unprecedented threats that we face today, particularly from ISIS. Most people also recognise the need for special measures to enable Governments to pre-empt and rapidly respond to threats of terrorism. However, we hear that powers afforded by such legislation, such as detention without trial, are being applied in cases in which there is no evidence of any terrorist link whatever. Political opponents, human rights defenders and even NGO employees have been subject to arbitrary detention, justified by anti-terrorism legislation.

The pattern can extend far beyond detention without trial. In Malaysia, for example, a council has been created with the power to declare “security areas”, within which the council can invoke special measures to arrest and detain without warrant. The misuse or overuse of anti-terror legislation also has indirect effects.

**Jim Shannon**: In business questions in the House today, I had the chance to highlight the persecution of Christians under Malaysian civil law specifically and to ask the Leader of the House to agree to a debate on that issue. Although Malaysia looks outwardly like a peaceful country with few restrictions, it is actually a country with significant and substantial restrictions.

**Fiona Bruce**: What often happens in such cases is that a climate is created in which individuals and organisations self-censor for fear of reprisals—the so-called “chilling effect”.

Lest we think that it is only in other countries that counter-extremism measures threaten the space for civil society to operate, let us reflect on the proposal made by our Government last year, in connection with their proposed counter-extremism measures: that all youth organisations outside schools teaching young people for more than a certain number of hours a week should be required to register with central Government and potentially be subject to Ofsted inspections, to ensure that they are in line with a list of values drawn up by the Government. At one point, it was suggested that just six hours a week of teaching outside school was sufficient to require central registration. The proposals could have covered traditional and clearly non-threatening church groups, such as Sunday schools or youth groups.

Fortunately, we have heard little about the proposal since the justifiable outcry against it by several Members of Parliament during a debate in this Chamber. I hope that the Government have quietly dropped it, but it goes to show how vigilant we must be to protect civil society even in our own country. Whenever we have the capacity, we should also do our best to challenge restrictions in other countries where they can be much more severe. We must do so on behalf of those in more vulnerable societies who do not have the opportunity to speak out for themselves as we do here.

The fourth and final trend is the harassment of civil society organisations. One issue arising from legislation relating to the registration or operations of NGOs is that laws are drafted so broadly that the scope for interpretation is wide open, enabling authorities to pursue agendas tantamount to harassment under the guise of implementing legislation. Excessive monitoring, threatening phone calls and unannounced inspections are commonplace. The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development reports that its partner workers in Sri Lanka and Latin America face surveillance, threatening phone calls, searches and disruption of community events. Fraud, tax, blasphemy and slander legislation is applied arbitrarily to criminalise the activities of human rights defenders or outspoken advocates, resulting, in extreme cases, in abduction and extrajudicial killing.

Those four trends only scratch the surface. There is overwhelming evidence that freedom of conscience, thought, religion and belief—in many ways, the bellwether of a healthy civil society—is progressively being undermined. Freedom of expression is under threat; in many parts of
[Fiona Bruce]

the world, journalists live in fear. Around 250 are serving prison sentences as I speak. I mentioned the issue not long ago in a House debate on Bangladesh. In Hong Kong, too, following the arrest of booksellers, we hear that journalists there feel intimidated, and even young representatives elected to their legislature are being threatened and denied the right to take up their seats.

Taken together, those trends paint a distressing picture of the state of civil society around the world. If civil society is the oxygen of democracy, as former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described it, it is in many places struggling for breath. It is therefore critical that we here, in what has been described as the mother of Parliaments, speak out and provide that much-needed breath. To colleagues who, like me, believe that foreign aid is an essential moral duty of the modern state—I know that there are many in the room—it is a matter of deep concern that such issues are occurring in many countries where UK aid is expended. I welcome the Government’s commitments in DFID’s recent civil society partnership review to tackle them.

Tom Brake: I apologise to you, Mr Turner, and to the Minister; because I must go to the Holocaust Memorial Day service, I will not be able to hear the summing-up. Does the hon. Lady agree that this is one of the most important things that the Government could do in relation to Syria? Surprisingly, there are still civil society organisations active there. The Government might consider more investment to secure successful elections in the part of Syria near the border with Turkey, where there is still civil society activity.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for making that suggestion, and I hope that the Minister will address it in his response.

I welcome the Government’s words in the first paragraph of the partnership review:

“A healthy, vibrant and effective civil society sector is a crucial part of Britain’s soft power and leadership around the world. The Government will give them our strongest support.”

The UK can use its considerable soft power to influence global behaviour. Although I would always like to see more done, I commend our Foreign Office Ministers and officials for raising concerns privately and publicly. For example, FCO officials supported land rights activists in Colombia by visiting them, improving protection of their livelihoods by helping them raise the visibility of their case. Just yesterday, when I met the Minister for Asia and the Pacific, he confirmed that he had raised human rights concerns with the Chinese authorities over the alleged forced harvesting of the organs of prisoners of conscience in that country.

The UK Government have given excellent international leadership by example in respect of listening to civil society advocates by tackling female genital mutilation, taking up what was wrongly seen as a niche issue. Our Government are doing a lot. Of course I think that DFID could do more; I have said many times in this Chamber that I believe it could do more to support freedom, particularly of religion and belief. When I went to Nigeria, I was concerned that I had to fight to get a representative of a major Christian organisation there to come to a roundtable discussion involving other NGOs.

I welcome the new review. It refers to commitments by DFID, including that we will “increase opportunities for in-country CSO engagement with DFID country offices, including working with...faith groups”.

That is exactly what I am talking about with regard to my Nigeria experience, so I am pleased to see that commitment in the review.

I am also pleased to see the commitment that DFID will “help shape the environment in which CSO operate. We will address declines in the operating space for civil society that reduce civil society’s ability to improve the lives of poor people and hold those in power to account. Alongside other UK Government departments, DFID will support organisations that protect those under threat and increase understanding of the extent, causes and consequences of closing civic and civil society space.”

I appreciate that the Department for International Development Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border, has had to leave this debate, but I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and the Americas, who has remained to respond. I was going to ask the DFID Minister to tell us in a little more detail how DFID will action the commitment; perhaps he will ask his colleagues in DFID to respond to that question in particular.

As I said, there is much more that we can do—all of us; not just Ministers. I have therefore suggested that the Select Committee on International Development should consider sustainable development goal 16:

“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

That is a new goal and a new commitment. I hope that the Committee will examine how it is being implemented internationally, as well as through UK aid. It would go a long way towards tackling some of the grave challenges that I have outlined.

I end by reiterating the complexity of the issue and the incremental way in which freedoms can be eroded. I hope that we will all be stirred into recognising the urgency of the issue and into speaking out to protect civil society far more. In the current atmosphere of rising nationalism and economic protectionism, and with Islamic State so threatening, legislation putatively designed to address those issues could become more common, as could Government acts to deter them. If the pattern of the last decade is an indicator, abuses will therefore also become more common, unless we all resolve today to redouble our efforts to ensure that the oxygen of democracy continues to flow, so that civil society can play its vital part around the world.

2.29 pm

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. I congratulate the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who we will hear from later, for securing this debate through the Backbench Business Committee.

I will concentrate on Turkey today. I want to talk about the erosion of civil liberties in that country—one of our most pervasive issues in the EU, particularly because Turkey is on our borders. We do not hear enough about Turkey in the UK media; it seems to be the truth that dares not speak its name.
This debate is especially pertinent at the moment, given that this is a time of great uncertainty. Even in the country that calls itself the leader of the free world, six journalists have been charged with rioting for reporting what happened on President Trump’s inauguration day. America, in President Trump’s tiny hands, faces a very uncertain future. With that as a background, what is happening in Turkey—especially given America’s relations with Turkey—is particularly important.

Turkey should be important to everybody, but it is personally important to me. In the last year, I have travelled there and seen for myself the erosion of civil liberties. Even before the coup, I met representatives of organisations that were already suffering from the crackdown on civil space and the shutting down of organisations in the country.

Indeed, I went to visit Sur in Diyarbakir, to see what was happening to the Kurdish populace and also to areas such as Cizre and Surnak. I was detained by the Turkish forces for taking a picture of the bombardment. It might have been naive to take a picture of what is a military procedure, but I did it because I had been told by media organisations in this country that the reason why they did not report what was happening to the Kurdish populations in those areas was that they did not have any evidence of what was happening. They needed some reliable testimony, and they would not take it from any of the actors involved. Given that the Turkish state had expelled journalists and prevented them from going into these areas to report on them, we were getting very little from those areas.

This is not about me, but I will say that that experience was the most terrifying of my life. I was dragged off a street behind the demarcation line and taken into a shack filled with guns and people who did not speak any English. I was refused a translator. As I say, it was terrifying. I am in the very fortunate position of being a Member of Parliament: using Google translate, we managed to get that message across to my captors, and the consulate and the embassy did stellar work to get me released. But I am a British Member of Parliament—

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Scottish!

Natalie McGarry: Yes—a Scottish Member of Parliament.

Jim Shannon: You were right the first time—[Laughter.]

Natalie McGarry: I am a Scottish Member of the British Parliament.

I am so fortunate that I could rely on those networks to release me; if I had been a Kurdish activist, a journalist, a member of an NGO, a teacher or a judge, my rights would not have been asserted. I could have been there not for hours but for days, weeks and months, perhaps without trial.

When I was released, Kurdish people were waiting for me because they thought, “You can at least slightly identify with what it is to be grabbed off the street and taken away, for doing nothing more than taking a picture as evidence”—evidence of what, in my opinion, is nothing more than a brutal, ideological attack on the Kurds.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for her courage and fortitude in what she does for the Kurdish people in this House and in the meetings that she has personally organised; some of us have been able to help her. Does she feel that one way of addressing the Kurdish issue is to give the Kurds self-determination in this area and that Turkey, Syria and Iraq need to do just that?

Natalie McGarry: That is a very pertinent point. In my opinion, the Turkish state participated very strongly in the breakdown of the peace process in 2015. I think that was very deliberate; in my opinion, the state’s actions since have proven that.

Let us turn to Syria. In Rojava in the northern area, the people are quite clear that they are not trying to create a separate Kurdish state; instead, they are trying to work within the current parameters. If the Turkish Government were to consider some form of federalisation, respecting the identity, culture and language of the Kurdish people, particularly in the south-east of the country, we would get much closer to a peaceful solution. However, while the Turkish Government refuse to do that, we will continue to see the likes of what we have seen in the last few months.

In any kind of democracy, free media, freedom of expression, freedom to protest, judicial freedom and independence, and freedom of assembly are all key rights—the very foundation stone of what it is to be a democracy. Turkey has been celebrated for being a secular state: the bridge between the east and west. That may have been true a number of years ago, but it is certainly not the case now. Under President Erdogan, we are seeing an increasing Islamisation of culture, society, education, the judiciary and the Parliament.

I will read out some numbers. The sheer scale of what has happened in Turkey after the coup and the purge is breathtaking in its enormity. I want people who are listening to this debate to understand. Since 15 July last year, 123,567 public officials have been dismissed; 88,642 people have been detained; 42,452 people have been arrested; 6,986 academics have lost their jobs; 3,843 judges and prosecutors have been dismissed; 151 journalists—some say 200—were arrested; and 3,861 Twitter users were detained and 1,734 arrested. In addition, the following bodies and organisations have been shut: 149 media outlets; 1,284 schools; 800 dormitories; 15 universities; 560 foundations; 54 hospitals; 1,125 associations; and 19 trade unions. In total, 3,520 different entities were shut down.

The remaining media organisations are largely controlled by the Turkish Government—or they are scared, because journalists have already been imprisoned. Next week, Can Dündar—I apologise for my massacring the pronunciation of his name—will come to this House as a guest of PEN, to talk about his experience. He was the co-editor of Cumhuriyet, at the time the biggest selling Turkish newspaper. I met him in the House a few months ago; he is currently exiled from Turkey, because he was sentenced to five years and eight months in prison for reporting that Daesh was being allowed to cross the border and transport oil. He was charged as a traitor and, after months of detention and torture, sentenced to prison.

As I say, Can Dündar is coming here next week. He is an international figure and yet Turkey still has no fear about taking such people into detention. Turkey is not scared of any kind of international condemnation, because it does not hear any international condemnation, certainly not publicly. We should ask why that is. Is it
because of the refugee crisis and the fact that it has 2.6 million refugees within its borders, or is it because of the blank cheque for 6 billion euros that it was promised by the EU? Is it because of the threat of refugees coming into EU countries? What does Turkey have that prevents international condemnation of heinous actions, as shown by the figures I have just cited?

Turkey is not a healthy democracy, and I have only just started with the journalists; now I have to move on to the politicians. President Erdogan has changed what was a democracy into a presidential state. He is going through all the rite of that at the moment. He has removed the immunity of the Kurdish HDP MPs. Those representatives were democratically elected in 2015 in two separate elections, and the majority of them have been arrested.

When I was in Diyarbakir, I met with the co-mayors. There is a co-mayor system in the Kurdish areas, because they have gender balance. The co-mayors told me that their offices were raided monthly or fortnightly by the Turkish state trying to find some evidence of a link with the PKK. They came up empty-handed every single time. The representatives’ immunity has been taken away, and Erdogan has granted himself expansive powers as a result of the coup, and the co-mayors have been arrested and have been in prison for months. Mayors, co-mayors and HDP politicians are in prison. Selahattin Demirtas, the co-leader of the HDP, is in prison, snatched in the middle of the night from his home. All have been charged, with absolutely no evidence, with the vague charge of aiding and abetting terrorism.

I had a guest, whose name escapes me—I will correct the record when I remember—who attended Parliament to speak to a group. On his return to Turkey, he was taken into custody. Part of the charges against him was that he had attended the UK Parliament and criticised President Erdogan. More than 1,000 people have been charged with or are in prison for insulting President Erdogan. That sounds Trumpian in terms of having a thin skin, but actually it is terrifying.

I do not know whether Members in the Chamber or people watching recall that just last year, a German comedian was the subject of international press interest. He had mocked President Erdogan with a satirical song he had written. President Erdogan contacted Angela Merkel to demand that the comedian be charged and dismissed from his position. Erdogan was interfering in German democracy, which is absolutely shocking, but Germany did not tell him where to go. Angela Merkel caved to the pressure from Erdogan, which is a damning indictment of the power he seems to have over Europe.

Post-coup, we are living in this reality where people cannot criticise the President. They can be imprisoned and detained without charge. A massive prison-building programme is ongoing, with multiple prisons being built. When I was in Turkey pre-coup, I met with the families of political prisoners. They told me that their relatives were being situated thousands of miles away so that they could not visit. They said that political prisoners were allowed a visit only once every two weeks. They could not take children in with them as no more than one person could go in at a time, in case there was collusion. They had to split the visiting time up, with the mum getting 20 minutes and each child getting 20 minutes. They were not allowed to visit together. Allegations of the sexual assault, rape and torture of political prisoners are rife. There is verifiable testimony that that has occurred.

What is also happening is a social media campaign aimed at closing down social media spaces and threatening journalists and people who disagree with Erdogan. There are bots that, as soon as things are mentioned, send threats to people on social media. After my detention, I received some death threats emanating from Turkey. I was a PKK terrorist where I received threats of rape and sexual violence. Those threats were auto-generated in seconds. I went to the Met police, and they were very reassuring, but within Turkey those threats are particularly made against women and people seen as opponents of Erdogan at all levels. It would be terrifying to be in a country, not knowing who is making those threats. That is further evidence of the use of threats of violence and sexual violence to close down discussion and spaces.

I have spoken for quite a long time. I conclude by talking about what we can do. The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) made a very interesting point before he had to leave. He said that the civil space and structures exist, and that was one thing that came out of meeting people in Turkey. Civil space in Turkey does exist—NGOs are there, trade unions are there and the structures are still there; it is just that the pressure from above is trying to close them down. There is hope. There are people there and structures that the Government can work with and help support, if they have the desire to do so.

The Prime Minister is meeting with President Erdogan this week. I hope that she goes much further than the Foreign Secretary did when he visited Turkey last year. He said half a sentence about the situation in Turkey. He said that we would like “a measured and proportionate response”, which does not go nearly far enough. He spent more time talking about washing machines and trade deals with Turkey than talking about the very real and dangerous civil rights situation there. The UK Government must be seen to be doing more, including standing up for people in Turkey and their relatives around the world, on the impact that Turkey’s actions are having on the closing down of civil space right across the middle east.

2.46 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for proposing the debate. We all know that he is a tireless and relentless campaigner on these issues. It is a great pleasure to take part in this debate, and to follow him and the hon. Members for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Glasgow East (Natalie McGarry).

It is truly shocking that, according to the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law:

“Since 2012, more than 120 laws constraining the freedoms of association or assembly have been proposed or enacted in 60 countries.”

I am not proposing to read out any more facts and figures from that organisation, but that gives us some context. There are many ways one could start with a debate on civil society, but I suspect that, in common
with most people in this country, I began at the first course of refuge, which is Wikipedia. It describes civil society as the

“aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens.”

That is all very good. “Collins English Dictionary” told me that sometimes the term is used in the more general sense of

“the elements such as freedom of speech, an independent judiciary, etc. that make up a democratic society”.

Of course, if one wanted to look at it in an even more erudite way than Wikipedia, there is Aristotle’s “Politics”, where the whole idea of civil society—the “koinonia politika”—was of the community coming together with shared values for common wellbeing. More recently, we have works such as Robert D. Putnam’s “Bowling Alone”, which make the point that social capital and people coming together are vital in creating cohesion in different societies.

One very important thing to consider when we look at civil society internationally is how what we do can affect cohesion in this country. The hon. Members for Strangford and for Congleton spoke about a comprehensive range of countries and themes, as they so often do. I do not pretend to have such expertise, but I want to look at the impact of what happens in this country in the context of civil society abroad. An important manifestation of civil society in this country is the coming together of different communities. In north-east Wales we are privileged to have an organisation called Together Creating Communities. Since 1995, it has brought together a range of community groups: faith groups, some unions and other community groups. Together they have facilitated and become strong so that local people can take action.

At the end of last year in December, TCC won a charity award from The Guardian. TCC has a range of different activities that bring society together, including accountability meetings—it sounds a little terrifying and sometimes is—for candidates standing for election. It brings together a range of other campaigns, too. It brought together a diverse range of groups to make Wrexham the first fair trade county in Wales, forming the basis for which Wales became the first fair trade country in the world. It worked with statutory and voluntary bodies to create an emergency night shelter in Wrexham. Critically, it supported the Muslim community in establishing the Wrexham mosque at the old Wrexham miners’ centre.

Interestingly, the English Defence League in north Wales—I emphasise that it was the English Defence League—held a protest, although it did not attract many people. A key figure at the mosque made the point that, although it was Muslims in the area who wanted the mosque, they were backed by members of Christian Churches and by representatives of other groups all standing firm together. There is a lovely quote by one of the Muslim leaders on the Together Creating Communities website:

“When we went to negotiate with the council”—

this was to do with planning and land—

“we had two other TCC members with us and they were wearing dog collars. The deputy chief executive said: ‘Excuse me, I’m a bit puzzled, you’ve come to talk…about the mosque, so what are the two clergy wearing dog collars doing with you?’ The clergy said: ‘We support them, we are with them.’”

That is an important message from a part of the country where Muslims are a small minority and were supported by a larger faith group and wider society.

As I have said, TCC has a range of campaigns. I have described one of them. Others include tackling debt and irresponsible debt lenders and there is also the fair funeral campaign. TCC asked every funeral director in the county to commit to giving out the funeral price before it takes place, and it has secured that commitment from every one. TCC shows a flavour of what good civil society organisations can be like in bringing people together.

More widely in this country, we can be proud of a great deal of our charitable and civil traditions. I am often amused when I read about this subject. The whole gamut of opinion from neoliberals to Marxists have claimed different bits of the tradition as their own. That is because it is a rich tradition, including churches, faith groups, a range of different charities, mutuals, trade unions and a great many advocacy groups. They are all part of what we see as our tradition. That is why many of us were perturbed by certain aspects of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014, which ran counter to that tradition. I will not dwell on that Act today, but I will dwell on how our tradition matters.

I am intrigued that, in 1601, charity was discussed in Parliament for the first time. The preamble to the Charitable Uses Act 1601 contained a list of purposes that the state believed were of general benefit to society. Of course, that was later developed by case law, which helped to form our modern definition of charitable purposes. So far, so good. What intrigues me even more was that all that was happening at the time of Elizabeth I, a Protestant monarch, who refused to insist that Catholics converted. That was in the early 17th and late 16th century when she repeatedly said,

“I would not open windows into men’s souls.”

She was told time and again, no doubt by the many advisers—I do not know whether there were special advisers in those days but I imagine there were—

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): They would have all been men.

Susan Elan Jones: Probably. The tradition of civil society and openness goes hand in hand with the development of charity in our country. It is fascinating that freedom of thought happened at the same time as freedom of action. That is very important for us to consider today.

I want to move on a few centuries and pay tribute to the work of the Charities Aid Foundation, which, as we know, provides great assistance to UK and international charities. It promotes general donations to charities and operates on six continents with services provided by local experts in nine countries: America, Australia, Bulgaria, Brazil, Canada, India, Russia and southern Africa. CAF has called on the Government to consider working even more with Governments overseas to develop civil society infrastructure where the UK is transitioning out of aid funding. In view of CAF’s expertise, will the Minister comment on that point?

My final thought on that subject is that we are probably in a time when nationalisms of different hues are growing and there is a populist message. The hon. Member for Congleton used a word that perhaps more
of us should reflect on: incrementalism. It often starts with something small: a comment, a bit of rhetoric or—dare I say?—a bit of banter. It can then grow to something quite unmanageable: the bashing of Muslims and the insidious growth of anti-Semitism of different varieties on all parts of the political spectrum.

**Fiona Bruce:** The hon. Lady makes an important point in saying that it often grows to something unmanageable. One of the reasons we have such a massive refugee problem today is that so many people are denied their rights in their home places and are therefore displaced. Is that not an example of how we have incrementally caused a major problem?

**Susan Elan Jones:** I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Lady on that point. We also need to reflect on the demonisation of migrants, which in some cases seems to have dropped into common parlance. Let us remember that, in our country—I think it was in the early 1970s—that was a case that resulted in Sikh bus drivers being allowed to wear turbans. Let us remember how long ago that was and remember our tradition of tolerance.

**Andrew Rosindell:** in the Chair

I have a little word for our friends across the pond. I find it extraordinary that certain of the United States of America still have the death penalty. Many people who claim to support religious and individual freedoms across the world probably get put into greater danger—some of the minorities and some of the Christian groups and the like—and they too face the death penalty. I find the very fact that American states have the death penalty quite extraordinary. The British Government support a global ban on the death penalty, but I find it extraordinary that certain of the United States of America still have the death penalty. Many people who find it extraordinary that certain of the United States of America still have the death penalty.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, as I do in the all-party group on the Chagos islands. If there was ever a community that deserved the support of a strong civil society movement it is the Chagossians, but we shall perhaps not trouble the Minister too much on that issue, as he responded to it in Westminster Hall recently.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on securing the debate, and want to clear up a point: I was happy to support their bid for a debate at the Backbench Business Committee, but because I would be summing up for the Scottish National Party on the Front Bench, my name had to come off the motion. We in the SNP exist in a kind of gloaming—a word people can look up if they need to—depending on whether we are speaking from the Front or Back Bench, and on the topic and who is replying. The concept of the debate has my full support, and we have heard some considered speeches and interventions.

I thank, as other hon. Members have, the large number of non-governmental, civil society organisations that provided briefings for today’s debate, including Bond, CAFOD, Amnesty International, the Charities Aid Foundation, and ABColombia. The fact that so many briefings were submitted is a cause for both celebration and perhaps a little concern: celebration because this country has a vibrant NGO sector that feels empowered to speak out; but concern at the content of the briefings and the many instances of the closing of civil society space around the world. Indeed, Amnesty’s report says that the situation is unprecedented.

I want to reflect on three themes: the intrinsic value of civil society and its contribution; areas of specific concern—countries that we have heard about and specific individual cases; and some domestic considerations and the role of the UK Government. I no longer need to declare a formal interest, but I should say that my professional background was in the NGO sector as a civil society lobbyist and campaigner on international development issues. I sometimes feel a little like poacher turned gamekeeper, but it has been an interesting 18 months or so since the 2015 election.

A strong civil society is a key indicator of healthy, stable democratic societies. As other hon. Members have said, it is such an important indicator that it has been integrated into the sustainable development goals framework—the plan for the planet over the next 30 years. Goal 16 commits countries around the world to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. So it is fundamental to the global vision of peaceful and sustainable societies.

Civil society provides a platform for debate, to influence policy process and to mobilise opinion outside party political structures. The hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) referred to the Charities Aid Foundation. Its research shows that when asked who is best placed to speak up to Government on behalf of disadvantaged people, and to influence their policies, 84% of respondents in this country said it was charities that specialised in those areas.

The role of the Church and faith-based organisations has also been a strong theme in the debate. Often there is pressure on them from two fronts—from Governments in the countries where they operate, and sometimes from extremists and fundamentalists of other faiths. Yet often those faith-based organisations are among the best placed to speak out on behalf of the poorest and most vulnerable communities. In countries where there is very little infrastructure, such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, it is the Church that has a presence in the communities most remote from society and central governmental structures.

Conversely, the absence of a strong civil society is generally a sign of instability. Syria has been mentioned by several Members. The roots of the conflict are incredibly complex, but Syria is an example of how, when people cannot protest peacefully against the Government, or...
protests are shut down, people turn to extreme measures. It allows violence to creep in, and Governments respond in kind. We fall into a downward spiral. That point was powerfully made by the hon. Member for Congleton when she reflected on other lessons from history, especially given the fact that we are preparing to mark Holocaust Memorial Day tomorrow; I know that a number of right hon. and hon. Members are attending a service today. The role of faith-based organisations in this country, such as the Jubilee 2000 movement, the trade justice movement and the Make Poverty History campaign, has also been recognised.

Several specific countries of concern have been discussed, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (Natalie McGarry) gave a powerful testimony in her speech. It struck me that the countries mentioned are middle-income countries. Colombia, Ethiopia, Malaysia—mentioned by the hon. Member for Congleton—and Turkey are all classified by the World Bank as lower or upper middle-income countries. I said in yesterday’s Westminster Hall debate on West Africa that middle-income country status is perhaps the most precarious, because those countries are in transition from having had little in the way of infrastructure or the kind of development that we enjoy. Hopefully, they are on a journey to the kind of stable democracies that by and large we experience that we enjoy. Hopefully, they are on a journey to the kind of stable democracies that by and large we experience in the west. However, there is a huge risk of regression and backsliding, and it is one of the most precarious periods in a country’s history. An important point that has been made a couple of times is the statistic from the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law about the 120 or so legal initiatives that have been introduced, in periods in a country’s history. An important point that we must reflect on is that the kind of stable democracies that by and large we experience that we enjoy.

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**Fiona Bruce:** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful point. Does he agree that we need more lawyers to engage in international development, to help those countries develop strong democracies? That is not something that we have inspired lawyers—particularly the younger generation of lawyers—to think about doing, as we have inspired medics or teachers. If we are really to achieve SDG 16, we need that.

**Patrick Grady:** That is a fair point. The rule of law—we have heard a lot about it in this part of the world in recent days—obviously requires lawyers. I will perhaps come on to say a little about the appropriate use of the aid budget later.

I want to look at a couple of particular cases. Colombia has been mentioned; it is symptomatic of issues around the country that, despite the progress—the peace agreement signed with FARC, pending agreement with the ELN—civil society organisations report that the situation on the ground continues to worsen progressively. In 2016 85 human rights defenders were killed, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights publicly condemned the violence against human rights defenders. What is encouraging, however, is that the UK ambassador to Colombia is one of eight ambassadors who have publicly denounced abuses of human rights and announced their concerns for human rights defenders.

The case of Andy Tsege in Ethiopia, the subject of a debate in its own right here in Westminster Hall, was mentioned again by the hon. Member for Congleton. His case is a powerful example of how UK citizens can be affected by oppressive Government crackdowns on freedom of speech. The Ethiopian Government, which announced the state of emergency that has seen thousands detained and severely limited due process and access to justice, sentenced Andy under a widely condemned anti-terrorism proclamation. Other concerns have been expressed about aspects of Ethiopia’s regulation of civil society. NGOs are not allowed to accept more than a very small percentage of their budget—15% or something like that—from overseas donors. Likewise, only a small percentage may be spent on administration, but the definition of that can be extremely wide. I wanted to flag up those two situations in Ethiopia.

There are some domestic considerations, and it has never been more important for the United Kingdom and its Government to lead by example. The examples given by the hon. Member for Clwyd South were very interesting. Even a local organisation can have a global impact, taking Wales forward to become the first fair trade nation. Scotland was the world’s second fair trade nation, which we are very proud of, but it is something we are happy to work with our brethren in Wales to promote. Indeed, the fair trade movement as a whole is another example of successful civil society campaigning, and it is an approach that also leads to positive economic benefits for people.

Even in the lifetime of this Parliament, since those elected in 2015 have been here, there have been some concerns, such as the threat to repeal the Human Rights Act without any clear indication of what was to replace it. Concerns were expressed about surveillance during the passage of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, and the Government were also pressing the so-called anti-advocacy clause, which would have severely restricted the ability of NGOs in this country to advocate on issues of Government policy. The climbdown on that was welcome. One concern was that scientific researchers in receipt of Government money could not have been called to give evidence to Select Committees in this Parliament, which would have been nonsense. We welcomed the Cabinet Office climbing down to an extent, but we have to keep an eye out for all such things.

I appreciate that a Foreign Office Minister is responding to the debate today, but there is a role for the Department for International Development to play in support of civil society and civil society organisations around the world. The Government should also recognise their importance here at home.

The “Civil Society Partnership Review” was mentioned, but my concern about it was that the concept of partnership was being changed significantly. Partnership was not about working together to achieve shared goals but about a service delivery model through which DFID was almost to commission its desired results from civil society and its Government to lead by example. The examples given by the hon. Member for Strangford asked about acknowledging the particular role of faith-based organisations. Particular kinds of support and sensitivity are necessary with them.

In recent days the Minister’s colleague in the Government has confirmed several times Government support for the 0.7%, which is important, but I ask the Minister present to do the same again. It is important for as many Ministers as possible to make it clear that the UK
Government are committed to the 0.7% in current and future spending reviews, despite the best efforts of some of their Back Benchers.

In the context of Brexit, it is especially important for the UK Government to continue to be seen as a world leader on the 0.7% and not to roll back from such an important commitment. If they are somehow struggling to meet that commitment and to find things to do with the money, plenty of examples have been given today. Only a moment ago we spoke about support for lawyers and legal practitioners around the world. There is no shortage of imagination on how to spend the budget, not least in civil society. I say that as a former employee of a civil society organisation, but I have made my interest clear.

The Scottish Government have a good partnership approach to civil society. Due to the nature of the devolution settlement, they are not allowed to use their small international development budget to fund organisations directly in different countries, so they have to work through civil society organisations in Scotland. There are some lessons to be learned from that model, although it is not entirely replicable at the scale DFID operates on, obviously.

This has been a very substantial and constructive debate, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. Governments at home and around the world should have nothing to fear from a strong civil society and, as we have heard from all Members, they have so much to gain.

3.15 pm

Fiona Bruce: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise, as I do, an increasing trend of elected representatives and premiers staying on beyond the agreed maximum period that their nation’s constitution permits, causing huge amounts of distress and unrest in their countries? I am thinking, for example, of Burundi.

Mr Mahmood: I concur with the hon. Lady. There is a real problem that, when some people get into elected office, they assume it is their right to continue to rule. That is a real problem for us to address. It becomes not only a position for life for themselves, but a hereditary position for their kin. That is a real problem we have to look at when we talk about democracy.

Those three things I spoke about—transparency, the rule of law and accountability—come from civil society structures. If we have the right civil society structures, if the structures and the systems are accountable to people who work in communities, and if those people understand how Governments need to be accountable to them, then accountability happens when an election comes. However, if people do not have access to those institutions, the rule of democracy and people’s presumption that it is working becomes dubious. The rule of law also has a huge part to play. When people are kept away or held in prison for a long time before their cases are even heard, that is a huge problem. Civil society needs to play a role there. When people are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, religion or caste, or on the basis of where they come from, there are real issues for us to look at. We need to look seriously at those things in terms of civil society.

The Minister with responsibility for the Commonwealth is here, but unfortunately, his colleague the DFID Minister did not stay. Perhaps he was unable to participate in the debate. There are several important aspects of DFID funding that we must look at. It is crucial that DFID looks at the democratic structures that I pointed out and how we can best support them. We work in different parts of countries where such things are seen differently, and we need to start to address some of those issues.

We all cherish the fact that we have protected our fantastic aid budget in difficult circumstances here at home. We want to keep protecting that budget, but if we are to do that, it must be implemented properly in countries of operation, and DFID must understand that when it allocates money in those countries, it should keep the use of external contractors to a minimum. If they are used, such contractors must be able to leave a legacy by building capacity in those countries. Unfortunately, in certain cases where projects are taken on board and contracts are issued, the people who deliver those contracts remove themselves at the end and leave a huge vacuum; the budget goes, but there is no legacy. If we build capacity in a country, it can generate further capacity in those areas and move forward.

Several Members have made huge contributions. The hon. Member for Strangford, who is passionate about this subject, quite rightly raised the issues that he strongly believes should be looked at in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Where people go missing without any trace or are just moved out of place, and where people are detained for long periods without trial or justice, discriminated against because of their religion or victimised for who they are, that needs to be addressed. Those are important issues against which we need to assess countries and where we need to build capacity.

I was actually in Lahore in Pakistan over Christmas. I understand a lot of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raises, but I did see one bit of progress. In the majority
of places, there was a huge celebration of Christmas. I saw a huge amount of decoration and many Christmas trees, which was very heartening. In the lobby of the hotel that I stayed in, carols were sung in the evening, and people came out. That is a good sign. If the mainstream of the community starts to accept things like that, where there are issues at a local level, people can be stopped from using the legislation that is available to them to persecute the Christian community in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh or anywhere else. That is a positive start, as far as I saw, but there are certainly issues that need to be looked at. Certainly issues have been raised in relation to the Ahmadiyya community. I understand that. All the people living in that country should be treated the same. Equally, I would say that to India.

We had a debate last week in Parliament about Kashmir and the issue of civil society being allowed into Kashmir, where mass graves have been discovered. There has been huge abuse, including the use of pellet guns. Those sorts of issues have been raised, and it is important for us to recognise that.

Extreme action has also been taken in Bangladesh. People there might say that that is because of terrorist activity and that that gives them carte blanche in most instances now to do whatever they want. A huge amount of legislation has come in that clamps down on civil society, justified by the use of the word “terrorism”.

It is right to say that a huge number of countries are now using different legislation to make it difficult for civil society organisations to register and start to get funding. There are significant issues that we need to address. The hon. Member for Strangford made that point very clear. The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) also made those issues very apparent and was very positive in the way she came across and the way she wanted to deal with them. In particular, she spoke about the conditions that are imposed on non-governmental organisations in order to frustrate the process; they are not able to do the things that she mentioned.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East (Natalie McGarry) spoke passionately about her own experience and the current situation in Turkey. All of us need to be mindful of what is going on in Turkey and how we should deal with that. Certainly the Minister should seriously look at how we can address some of those issues. I know that the Secretary of State has refused to address any of those issues, but I think it is important that we look at that. This is a close neighbour of ours and it has a huge impact in terms of access from Syria, Kurdistan, Iraq and all those areas into Europe. If the country itself is not stable in the first instance, that makes it very difficult to provide all the necessary services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) made a very passionate case on behalf of the Welsh contingent about the inter-faith practices and civil society activities that they are carrying out to a great extent. That is really powerful if we are to be a role model—to move forward and say how it is best to deliver those.

I do not want to take up too much time, because I think that the Minister wants to wrap up as well, and will be very pleased to do that. There are some serious issues to address. I had hoped that his DFID colleague would respond to the debate, because many of the issues relate to DFID, but I am thankful that this Minister is here to do so. He has himself played a very active role on most of these issues over the years, but did so particularly in his former role as a Minister of State in DFID, and he understands the issues.

I will bring to the Minister’s attention again—he should perhaps pass this on to his successor—the way in which major contractors deal with DFID contracts, the capacity-building issue and the capability that should be left after they have finished doing that. That is a key issue. There are also trade issues. Obviously, post Brexit, we will be dealing with a lot of these nations, which want to trade with us. We now have another window to be able to deal with them. We should start to insist that they treat their NGOs correctly and improve civil society in order to be able to work with us. There are a number of important issues, but certainly those two issues I ask the Minister to look at.

3.29 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I thank the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), and my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), for securing this important debate.

Poverty, violence, extremism and large-scale migration are some of the most important challenges of our times. Evidence shows that those problems are most acute in countries where civil society is not allowed to function. Democracies do not start wars with each other—[^1] I challenge my hon. Friend to name two democracies that have ever gone to war. By and large, democracies do not suffer famine, nor do they trigger the uncontrolled exodus of their people in a way that leaves them vulnerable to all manner of abuses, such as modern slavery. Democracies are countries in which civil society is allowed the space to thrive, to challenge authority without fear and to work for the good of society as a whole.

The space in which civil society operates is under ever-increasing pressure throughout the world. Her Majesty’s Government are fully aware of this disturbing trend, and we are working hard to counter it. The Government believe that a free and vibrant civil society not only helps safeguard individual human rights but contributes to a country’s security and prosperity. I should like to highlight some of the ways in which this Government work for the promotion and protection of civil society space overseas.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s annual human rights report shows that the issue of civil society space has been increasingly prominent in our human rights work in recent years. Last December, we placed civil society organisations at the centre of our activities to mark UN human rights day in London and across the entire FCO network. In her speech on that occasion, my noble Friend the right hon. Baroness Anelay stressed how she sought to champion civil society organisations on her official overseas visits. The message was echoed by our diplomatic missions around the world, which celebrated human rights day by reflecting back to the host Governments our admiration for the dynamism of local civil society, or our disapproval, and frankly our bafflement, when they tried to clip its wings.

We also support civil society around the world through our human rights programme work, funded by our Magna Carta fund. In 2016-17, we invested £1.6 million to support 14 projects designed to protect civil society
space by promoting freedom of expression, including online, which is important in the modern age. The projects took place in countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Burma, Syria, Pakistan, Rwanda, and Uganda.

The Government are equally proud of the effective work of the Department for International Development in this field, which I recall from when, as has been said, I was Minister there for four years from 2010. Since 2014, DFID has been an active supporter of the Open Government Partnership, which drives up global transparency standards and promotes civic space in developing countries. Recently, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria have joined the partnership, bringing membership to 75 countries.

In November last year, DFID published its civil society partnership review, which assessed the results and effectiveness of DFID’s work with civil society. In that document, the Secretary of State for International Development stated:

“A healthy, vibrant and effective civil society sector is a crucial part of Britain’s soft power and leadership around the world.”

She also pledged to

“robustly defend the rights of civil society in a dangerous and uncertain world.”

One could not hope for a clearer statement of the Government’s position.

The Treasury has also played its part, working with the Charity Commission to prevent the misuse of Financial Action Task Force standards, which are designed to prevent the financing of terrorism, to restrict civil society. Many hon. Members will be aware that the Government sponsors the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Through its programmes to support democratic practices and institutions around the world, the foundation shares the experience of our democracy, in which the relationship between civil society, Parliaments and political parties is of fundamental importance. We welcome that approach and want WFD to continue to promote that healthy respect for civil society that we enjoy, and that we know is critical for the quality of democracy everywhere.

Another vehicle for our support for civil society space is the Community of Democracies, a democracy-building alliance of Governments and civil society, the governing council of which we joined in December last year. Its working group on the protection of civil society space issues a call to action whenever it sees a threat to that space emerging through new legislation or regulation, or whatever it might be, anywhere in the world. Last year, for instance, it successfully helped to influence decisions in Kyrgyzstan, deterring the adoption of an anti-civil society law along the lines of Russia’s deeply cynical and very damaging foreign agents law. I reassure hon. Members that the UK’s diplomatic service works tirelessly to support civil society and to defend its right to function freely.

Fiona Bruce: Would the Minister be good enough to comment on the concerns I expressed regarding the apparent reduction of space for civil society to operate in Hong Kong? What can be done to address that?

Sir Alan Duncan: I do not cover Hong Kong—I cover the other half of the world, which keeps me quite busy—but I note what my hon. Friend said. I will ask the relevant Minister to write to her with a specific reference to Hong Kong. Our ambassadors and high commissioners frequently stand shoulder to shoulder with those who seek to defend the values in which we believe, including the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, and the right to live without discrimination of any kind.

At the multilateral level we play a leading role in defending the rights of civil society. We support the accreditation of legitimate and serious NGOs to take part in the workings of the United Nations, including the Economic and Social Council. Knowing the keen interest of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) has left the Chamber, he raised the issue of religious freedom and discrimination against them. We welcome his interest in the work of the United Nations in this area, as well as of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. We are proud to chair the Human Dimension Committee of the OSCE and are developing a work plan that reflects the importance of civil society to human rights, security and prosperity.

Let me turn to some of the very important points that have been made in the debate, in order to give a proper and thorough answer. The hon. Member for Strangford emphasised the importance of freedom of religion and belief, as I mentioned. Freedom of religion promotes prosperity and security and is an important part of countering violent extremism, so we always urge our international partners to allow freedom of religion and belief, and to end all forms of discrimination on religious grounds.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of freedom of religion in Pakistan. The Government have urged Pakistan to uphold religious freedom and the rule of law. During the Foreign Secretary’s visit to Pakistan in November last year, he raised the issue of religious tolerance and the importance of safeguarding the rights of all Pakistan’s citizens. The hon. Gentleman also raised the case of Shahidul Alam in Bangladesh. We are aware of the apparent detention of Shahidul Alam in Dhaka this morning. The British high commission is monitoring the situation very closely and will diligently follow that up.

Although the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) has left the Chamber, he raised some specific points, so it is only fair that I should answer them—my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton also raised the question of Egypt. It is no secret that we want to see more political freedoms and space for civil society in Egypt. The Prime Minister raised the ongoing foreign funding NGO case with President Sisi when they met in New York in September at the United Nations General Assembly. Restrictions on civil society take Egypt further away from implementing the freedoms that are in the 2014 constitution. I can also confirm to the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington that we have raised the issue of discrimination against the Baha’i with the Government of Iran, and the arrest of Nabeel Rajab with the Government of Bahrain.

I join the hon. Member for Glasgow North in praising the excellent work of our ambassador to Colombia. I have seen at first hand the work of our diplomats overseas who work with human rights defenders, often in very difficult environments. I am sure everyone here joins me in recognising their work.
Jim Shannon: It has to be recognised, and stated for Hansard, that the Government have worked very hard to get a peace agreement in Colombia. However, as the Minister knows, right hon. and hon. Members of this House have made significant contributions—some of my colleagues from Northern Ireland are perhaps an example—on all sides of that political divide. They have also helped to encourage the Colombian Government to move forward. Their contribution is sometimes overlooked, so it is good to have it recorded.

Sir Alan Duncan: From my DFID days and now from my desk in the Foreign Office, the path to peace in Northern Ireland is a fantastic example of how something can be achieved in this field. By taking other countries’ politicians to Northern Ireland to show how it was done, we have made progress in countries such as Nepal, Colombia and potentially Burma, in a slightly different field. Therefore, one cannot exaggerate or over-praise the example of Northern Ireland in having a beneficial effect on other parts of the world that are trying to find a path to peace and security.

I will, however, raise one issue in response to the hon. Member for Glasgow East. I fully understand everything she said, and fully recognise her personal interest and the experience she underwent when she was in Turkey. May I just say to her that she did not say anything about the other side of the picture? I am very familiar with Turkey—I have been there three times since I became a Foreign Office Minister, including a visit of three days after the attempted coup. It is important to experience how traumatic that attempted coup has been to the entire population of Turkey. One has to understand that they went through—they have, through their history, lived through this risk—a day, the equivalent of which in the UK would be like a regiment of the Army driving tanks up Whitehall, trying to kill the Queen and the Prime Minister, bombing Parliament while it was sitting and taking over the BBC. That is what they went through. One has to understand the trauma and the existential threat of that experience to understand Turkey, and indeed to understand everything that followed, which she described.

Natalie McGarry: The Minister makes an important point about the other side, but I was merely raising the issue of the Government. I take him to task, however. We are talking not only about what happened subsequent to the coup or the actions of terrorism and the closing down of space, but about the actions of the Government, with the transformation into a presidency and the removal of the hugely important rights of MPs. Post-coup—the very next day—there was a prepared list of people who were removed from their positions. That looks like a predetermined eradication of opposition voices.

Sir Alan Duncan: The threat the hon. Lady describes did not start on the day of the attempted coup. This is a country that has to live every day with threats from the PKK, ISIS and the state within a state. I find it unfortunate that she did not choose to mention any of that. None the less I sympathise with her experience of arrest, and I consider it fortunate that she was so ably assisted by Her Britannic Majesty’s Government and the competence and capability of officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Any Government confident of their own legitimacy and their commitment to democracy should allow civil society to operate freely. We will continue to state that position, often privately but often very loudly in public too. We will continue to make the case for civil society to flourish everywhere and to defend it wherever and whenever it is under attack.

3.45 pm

Jim Shannon: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have made contributions directly or in interventions. Those contributions and expressions of support were very valuable. The issue of shrinking civil society throughout the world is obviously one that Members are greatly moved by and interested in, and we have had the opportunity to highlight all those places in the world where there are problems.

It was nice to hear the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood), make a very personal contribution. Indeed, some really good personal stories have been told about individuals today, and I thank all Members for that.

I thank the Minister for his two direct responses, on Pakistan and Bangladesh, especially the pertinence of Bangladesh because of what happened only one day ago. I thank him and the diplomatic service for their clear work to address those issues.

I welcome the fact that some 75 countries are signed up to freedom of expression. I urge those countries to make that commitment not only in words, but in action. If we have action in such countries, civil society can be maintained and people can live together peacefully into the future.

I thank the Minister for the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Sometimes we do not say this, but let us thank all our diplomatic staff across the world for what they do. [Hon. Members: “Hear, hear!”] I say this with respect: how fortunate we are to be subjects of the British Government, to have a British passport and to be able to call on our diplomats and embassies throughout the world to help us. The Minister is part of that, and I thank him. I thank everyone for taking part in the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered protecting civil society space across the world.

3.47 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Catherine McKinnell: I absolutely agree. It is hard to emphasise enough my support for people working across the NHS in increasingly challenging circumstances, without whom our health service would, quite frankly, cease to exist.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The way to show respect for our nurses and other NHS staff is to act now to remove the cap, as has been described, and listen to the independent pay review body.

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is not enough for us to state our support for our NHS workers; we must show it through real action.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I agree with the points that the hon. Lady has made. Does she agree that, given the shortage of about 24,000 nurses, the fact that about one in three are due to retire in the next 10 years, and the challenge of Brexit, which might make recruitment more difficult, one potential consequence of pay restraint, along with the sense of injustice for nurses, is that we will face a real recruitment crisis? People will just vote with their feet and not work in the NHS. That presents us with a real challenge.

Catherine McKinnell: I very much share the right hon. Gentleman’s concerns. He anticipates some of the points that I would really like to get across.

My view of the importance of those who work in our NHS is shared not only by Opposition Members. The Department of Health stated in its response to the e-petition:

“Agenda for Change staff are vital. They work incredibly hard for patients and deserve to be fairly rewarded. We are committed to ensuring trusts can afford to employ the staff the NHS needs.

NHS staff are our greatest asset. Despite the pressures on the NHS driven by an increasingly aged and frail population, nurses, and all our hard working NHS staff continue to put patients first, keeping them safe whilst providing the high quality care patients and their families expect.”

How have we found ourselves in a situation in which hard-working, dedicated, exhausted nurses, midwives and other healthcare professionals are genuinely struggling to make ends meet?

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Are we not in danger of getting into a downward spiral? Staff feel stretched, undervalued and underpaid, and many are looking to move abroad, or possibly even into other professions—

I have had emails to that effect. Many are also going to agencies, and we know how much money agencies make. That costs extra, especially at a time when the retail prices index is moving inexorably up as a result of currency effects.

Catherine McKinnell: My right hon. Friend puts his point very succinctly and absolutely correctly.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I hesitate to interrupt my hon. Friend, because she is making such a good case, but does she agree, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) said, that agency working, which is very expensive, is really a false economy?
If nurses leave full-time employment in the NHS to work for agencies, they cost the NHS two or perhaps three times more, so there are no savings whatsoever.

Catherine McKinnell: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is also a false economy to lose professionals, given all the money that has been invested to make them a well-trained, well-performing workforce.

As hon. Members will be aware, Agenda for Change was introduced in 2004 as a system of pay, terms and conditions, and it applies to more than 1 million directly employed clinical and non-clinical NHS staff, with the exception of doctors, dentists and some very senior managers. It was designed with the intention of delivering fair, transparent pay that is better linked to career progression, skills and competencies. Agenda for Change is based on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. According to NHS Employers, the system allows NHS organisations to “design jobs around the needs of patients rather than around grading definitions” and individual NHS employers are better able to define the skills and knowledge that they want the staff in those jobs to develop.

Importantly, in relation to this debate, Agenda for Change was also designed to enable employers to address more local recruitment and retention difficulties. However, as with hundreds of thousands of people who work in the public sector, all Agenda for Change staff have been affected by the previous and current Governments’ imposition of pay restraint.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Is it not perverse that the Conservative party seems to favour the introduction of all sorts of markets in the NHS apart from a labour market? The devolution of responsibility to trusts that it often heralds is completely inconsistent with a centralised, state-imposed pay freeze.

Catherine McKinnell: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. There was a two-year pay freeze from 2011-12 and a 1% increase in 2013-14 and 2014-15, followed by confirmation in the Budget of summer 2015 that the Government would fund an average public sector pay award of only 1% for the four years from 2016-17. As has been pointed out, the Government decided to reject the independent NHS Pay Review Body’s recommendation of a further 1% uplift to all pay scales from 2014-15, stating that there would be an annual increase of at least 1% for Agenda for Change staff in England through either contractual incremental pay or a non-consolidated payment.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her excellent speech, which I am following closely. Is there not very thin moral justification for the Government rejecting the review of an independent pay body when each of us as MPs has our pay independently assessed and awarded? I can see no justification for saying to hard-working nurses in Kettering, “You can’t have the pay rise that an independent pay body said you should have” when I, as an MP, automatically get a pay rise awarded by our independent body.

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly powerful point, which I hope the Minister has heard.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Lady on leading this debate, despite all the other debates going on elsewhere. I rarely find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), but I fully agree with him. Hundreds of nurses across Northern Ireland feel desperately demoralised by the pay freeze, which has gone on for such a long time. When we got a new Prime Minister, on 13 July last year, who talked about a fresh beginning and new opportunity, they were encouraged, as many of us were, and thought that this would be an ideal opportunity for her Government to show that they mean what they say and that they care about removing pay restraint.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention—I think that many of us are surprised that we agree so entirely with the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone). She raises an important point about the concern that many people up and down the country feel about some of the Prime Minister’s early actions in her time in office.

There are real concerns that the continuation of pay restraint in the NHS threatens to undermine the very benefits that Agenda for Change was supposed to bring to employers and staff. A centrally imposed cap on pay rises limits employers’ ability to respond to recruitment and retention problems while compromising the extent to which skills and competencies acquired by staff throughout their careers can be properly recognised and rewarded.

The extended nature of the pay restraint imposed first by the coalition Government and now by the Conservative Government also throws up this question: what is the point of having an independent NHS Pay Review Body, given that the Minister is clearly content to impose a figure on NHS Employers and staff each year? Indeed, the Royal College of Midwives has warned that the policy “undermines the integrity of the system; and will cause lasting damage to the morale and motivation of staff; worsening the staffing crisis in the NHS.”

Despite the widely promised but yet to materialise extra £350 million a week for the NHS, we all know that our health service faces real and significant challenges in financial terms, both now and in the years ahead.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I add my congratulations to the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. She has somewhat moved on to the topic of Brexit. In Bedford hospital, to fill vacancies in our nursing staff we have relied on bringing in staff from the European Union. Does she not agree that the Government have a choice: they can continue with pay restraint if they wish, but if so we must retain that ability to attract people from within the European Union and secure the rights of those already here?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman raises some important points. I would never admit to having strayed into the subject of Brexit in this important debate on the NHS, but his comments are on the record and
should be noted by the Minister. As NHS Employers stated in its 2017-18 submissions to the NHS Pay Review Body:

“The NHS continues to face unprecedented financial and service challenges. The majority of trusts fell into deficit during 2015-16 and the overall shortfall has now reached over £2.5 billion... The financial settlement for the NHS up to 2020 is extremely challenging, with employers set ambitious targets to deliver efficiency savings. At the same time, demand for services continues to rise. Performance indicators show the service is under great pressure as demands for care increase and other public services reduce provision.”

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the physical demands of nursing, as a family member who worked as a healthcare assistant over the summer reflected to me, mean that sometimes conscientious nurses might be tempted to lift patients on their own, such are the demands of the job, and seriously strain their backs? That is something we should have regard to.

Catherine McKinnell: I very much agree. That is a factor right across the NHS and the social care sector, and it is an issue we see arising increasingly as staff come under increasing pressure, with the increased pressure to make efficiency savings, which ultimately compromises the health and safety of staff who find themselves in such situations.

Just last week the National Audit Office published its report into NHS ambulance services, which concluded, among other things, that:

“Increased funding for urgent and emergency activity has not matched rising demand, and future settlements are likely to be tougher”.

Crucially, in the context of this debate, it also concluded that:

“Ambulance trusts face resourcing challenges that are limiting their ability to meet rising demand. Most trusts are struggling to recruit the staff they need and then retain them. The reasons people cite for leaving are varied and include pay and reward, and the stressful nature of the job.”

That very much ties in with the concerns the hon. Gentleman raised.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her speech; I agree with a number of the points she has made. On ambulance trusts and the point about very senior managers, we need good managers and senior managers in the NHS. However, ambulance trusts are a particular example—my trust, East of England, is an example—of where managers have sometimes received huge pay rises at the expense of frontline staff, who have received pay rises of nought or 1%. That is unacceptable. Does she agree that further lowers the morale of frontline staff in a difficult period of pay restraint?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which is why it is important that staff under Agenda for Change have the opportunity to have their voices heard today. When the Government look at how the NHS’s limited resources are distributed among the workforce, they need to approach the matter very much in the round.

I have no doubt that the Minister, when he responds to the debate, will be tempted to repeat the Prime Minister’s mantra that the Government are putting an additional £10 billion into the NHS by the end of this Parliament. However, as we all know, that figure has been comprehensively debunked by the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and her fellow members of the Health Committee, and more recently by the chief executive of NHS England, Simon Stevens, when he appeared before that Committee. Indeed, Ministers confirmed only last week that NHS England will face a 0.6% real-terms fall in per capita funding in 2018.

How would an end to pay restraint for Agenda for Change staff help address the enormous difficulties the NHS faces? As the Royal College of Nursing has highlighted, chronic staff shortages have led to an “over-reliance” on “expensive agency staffing” to the extent that spending on agency nurses equates to about one tenth of the NHS’s total nursing pay bill. Indeed, the Royal College goes on to state that “the over-reliance on agency staffing is a reflection of a nursing shortage and a direct consequence” of the limit on pay for nurses working in the NHS.

We therefore have the nonsensical situation whereby nurses are leaving the NHS because of increasing workloads, stress and feeling undervalued following years of pay restraint, so the NHS has to turn to expensive agency nurses to fill the gaps left behind. Those concerns are mirrored by the Royal College of Midwives, which, following a freedom of information request, uncovered that NHS trusts in England spent almost £72.7 million on agency, overtime and bank midwives in 2015—enough to pay for 2,063 full-time experienced midwives or 3,318 full-time, newly qualified midwives.

The Minister might also refer to an increase in the number of nursing and other NHS staff since 2010. Again, that addresses neither the fact that there is currently a shortage of about 24,000 nurses in England and Wales, nor the shortage of nearly 3,500 midwives across the UK. Nor indeed does it address Health Education England’s worrying confirmation that last year some 8.8% of nurses left the NHS—the highest number since 2011. All that surely shows that the NHS is facing a perfect storm, not least in the light of the Minister’s ludicrous decision to axe bursaries for new nursing, midwifery and allied health students—I should perhaps say “Ministers’ decision”, rather than directing that comment at the Minister of State—the Government’s continued disgraceful failure to confirm the long-term future of 33,000 nurses from other EU countries working in the NHS, and the fact that one third of nurses are due to retire in the next 10 years. I look forward to hearing him explain how continued pay restraint for Agenda for Change staff will help resolve the staffing crisis.

Dr Poulter: The hon. Lady makes a good point about bursaries. Most nurses enter the profession in their late 20s—at about 28 or 29. We are talking about a recruitment challenge in nursing and the fact that the number of applicants for nursing courses dropped by 25% this year. Surely that demographic group needs the bursary as an enticement into nursing.

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman makes another valid point. I hope that the Minister is listening, because although we are focusing specifically today on pay restraint for Agenda for Change staff, there is a much wider issue for the Government to take on board.
We do not need to take Unison or the RCN’s word for what is happening. I have received emails containing powerful testimony from NHS staff in my constituency. One explained:

“I have been qualified as a children’s staff nurse for 12 years and I reached the top of my pay scale four years ago. I have not had a pay rise since. 4-5 years ago I was in a comfortable position, I could afford the basics and if I wanted extras like holidays or treats I would just do overtime or extra shifts to afford these luxuries. However, due to the fact my pay against my cost of living has reduced by 14%, I now struggle to afford the basics and am having to do extra shifts just to be able to provide food and pay my bills… I am missing out on valuable time with my family as I have to work nearly every weekend in order to be able to get a wage that can cover our costs. It is now becoming such a stretch each month that I may have to leave nursing and find a job that pays me better…”

Another constituent challenged the claim made in the Government’s response to the e-petition:

“Average earnings for qualified nurses were £31,214 in the 12 months to June 2016”.

She described herself as an average nurse in her 40s with a partner and a child:

“I have been qualified and working in the NHS for 11 years. I don’t earn £31,214. The top of my band (band 5) is £28,464. So, I am paid about £14.50 an hour to clean up faeces, vomit, blood and other bodily fluids. To hold the hands of patients who are dying. To maintain complicated machinery/equipment that is keeping a person alive whilst watching the newly-qualified staff nurse who doesn’t feel confident and make sure they don’t do anything dangerous.”

Another constituent painted a very concerning picture about her financial situation. She recently qualified as a nurse—a year and four months ago. She is a single parent of three children, and commented:

“After studying hard for 3 years mixing university, placements and guided learning, I gained my degree only to find myself in more dire financial circumstances than I was as a student. I live to a tight budget, I drive a car that is 16 years old, I don’t smoke or drink, and I rarely socialise with my friends unless it’s a special occasion. This month I was paid £1,450 after tax—from that £300 is childcare; £400 is rent; leaving £750 for the month for gas, water, phone, food, insurance etc. I also receive £35 tax credits a week which covers my daughter’s bus fare to college and her lunch money.

I am a qualified professional and yet I would classify myself as being on the breadline. I know there are others in greater need than I am; however I feel like I work hard and sacrifice my family time for nothing.”

Finally, a senior sister with 30 years’ experience in an acute trauma unit explained:

“After six years of pay restraint, I now see nurses struggling day to day to make ends meet. Those who have stayed are now planning to leave the NHS early and newly qualified nurses are unable to stay without reasonable remuneration.

I feel like I grieve every day for my profession now. We have an NHS workforce currently willing to work as hard as the service asks them, but this goodwill is now eroding faster than I have ever seen in all my years’ service.

I am retiring within a couple of years. This request comes not for me, but for those who come after me and who will be caring for me and my family in the future.”

It is clear that our NHS is facing a crisis, yet the people the Government entirely rely on to make the NHS work are being badly let down. Nobody would suggest for a minute that those working in the health...
service do it for the money. However, we have reached a situation in which nurses, midwives and other invaluable NHS staff are struggling to pay their bills or put food on the table, or are pawning their possessions or taking out high-interest loans just to get from one month to the next.

How can we expect people to continue to provide high-quality care to us and our loved ones in what are already increasingly challenging circumstances when they are also facing this level of stress and anxiety at home? I strongly urge the Government to look at this situation again and to take on board the concerns being raised not only by organisations such as Unison, the RCN and the RCM, but by NHS frontline staff who are saying loud and clear that this pay restraint simply cannot continue.

5 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. It is a particular pleasure to follow the excellent contribution from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). She set out the compelling case for why the pay regime for nurses, midwives and associated health service professionals across our health services is becoming increasingly exploitative.

The hon. Lady spoke of the particular experience in England; I obviously speak from the experience of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the Administration in Northern Ireland have chosen to void the clear recommendations from an independent pay review body, as in England, and have not taken the more constructive approach followed in Scotland to pay recommendations and to meeting the proper pay needs and aspirations of hardworking professional staff. As other hon. Members have said, those staff provide such a valuable service day in, day out. They work long hours with huge responsibilities, but with less and less of a sense of reward and with ever more inadequate remuneration.

We now have the situation in which many things have been brought forward. People were promised that Agenda for Change would ensure greater equity and transparency on pay, that they would see salary paths improving naturally—more than just token increments—and that it would reward people’s sense of vocation. Of course, it does nothing of the sort, because people have found themselves locked into highly contested bands. Certainly in Northern Ireland, people doing the exact same work in different trusts are paid differently, which is causing huge frustration and a grave sense of grievance and injustice for many people.

The health and social care system in Northern Ireland is supposed to be operating increasingly as a single employer, with the commissioning role of Health and Social Care Board moving to the Department and the Minister. However, we have the bizarre situation in which people who are doing the same job and delivering on the same targets set by Ministers and the Executive are supposedly employed by different trusts and are paid differently—not because their working terms are different, but because the terminology on their contracts might be different here or there. The slightest difference in terminology in job descriptions is being used to keep people in lower pay bands than their counterparts in a neighbouring trust who are doing the exact same job. Of course, not being able to address those issues absolutely suffocates people with frustration.

This has happened in the context of those staff being locked into the 1% pay rise cap that has endured for a number of years. It is one thing to ask people to take a pay freeze in the name of austerity and managing public financial pressures for a year or two, but it is another to be locked into such a pay freeze while seeing other people, including on the public sector payroll, being able to escape those constraints. Again, it adds to the sense of injustice.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): On the pay freeze, over the past five or six years it has worked out to roughly the equivalent of between a 6% and 8% wage cut. That is the reality that those people face. The Government say they value people in the health service, but the only way to demonstrate that is through their wage packets at the end of the day. The other issue, which will certainly affect mature students who want to be either a nurse or a midwife, is that the education maintenance grant has also been cut. So much for valuing people who work in the national health service.

Mark Durkan: I agree with all of the hon. Gentleman’s points; they touch on points made in interventions by other hon. Members. Let us be clear: the long-standing freeze is, in essence, a long-term pay cut in real terms. People are left feeling frustrated and aggrieved by that. People are leaving the profession; they feel they are being driven out—we heard references to the number of people who are switching to agency roles, but many people do not want to do that, and their sense of vocation is being exploited in a way that now probably more than borders on the cynical. A better response is needed.

I have made points particularly on Northern Ireland. On Agenda for Change, we know, as other hon. Members have mentioned, that pay in the lower bands actually falls below living wage standards. One appalling vista—which will bite this year in Northern Ireland, where these adjustments are being made—is that the money for that 1% pay rise will be used to bring people in the lower wage bands up to the living wage. In other words, if the 1% envelope is to be used to cover that, other people will lose out; there will be a trade-off between nurses and health service professionals in different grades, with that 1% being prioritised towards bringing people up to the living wage. Nobody should be asked to endure inadequacy as the price of affording a micro-concession to equality for those who are locked into the lower bands that pay below the living wage. That is going to bite in Northern Ireland this year.

It should not, because as part of the Stormont House agreement and other things, Northern Ireland has a voluntary exit scheme that was meant to reduce the cost of the public service payroll. If that overall voluntary exit scheme saves money on the public service payroll, my party made the point that, rather than those savings being used to pay for a cut in corporation tax in future years, they should be used for restorative pay measures, starting first in the national health service for those staff who have suffered as a result of freezes and who are stuck on inadequate and unfair pay bands under Agenda for Change. Their case could be met because public sector payroll savings are on the way.

Health service staff in Northern Ireland will be asked to manage yet more change. People already work long hours in heavy-demand services, but more structural
changes will be made to health services following the Bengoa review and others. If people are being asked to manage all of those changes and keep those services going during those transitions, the one thing they are entitled to is some long overdue consideration of the inadequate pay they have been asked to endure.

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): I call Dr Philippa Whitford.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I thought I would be called to speak at the end.

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): No Members indicated that they wished to speak by standing in their place, but I can be flexible, with your permission.

Dr Whitford: Yes; I would expect to speak at the end, if other Members wish to speak.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab) rose—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): I call Andy Burnham.

5.9 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Evans. I also thank the SNP spokesperson. I had not intended to speak but will grab this opportunity because it is an incredibly important debate.

First, I pay tribute to the Royal College of Nursing and the Nursing Times, which have captured the voices of nurses all over the country. We heard some of those voices in the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), and I think they speak for the vast majority of those in the nursing profession.

We meet at a time when the NHS is under unprecedented strain—certainly in recent times. Workforce morale is at the heart of the quality and sustainability of NHS services. What is often forgotten and missed when we debate this subject is that the vast majority of nurses in the NHS—nearly all, actually—work beyond their contracted hours.

I will never forget being at a meeting in Bristol with a nurse from the Bristol Royal Infirmary. It was when the Government were looking at introducing regional pay, which the RCN led a campaign against. At the time, the nurse was being presented with a contract and asked whether she was prepared to vary her Agenda for Change conditions by moving from a 37-hour working week to a 39-hour one—it may have been 39 to 41 hours, but it was an increase. I asked her, “What did you do?” and she said, “Well, I signed it straight away.” I asked why, and she said, “Because I’m currently doing a 45-hour working week, but they don’t know that.” In many ways, that illustrates the point: management do not know the value of what they get from the nursing profession.

That anecdote tells the story about the job. It is more than a job to people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North said, people give all of themselves to this job, but they have limits. When they feel as though those above them do not understand the commitment and the huge contribution they make to the NHS, and when they feel taken for granted, the good will and morale start to dry up. That is when the Government are in danger of achieving a false economy. The price of holding down nurses’ pay in the way that has been done over the past six years is, in the end, nurses not feeling able to go above and beyond as they normally willingly do.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I agree with the points that my right hon. Friend is making. The RCN has told us that the pay of a significant group of nurses has fallen in real terms by 14% over the period he refers to. Does he agree that that is a pretty startling statistic?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) said that this is a pay cut. We should not call it a pay freeze because it is, in fact, a pay cut. The Government have manipulated the figures in this area. Let us call it what it is: a pay cut that has now been sustained over a number of years.

People are at their limits. They cannot carry on having their pay cut every single year while they face other pressures and rising costs, such as accommodation costs, without there being a consequence. The consequences will be for their own sense of wellbeing, their own mental health or, indeed, their children’s quality of life. Nurses are now saying, in large numbers, that enough is enough.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Further to what my right hon. Friend just said, does he agree that there is a culture under this Government and the previous coalition Government of devaluing the whole of the public sector? This is one stark example of what is happening across the public sector.

Andy Burnham: That is how it begins to appear. The Government are pushing people beyond their limits. There was the attempt to introduce regional pay, and there was the attempt to cut what is called the unsocial hours payment—there has been a whole series of initiatives that try to strip away support for the profession. It begins to feel like an attack on the profession. That is certainly how junior doctors felt, and I think GPs feel the same. The nursing profession is making clear today that it feels the same too.

As I said, this is a false economy. As well as damaging the good will and the extra hours that people were willing to offer before, it has also, as my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle indicated, pushed people into the arms of private staffing agencies. That, in the end, is another false economy for the national health service. Over recent years, we have seen the bill for private staffing agencies in the NHS increase year on year, to the point where it is now in the region of several billion pounds every year. Many trusts are in the grip of the private staffing agencies. That, of course, is also a factor in the cuts to nurse training that we have seen in recent years.

Dr Poulter: The right hon. Gentleman is making some very fair points. I hope he recognises that one of the first things I did in ministerial office was to reverse what was happening on regional pay and stick to the national pay contracts. He makes an important point
about temporary staffing. If we look at the approach with the junior doctors’ contract, many junior doctors will now see a huge reduction in in-house locum pay for the work they are doing; it is sometimes a reduction of £10 an hour. That will feed locum agencies and drive up the temporary staffing bill. We need to see nurses and other Agenda for Change staff paid properly, to stop them needing to do agency work. That is one of the main drivers of the agency business.

Andy Burnham: I am glad to hear the intervention of the former Minister, whom I worked well with in the previous Parliament. I want to take this opportunity to say that he did listen on regional pay. We made an argument about that issue, backed up by the RCN and others, and, to be fair, it did not go any further than the experiment in the south-west. I give credit to him for that. I also give credit to him for consistently showing a real regard for the pressures faced on the frontline.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point that the Minister would do well to reflect on. There is a huge false economy here. It makes sense to have fairness in terms of headline pay for staff, to maintain good will, but on top of that, it makes sense to provide them with incentives to give any additional shifts or time to the in-house bank, rather than private staffing agencies. The Government have lost sight of that in recent times.

Mr Jim Cunningham: My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point. It can be a false economy to rely on agencies to staff hospitals, whether it be nurses or doctors. At the end of the day, training suffers. That makes it difficult for the NHS to recruit, so it is a false economy in a number of ways.

Andy Burnham: It is not only a false economy; it directly damages the quality of patient care. When people arrive on the ward who do not know the team or the environment and have to be told everything, it builds in confusion and delays because staff have to take them through things. It does not make sense to use private staffing agencies to the extent that they are being used in the NHS. The cost is exorbitant—that is No. 1—but it also damages morale, because it leads to staff in the permanent employ of the trust working on the ward alongside people who are being paid significantly more than them for the same shift, despite having just arrived on that ward. That does not build a sense of team on the ward; it builds a sense of resentment.

Dr Huq: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point about the lack of continuity with agency staff coming in. He talks about recruitment and retention. The NHS traditionally has had a large overseas workforce. Does he agree that the £35,000 salary required to settle in the UK has not helped matters? Nurses normally start at £23,000. Our NHS would crumble without overseas workers. We have also heard that in the post-Brexit climate, people from overseas feel less welcomed by this country. Does he have any comment on that?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend makes two important points. The first was on the effect that Home Office immigration rules could have had on the nursing profession. I think the former Home Secretary, now the Prime Minister, made some changes in that regard.

My hon. Friend is right that there is a much bigger context here: the post-referendum climate. The Government have been absolutely wrong not to guarantee the status of EU nationals currently working in our national health service. I have an example from my constituency of a Polish community nurse, who every day gets up early to go on her local round delivering insulin to vulnerable patients who are diabetic and housebound. One morning she heard a cry of, “Go home!”, out of one of the bedroom windows opposite. What does that make that nurse feel like, and is she likely to stay when we are in this prolonged period of uncertainty in which this growing hostility is felt to be around? There is a real risk here. We cannot simultaneously refuse to give clarity to those tens of thousands of nurses from other parts of Europe who are currently working in our NHS and run down the good will of nurses who are UK nationals. In the end, something will give, and it will be patient care, if we operate policies of that kind.

Alongside that, there is the attack on nurse training. We have seen cuts to nurse training places over a number of years, so there is a shortage of nurses coming through. Many places are being and have been forced to recruit from overseas. In those circumstances, with everything else that I have described, including the downward pressure on headline pay, how can it possibly make sense to scrap the nursing bursary? Will that not just be another factor that adds to the growing sense of crisis in the profession? Every single piece of support that is there to develop the nursing profession is systematically being stripped away.

We have seen years of that approach and are beginning to see the consequences in the national health service. Labour, of course, did not get everything perfect—I am not saying that—but I can say with some pride that when I was a Minister in the Department of Health, we brought through a major programme of investment in the nursing workforce, through Agenda for Change. It was the subject of hard discussions, but in the end it was agreed between the trade unions and the Government of the day. We did have in the Department of Health a social partnership forum, which brought together NHS Employers, trade unions and the Government to iron out problems relating to the nursing workforce. We did massively increase the numbers in the nursing profession. We did ensure that they were properly rewarded and had proper access to training. My worry is that we are seeing some of that break down.

In the immediate aftermath of the financial crash, it was acceptable, it seems to me, to ask the nursing profession to make a contribution to deficit reduction, but here we are, six years on, expecting people who are out there today, working flat out to keep an NHS in crisis going, to take pay cuts for the privilege of doing so. At some point, that strategy begins just to fall apart, and the NHS falls apart with it. I say to the Minister that we are not far from that point now.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Is there not a wider economic point that if we keep pay freezes in place for so long—six years—that ends up harming the private sector economy, because if 70p in every pound of public sector money ends up in the private sector economy, some of that is wages, including nurses’ pay?

Andy Burnham: Of course, and the point is very well made, but I will also say again that it does not help deficit reduction if nurses are being pushed into the grip
of private staffing agencies as a consequence of pay policies. That is another way in which the Government’s short-sighted approach has not in the end produced benefits for the economy, as the hon. Gentleman says, nor helped us meet the target of deficit reduction, because so much money is being wasted every year.

I will conclude on that point. The voices that have been mobilised in support of the lobby of Parliament today are real voices, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North. These people are the backbone of the national health service, the backbone of our communities and the backbone of our country. They have limits, though. Their limits are higher, but they do have limits, like everyone else. They feel taken for granted. Right now, the NHS cannot afford to lose the good will of the nursing profession. The Minister needs to listen carefully to what is being said today and he needs to make urgent representations, through the Secretary of State, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in advance of the spring statement. A signal needs to be given to the nursing profession that the Government are listening and will take action, within the bounds of what is possible, to treat the nursing profession properly. I hope that, if nothing else, the Minister takes that message away from today.

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): There being no one else standing in their place, we will move to the winding-up speeches.

5.24 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under you, Mr Evans.

We seem to have been in this place before. We had a lot of debate about the nursing bursary, and these things are connected, because it comes down to how we are treating people and valuing them, as has been said. In Scotland, we also have a pay cap of 1%, but one difference is that that is being paid each year, whereas for three of the last six years, nurses in England have faced a freeze—an award of 0%. What they are told is, “Well, your increment gives you a rise.” The increment is how people move through the Agenda for Change structure, so if they are not getting any cost of living rise, the increment structure of Agenda for Change is being undermined.

The Scottish Government are a real living-wage employer and are recognised and registered as such, so people earning less than £22,000 get £400 to keep them above the real living wage. Starting in the next financial year, 2018-19, those in the lower bands in England will fall below the national minimum wage; they do not come anywhere close to a proper living wage. We know the Government’s living wage as “the pretendy living wage”, because people cannot actually live on it. That term should not be used because it is confusing. That result is that at band 1 or 2, a nurse or healthcare assistant in Scotland will earn £881 more than their equivalent in England. The common band for a nurse graduate is band 5, and at the top of that band, the nurse in Scotland will earn £284 more than the nurse in England.

Scotland has had no compulsory redundancies since the crash. In England, there have been 20,000. That seems bizarre when we are short of nurses. The vacancy rate in England is 9.5%; in Scotland it is 3.5%. We get what we pay for. If we treat people badly, eventually they go away, or, if they are approaching retirement, they do not go on working: they finish, because frankly they are burnt out. Nursing is a hard, heavy and stressful job. Nurses in Scotland feel stressed because of the gap caused by vacancies, the increased demand, the ageing population and the complexity of the cases they look after, so we can only imagine what it must be like in hospitals in England, with almost 10% of places not being filled and having to be covered by agency staff, which, as we have heard, is just a circular, self-defeating argument.

Lady Hermon: On the hon. Lady’s point about how difficult and wearisome the work of a nurse is—it is hard work—those nurses born in the 1950s who are affected negatively by the Government’s pension policy cannot now retire until they are 65, 66 or, indeed, 67. Has there not been a double whammy for those nurses who want, for the love of the job, for the love of the patients and for the love of service of the community, to stay in post? The Government have an opportunity to recognise that contribution. If they will not do something on pensions—I hope that they will change their mind on that—they could at least remove the pay freeze.

Dr Whitford: The whole message that is sent by nurses, particularly those who are in their late 50s and approaching 60, is that they are burnt out; they do not feel valued. When they have to work hours and hours beyond their shifts, doing what is frankly heavy labour—coming from that background, I can vouch for its being heavy physical work—they will of course leave as soon as they can manage to do so. The problem is that that exacerbates the pressure on all their colleagues, and that is what we are seeing with the huge shortage of thousands of nursing posts across England.

We have to recognise that we will face more increased demand and more complexity as our population ages. When patients in their early 70s were coming to me with breast cancer, they had multiple morbidities. By that stage, they had had a heart attack, were type 2 diabetic, had a bit of kidney failure and were severely immobile from arthritis, obesity or one of the many other conditions that people are getting. The nurses were trying to deal with all those things. Going forward, we will face more cases of dementia and Alzheimer’s, which is a particularly challenging morbidity for patients and the staff looking after them. Working in that environment, where everyone around them is having a bad day at the same time that they are having a bad day, means that people do not enjoy going to work. If there is any chance to get out, they are going to take it.

We need to attract more nurses to deal with demand. As was mentioned earlier, approximately a third of nurses are due to retire within the next 10 years, and we need to prepare for that. Some of that relates to the expansion that we had under Labour; when there is a big expansion in a profession, a whole lot will tend to retire at the same time. Unless succession planning is ongoing and established, we will reach an absolute crisis.

That brings us to the other difference: the nursing bursary. In Scotland, we still pay a nursing bursary of more than £6,500. We also have free tuition, which is
equivalent to £27,000. We have additional funding for nurse trainees with additional support needs. They tend to be older—they are around their late 20s and early 30s—so they get more than £2,000 for childcare, a dependency allowance if they have either an adult or children dependent on them and a single-parent allowance.

The Scottish Government know that we have a challenge to recruit and retain nurses to grow the nursing profession, and they are putting that money in. They are not putting it in by giving high pay awards each year, but they are the only Government that actually accepted the independent review body’s recommendation of 1% on top of any steps within Agenda for Change. What is the point in doing all the work around a review body, if the Government do not bother listening to it?

I suggest that the Government need to show nurses that they are valued. They need to look at the decision to get rid of the nursing bursary, because we already know from NHS England that there has been a decrease of 20% to 25% in applications, so it is having exactly the opposite effect than the Government talked about. We know from the Nursing & Midwifery Council that registrations from the EU have dropped by 90% since last July. That means that whole source is drying up, regardless of rules, because people do not want to take the risk of moving here. We cannot shut down every possible source for having enough nurses. A lot of this is about calling on the Government to change their attitude and realise that this is a difficult job. We need to attract people into it and we need to retain people for as long as we can. Nurses are worth every penny they are not being paid.

5.33 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on the eloquent and knowledgeable way that she introduced this debate on behalf of not only the Petitions Committee but the more than 100,000 people around the country who signed this petition.

When she introduced the debate, my hon. Friend said that it is not enough for us simply to state our support for NHS staff—it has to be shown. The excellent attendance that we have had today, despite the important international business taking place in the main Chamber, has shown the huge support for our NHS staff and it is high time that the Government matched that support with action. In an intervention, the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) put the proposition that it is incredibly difficult to get people into it and we need to retain people for as long as we can. We need to attract the risk of moving here. We cannot shut down every possible source for having enough nurses. A lot of this is about calling on the Government to change their attitude and realise that this is a difficult job. We need to attract people into it and we need to retain people for as long as we can. Nurses are worth every penny they are not being paid.

My hon. Friend rightly highlighted the particular problems in ambulance trusts and the issues with the recruitment and retention of paramedics. She described the expenditure on agency staff as “nonsensical”. Certainly, no business would consider this a sustainable model. The personal testimonies that she gave from her constituents were compelling. None of us could fail to appreciate how difficult the situation is for some of our nurses. One said that she grieves for her profession, and that highlights just how dire the current situation is.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) about his perspective in Northern Ireland. He told us how the use of terminology appears to lead to people in different jobs being paid lower rates of pay for effectively the same job. That is certainly not how Agenda for Change should work in practice, and the pay freeze only exacerbates the sense of injustice that individuals feel. He summed up the situation perfectly when he said that the long-term pay freeze is in fact a pay cut. He said their sense of vocation “is being exploited”. He was right about that, but is it not incredibly sad that a Member of this place can say that without fear of contradiction? Just how low have we sunk?

We also heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who has great experience in the health service. He rightly said that nursing is “more than a job” and it is clear that he appreciates that, but he is right that when nurses feel that those above them do not appreciate what they are doing, it becomes a false economy and drives people into the arms of staffing agencies.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend has just mentioned people feeling a sense of fairness, particularly in the pay of those above them. Does he share my concern that in this current climate, while nurses’ pay is being cut, we are seeing large pay increases self-awarded to members of clinical commissioning groups and senior management? Does that not completely demoralise the whole local profession?

Justin Madders: I agree entirely. We all know—it is well documented—the financial pressures that the health service is under. It defies belief or explanation that those in senior positions can still fly in the face of that. I can only sympathise profusely with how nurses must feel when they see those headlines.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Important as nurses are as the backbone of our health service, many other NHS staff are affected by the Agenda for Change pay freeze. Does my hon. Friend share my particular concern for the many staff who work in support services? Given the financial pressure that trusts are under, they have been forced to privatise parts of the service, and support services staff have moved off Agenda for Change terms and conditions altogether, which is what has happened at my local trust. The private sector tries to recruit new members of staff for less than Agenda for Change, because it is implementing the funding cuts that it faces.

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend has encapsulated the challenge we always face when a service is privatised. Most often the only way in which the savings promised by the private company can be delivered is by changes to staff terms and conditions. I also agree that the pay freeze affects not only nurses, but the whole of the Agenda for Change workforce. Today we are focusing in particular on some of the effects on nurses, because there are clear reasons why that position is unsustainable.
To return to some of the contributions we have heard today, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh described clearly the impact on a ward of having agency staff, and how that creates uncertainty and is not the most efficient way of working. There is also the manifest unfairness of having someone on the same ward, who is only there for that particular shift, earning significantly more than permanent members of staff. How demoralising must that be for those involved? He was right to say in conclusion that we cannot afford to lose the good will of the nursing profession further.

In common with many hon. Members who have spoken today, I pay tribute to everyone who works in the NHS and the health and social care sector, not only to doctors and nurses, but to other allied health professionals such as porters, healthcare assistants, cleaners, receptionists, care workers, paramedics and countless others. It is important to remember that behind every story about the crisis that our NHS has faced this winter are patients waiting too long for treatment, and hard-working public servants doing everything that they can to prevent a very difficult situation from getting worse.

The NHS is the biggest employer in the country—and one of the biggest in the world—and it depends on the tireless efforts of its staff to keep going and meet the challenges of rising demand and insufficient funding. Let us be clear: we cannot indefinitely keep asking them to do more for less. I would argue, as other hon. Members have, that only the good will of NHS workers has stopped the current crisis from turning into a catastrophe. I recently heard the staff who work in our NHS described as “shock absorbers”. That seemed to be a pretty good description of how they are taking and absorbing the relentless pressure and stress of being on the frontline of an underfunded health service. They can take that for only so long before something snaps, which is why it is so important that we fully explore these issues today.

The incredible determination, professionalism and compassion that we see from staff comes against the backdrop of six years of pay restraint. Salary increases for NHS staff have either been frozen or capped at a level far below the rate of inflation. According to Unison, between 2010 and 2016 that represented a cut of more than £4.3 billion from NHS staff salaries, or a loss of between 12% and 19% in actual value since 2010. The Royal College of Nursing believes that since 2011 there has been a real-terms drop in earnings of 14% for its members. With Treasury forecasts indicating that the cost of living will go up by more than 3% every year between 2018 and 2020, it is not difficult to see how the current policy on pay restraint is unsustainable.

The policy is already beginning to have a huge personal impact on some of those affected. Registration fees have gone up by more than a third in two years, and we know well that wages have not kept pace with the cost of living. As we have heard, particularly from my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North, staff surveys from the RCN and Unison found that nearly two thirds of staff feel worse off financially than they did a year ago. Forty-nine per cent. had asked for financial support from a family or friend, 13% had used a debt advice service and 11% had used a payday loan company. About a third of nurses are struggling to pay their gas and electricity bills, 53% are working extra hours just to pay their everyday bills and 11% had pawned possessions. The Cavell Nurses’ Trust also found that 20% of nurses had skipped a meal in the last year due to money worries. Those are not abstract figures; they represent real people.

There was a lobby of Parliament today, and I am sure that some hon. Members in the Chamber went to hear at first hand from nurses how they are struggling. I met a nurse from the west midlands who works three days a week because of her caring responsibilities. She told me that she is living below the poverty line. Are we not ashamed that someone caring for our most vulnerable has to live like that? Are we really comfortable with a situation in which the people we are asking to care for our loved ones are having to pawn their possessions in order to make ends meet? In one of the richest countries in the world, can any of us accept the sight of nurses going to food banks?

Nowhere is the problem more acute than in our capital city. The Nursing Times reported that 40% of nurses who currently live in London say that the cost of housing means they will be forced to leave the capital in the next five years. Of course that challenge is not unique to the health service, but vacancy rates in the London area are among the highest in the country, with at least 10,000 nursing vacancies. How long will it be before we reach a tipping point from which there will be no recovery?

The impact is not just on nurses in their daily lives outside work, but on their working environment. NHS staff surveys paint a picture that cannot be ignored. The 2015 survey for England found that 48% of those surveyed stated that a lack of staff was impinging on their ability to do their job, and only 43% felt able to manage all the conflicting demands on their time. The warning signs are there for us all to see.

Analysis of NHS England data by the Health Service Journal found that 96% of NHS hospital trusts in England had fewer nurses covering day shifts in October than they had planned, and 85% did not have the desired numbers working at night. In 2013, the regulator Monitor, now part of NHS Improvement, warned about the potential impact of continuing pay restraint, stating in a report:

“Capping wages for longer to keep costs down would be self-defeating for the sector in the long term as it would make recruiting and retaining good quality professionals increasingly difficult.”

We had that very clear warning four years ago, but we have not heeded it.

The evidence that we have heard today and on previous occasions has proved that that prophecy was correct. The Public Accounts Committee reported that the number of nurses leaving their jobs increased from 6.8% in 2010-11 to 9.2% in 2014-15. Simon Stevens gave evidence to that Committee in 2014, stating that pay restraint would not be an “indefinitely repeatable strategy”, yet that is exactly what the Government propose to do.

Pay restraint, along with a cut to the number of nurse training places in 2010, led to a situation in which the amount of money that the NHS spent on agency staff soared by £800 million in a single year to £3.3 billion in 2014-15. Although considerable steps have been taken to bear down on the figure since then, the situation only
developed because of poor and short-term decisions made by the Government, and it remains the case that we still spend far too much public money on agency staff because the NHS has been unable to recruit and retain enough of its own. If we had maintained the levels set by the last Labour Government, we would have had 8,000 more nurses trained during the last Parliament.

Recent figures have revealed that the agency staff cap has been breached almost 2.7 million times in its first nine months of operation. That is a clear example of the impact of the recruitment and retention crisis on all areas of the NHS and how the current workforce balance is completely out of kilter. The use of agency staff is meant to be a temporary measure in times of particular demand and stress for the workforce, not a permanent feature. The fact that these incidences have run into the millions in less than a year should be a huge concern to the Government and a clear warning that the stability and continuity that we all want to see in our workforce is a long way from being achieved. The Government urgently need to address the situation in which hospitals seem unable to provide safe levels of care without relying permanently on agency staff.

The dependency on agency staff has made the case for a pay increase as strong as it has ever been. That is the view not only of the Royal College of Nursing, but of those that look at the impact of skills shortages on the wider economy. In March 2016 the Migration Advisory Committee found that many nurses are moving to agency work or leaving the profession altogether. The fact that the Government have had to put nurses on the skills shortages list should have been the point at which they realised that their pay restraint policy had reached the end of the road. Instead, they have ploughed on regardless, treating the symptoms rather than the cause.

In that regard, the disastrous policy of having tuition fees for student nurses will almost certainly make the position worse, not better. The Royal College of Nursing warned at the time that the policy could act as a disincentive for students from some backgrounds—particularly mature students and those on lower incomes—and early indications are that applications to study are down by at least 20%. If that turns out to be an accurate reflection of the position, the pressure on existing staff can only increase.

**Dr Huq:** At the weekend, on the doorstep, I met my constituent Dr Linda Burke, who is pro-vice-chancellor for health and education at Greenwich University. She is really worried, because her university’s figures look like they are down by between 20% and 30%—UCAS will have final figures for late applications. She says that that is serious because it will directly reduce the number of nurses for the NHS. We should be thinking about our future workforce. Does my hon. Friend have anything to say about that?

**Justin Madders:** I am glad to hear that my hon. Friend is out on the doorstep on a Saturday morning, but sorry that the news she was given is so concerning. It is not, however, a surprise. This is something that just about everyone interested in the matter warned the Government of and, as she says, we will find out in the next month or so what the final figures are. If they are of the order that we are hearing about, the Government will have the opportunity seriously to reconsider the policy. Today, when I attended the lobby, I heard some student nurses saying that they are finding it difficult to get staff mentors, because senior staff are exhausted. They do not blame those staff for that; they understand the intolerable pressure, because they too see it for themselves.

The change to student fees will add an extra penalty on those training from this year onwards, due to the Government’s decision to freeze the student loan repayment threshold at £21,000. That means that all future nurses will face a real-terms pay cut. According to Unison, based on current salaries, the average nurse, midwife or allied health professional will lose more than £900 per year to meeting their debt repayments. In practical terms, for a nurse on band 5, that means a salary cut approaching 5%. It is abundantly clear that that will make staff retention harder, not easier; there is a clear link between pay and retention levels.

Nobody is suggesting for a minute that anyone who goes into nursing is motivated by money, but when someone who has just finished another draining shift, going above and beyond the call of duty time and again, finds that they do not have enough cash in the bank to feed themselves and their family, and when each year their wages buy them less and less, they could be forgiven for thinking, “Is it all worth it?” It is morally wrong for the Government to put our nurses in that position, and it makes no sense economically either.

**Lilian Greenwood:** That is precisely the point that one of my constituents, a nurse, made when she wrote to me. She said that she graduated last year and is earning only £21,900, one of the lowest starting salaries among her graduate friends. She says that only months into her dream profession, she feels “worn down by the strains put on the NHS. I face continued pressures every day. Most 12-hour shifts I don’t get my unpaid break, and I leave late.” That is on top of knowing that she is not being properly rewarded for the work that she does. Is that not precisely why our nurses are feeling so demoralised?

**Justin Madders:** Yes. It is sad to hear that someone who has only just started out in the profession is being ground down so much already and is feeling so unappreciated. It is a story and a message that we hear repeatedly from our constituents who work in the health service. The Government need to listen carefully to it.

The RCN’s submission to the pay review body not long ago said:

> “Having faced a long period of pay restraint, it is inevitable that a large number of staff are now undertaking agency work as a way of restoring the real value of their earnings. Further restraint will only lead to even more damaging impact to the recruitment, retention and motivation of the most valuable asset the NHS has.”

Those comments were echoed by the House of Commons Health Committee in July 2016, which said that “a long term pay squeeze has unintended consequences for recruitment and retention, which may drive higher costs.”

The independent Nuffield Trust made a similar statement after the 2015 summer Budget. It said that “curbing public sector pay may make it even harder for the Government to realise some of its totemic pledges, such as seven-day working and reducing reliance on temporary staff.”
[Justin Madders]

All those comments have come before the implications are clear for recruitment and retention of the thousands of staff who come from the EU. If they left tomorrow, it would make the current staffing gaps seem like a golden age.

I conclude with a couple more quotes. The first states that

“as the economy returns to growth, NHS pay will need to stay broadly in line with private sector wages in order to recruit and retain frontline staff.”

That quote is from a document that I am sure is known to us all, the NHS “Five Year Forward View”. Median weekly earnings for full-time employees in the private sector rose by 3.4% in 2016. I referred earlier to the anticipated increases in the cost of living over the next three years, which are bound to put more upward pressure on private sector wages.

The second quote is from a document entitled “The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015”, which I do not generally quote. Page 38 says:

“We will implement the NHS’s own plan to improve health care even further—the Five Year Forward View.”

As the Conservative party manifesto includes a clear commitment to delivering “Five Year Forward View”, and as it is clear that pay restraint needs to end to improve recruitment and retention rates, I must ask exactly what is preventing that from happening. I would be grateful if the Minister, when he responds, could tell us whether he considers the current policy of pay restraint to be consistent with the successful delivery of “Five Year Forward View”.

Labour agrees with what has been said, be it by the cross-party Health Committee, the King’s Fund, the Nuffield Trust or the Health Foundation, about the need to end pay restraint. We agree with their crystal-clear message, and that of many hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, that further pay restraint for NHS staff would be self-defeating and unsustainable. We therefore endorse the wording of the petition.

I conclude with another quote from the Migration Advisory Committee, which said:

“The restraint on nurses’ pay instituted by the government was presented to us, and in the evidence to the pay review bodies, as an immutable fact. It is not. It is a choice”.

That is the nub of it: this is a political choice that does not need to continue. The Government have persisted with a damaging policy in pursuit of an objective that they have now abandoned, yet despite all the evidence that that policy is self-defeating and will cost more in the long run, the pay cap remains in place. It is a choice that they have made. It is the wrong choice, and it is time that they accept that they have got it wrong and change course before it is too late.

5.55 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): Mr Evans, I am grateful to you for calling me to wind up the debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). Although I do not agree with his prescription, I thought that he conducted himself in a thoroughly considered way, as usual. It is a pleasure to be shadowed by him, as well as by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who as usual made a constructive contribution.

[Sir Roger Gale in the Chair]

First, I should say that we are all rightly proud of our national health service and the staff who work incredibly hard day and night for the benefit of patients. They undoubtedly deserve a cost of living increase, but we must recognise that the financial and quality challenge facing the NHS is unprecedented. These are not normal times. I deny the allegation that Agenda for Change staff are undervalued, as the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) indicated in his speech, which was knowledgeable, given his previous role as Health Secretary. Staff at all levels in the NHS do a fantastic job, and it is vital that we in Government and the leaders of the NHS recognise that staff morale is important to maintaining staff commitment to services.

In my experience of making visits across the NHS, hard-working staff put patients first every single day of the week. They do so because caring for sick and vulnerable people is as much a vocation for them as it is a job. I know that pay restraint is challenging, but when I speak to staff, they tell me that they want to know that the right number of staff will be working alongside them in the hospital or community setting. The Government have listened. Contrary to some of the contributions made by hon. Members, staff numbers have increased significantly across most grades since May 2010. We have recruited almost 11,800 more doctors. More than 13,300 more nurses are working on our wards today than in May 2010—the overall number of nurses working for the NHS is at an all-time high. There are over 2,100 more midwives, and more than 6,300 currently in training, as well as over 1,500 more health visitors and over 2,400 more paramedics.

The allocation that people are leaving the NHS in droves is simply not borne out by the facts. The most recent workforce statistics were published last week, covering the period ending October 2016, and they showed that a record number of full-time equivalents were working in our NHS.

Dr Huq: The Minister is giving figures for the current workforce, but does he have any for the future workforce? I mentioned my constituent, Dr Linda Burke, of nursing and education studies at the University of Greenwich. She is worried that due to the cut in nursing bursaries, the number of applications is falling, possibly by as much as 30%. The RCN itself has said:

“We have consistently raised concerns to the Government... Despite 100 years of nursing knowledge and expertise, our advice fell on deaf ears.”

The RCN is effectively saying, “We told you so.” Will he remark on that?

Mr Dunne: I can say to the hon. Lady that there are 51,000 nurses in training today—I cannot tell her whether that is a record number, but it is a very significant number. There are 1,600 paramedics in training, which
I believe is a record number. She and one or two other hon. Members have given anecdotes today about applications for new courses starting in the autumn, but I cannot tell her what the figures will be, because I have not yet seen any numbers published by UCAS. I think that they are due in the coming days, so we will have to see.

Dr Whitford: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Dunne: I will, although I am not actually right honourable.

Dr Whitford: Honourable but not right—I accept that. The figures from NHS England itself suggest a drop in nursing applications of at least 20% to 25%.

Mr Dunne: The hon. Lady must have access to figures that my Department and I do not have. My information is that we have yet to receive any formal numbers from UCAS; there may be some early indications, but they do not represent the actual numbers. We will just have to wait for them. There is no point in speculating any further.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the potential impact of Brexit on EU staff, who currently represent a significant number of the professionals working in the NHS. Some 43,000 non-UK-born nationals work in the NHS—about 15% of the workforce—and about half of them come from the EU. It is very important that none of those staff are unnecessarily concerned about their future. The Prime Minister has sought to make it clear on several occasions that she wants to protect the status of EU nationals who are already living here and that the only circumstances in which that would not be possible would be those in which the rights of British citizens living in EU member states were not protected in return. We wish to provide as much reassurance as we can, both to NHS workers and to their employers, that they have a constructive future here in the UK.

However, it is important that we move towards a self-sustaining workforce. Frankly, that is at the heart of the reason behind the change in funding for nursing places, which is to bring nurses in line with doctors and midwives and others in the nursing profession—certainly those in Northern Ireland who have contacted me—feel very demoralised by the attitude that the Government have held for several years. People in the nursing profession do a wonderful job and perform a great service for us all and for our families and friends when we have accidents or are ill, and the Government really must recognise their sense of demoralisation. If the Government will not change their policy on pay restraint—the Minister has already hinted that they will not—what steps will they take to address the serious problem of low morale in the nursing profession?

Mr Dunne: Obviously I cannot speak about circumstances in Northern Ireland, because we do not have responsibility for that. As I develop my remarks, I will go on to explain some of the things that we are doing to ensure that people who work in the NHS feel valued, as the hon. Lady asked, and get the kind of motivation that encourages them to get out of bed every morning and come into work day in, day out.

Lady Hermon rose—

Mr Dunne: I will make some progress.

We recognise that the NHS faces a number of very challenging pressures: not just the ageing population, but the expectations of the public, who rightly demand quality personalised care at home or in hospital every day, not just from Monday to Friday. Those pressures will not be resolved just through pay, but by engaging with staff as they adapt at a time when they want to focus on the quality of care, many trusts have had to acknowledge the serious problem of low morale in the nursing profession?

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: I will make some progress.

We recognise that the NHS faces a number of very challenging pressures: not just the ageing population, but the expectations of the public, who rightly demand quality personalised care at home or in hospital every day, not just from Monday to Friday. Those pressures will not be resolved just through pay, but by engaging with staff as they adapt at a time when they want to focus on the quality of care, many trusts have had to acknowledge the serious problem of low morale in the nursing profession?

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: I will first answer, if I may, some of the comments made about the NHS Pay Review Body’s recommendations and how they sit alongside other elements of the NHS.

The allegation was made that there have been significant pay rises across NHS boardrooms, which are demoralising for those who have suffered pay restraint. However, I say to the hon. Members who raised that point that in 2016 the median rise across all board positions in NHS trusts was 0%. There are individual examples, when very senior managers are introduced to trusts that are going through a management change or are in difficulty, where higher pay rates may have to be introduced than for the previous incumbent, but generally speaking the opposite is happening: in many cases, those coming into new positions are coming in on slightly lower salaries.
Justin Madders: The Minister talks about respecting the independent NHS Pay Review Body’s recommendations. Without having seen them, can he say whether the Government are likely to respect those recommendations?

Mr Dunne: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I cannot give him any reassurances on that. We will have to see what the recommendations are and then take a view. However, we are not very far away from that point now.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) referred to the national living wage. I got the impression from him that some NHS staff members in Northern Ireland are earning only the national living wage; I can reassure him that no NHS staff in England are earning only at that level.

Dr Whitford: Looking at the graph going forward, however, those on bands 1 and 2 of Agenda for Change will fall not only below the real living wage, which they are already below, but below the national living wage, which is the minimum wage, in the coming years—2018-19 and 2019-20.

Mr Dunne: Once again, the hon. Lady is speculating about what might happen in future, and I am afraid that not only can I not comment on that, but I am not sure whether she is correct or not. There are some assumptions in what she said about what will happen to the national living wage. The Government are making some assumptions, but what the Government choose to do about the matter we will have to see. At present, the policy is certainly that nobody will be paid less than the national living wage. I can reassure her about that.

Mark Durkan: Just to clarify, like the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), I was referring to the living wage and not to the national living wage, which is a figment of Government policy.

Dr Whitford rose—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. You cannot take one intervention following another intervention. I call the Minister to speak.

Mr Dunne: I am very happy to give way to the hon. Lady.

Dr Whitford: I was basing my assumptions and suppositions on what the Government themselves announced when they said that the pay freeze would continue in the next four years. That was announced in the comprehensive spending review, so I am not just making it up, and if pay goes on the trajectory that was announced last year, it will fall below the national living wage, which is obviously due to rise towards 2020.

Mr Dunne: I have made the Government’s current position clear and we will have to see what emerges from the NHS Pay Review Body’s recommendations, and then how those are implemented over the coming years. I think it is fruitless to speculate on what might happen in future years, based on the suppositions that the hon. Lady made—

Dr Whitford: Why?

Mr Dunne: Because I have been very clear that at the moment nobody will be paid less than the national living wage, and that is all I am going to say on that.

Dr Poulter: On the current position, can my hon. Friend clarify what the average annual increase in pay in real terms is for NHS staff who have been at the top of the Agenda for Change pay scale since 2010?

Mr Dunne: I will come to that point. If my hon. Friend will bear with me for a few minutes, I think I will be able to satisfy him on that.

Lady Hermon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: No, I am afraid I am going to make some progress.

Hon. Members need to recognise that there is clearly a balance between pay and jobs in the NHS and across many public services. I note that the Opposition spokesman was full of recommendations about what not to do but had none, as far as I could calculate, about what should be done in relation to the delicate balance between pay and jobs. If pay were increased beyond the proposal from the NHS Pay Review Body, or beyond what the Government intend to pay, clearly there could be an impact on the number of jobs that can be afforded in the NHS within the financial envelope that we have.

Justin Madders: We are very clear that we believe that the recommendations of the independent NHS Pay Review Body should be accepted. Much of what I said was about how we should recognise that, given the pressures on nurses’ pay, that will not necessarily cost the Exchequer anything in the long run.

Mr Dunne: I am not sure that that provides much clarification, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for having a go.

Employers in the NHS know that they need to deliver greater efficiencies and improved productivity to help protect frontline jobs. Making the workforce more expensive, through higher pay rises, will not help.

It is therefore disappointing that trade unions have alleged that staff have suffered a pay cut of about 14% in real terms—an allegation that has been repeated by a number of hon. Members in the debate. The truth is that the Government have ensured that no NHS employee—indeed, no employee—should be paid below the national living wage. As I have said, no NHS employee employed under the Agenda for Change pay system is paid below that.

The truth is that average earnings of NHS staff as a whole remained well above the national average salary for 2015, which was £27,500, and have increased by more than annual pay awards. For most NHS staff groups, half of employees employed in 2010 and still in employment in 2015 benefited from double-figure increases in earnings, equating to between 2.2% and 2.9% annually, depending on staff group. The average annual consumer prices index figure over the same period was 2.4%.

Dr Poulter: I specifically asked about those who are at the top of the Agenda for Change pay scale, which many Agenda for Change staff are. Can the Minister
confirm what the figures are for that group, because I think that the figures he has given include those in receipt of incremental rises?

Mr Dunne: They do, and it is important for hon. Members to understand the impact of incremental pay rises. The truth is that some half a million Agenda for Change staff are eligible for incremental pay rises each year of more than 3% on average, on top of annual pay awards. I am not saying that NHS staff should have no concerns about the level of pay award they receive; what I am saying is that since the 2008 recession, NHS earnings and public sector earnings have generally compared well with those in the wider economy.

A number of hon. Members talked about regional pay and in particular the challenges of working in London. Of course, we are very sympathetic to individuals who face the pressures of working in London—in both inner and outer London—and that is why we have the increments available to recognise the extra costs of living there.

Catherine McKinnell rose—

Dr Poulter rose—

Mr Dunne: I will make a little progress, if I may.

NHS organisations spend about two thirds of their entire expenditure on pay. Ensuring that the NHS has the staff it needs relies, crucially, on controlling pay and on making every penny count for the benefit of patients.

I give way to my hon. Friend.

Dr Poulter: My hon. Friend the Minister may not have the answer to my specific question here today, but will he write to me after the debate to confirm the answer to my question about those members of staff who are at the top of the Agenda for Change pay scale? What, in real terms, has been their pay increase since 2010?

Mr Dunne: I will be happy to look at that; if my hon. Friend writes to me with his precise question, of course we will give him an answer.

Catherine McKinnell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: I was about to come on to agencies, but I will give way to the hon. Lady.

Catherine McKinnell: Thank you for giving way. I am slightly concerned by his response, in that he does not seem to be taking on board the very significant concerns that have been raised right across the board, not only by unions but, significantly, by the National Audit Office. Last week, in its report on ambulance services, the NAO said:

“Ambulance trusts face resourcing challenges that are limiting their ability to meet rising demand.”

One of the “challenges” that is specifically cited is “pay and reward”, which is hampering recruitment. It is not just the unions and NHS staff who are saying these things; it is the NAO and other bodies as well.

Mr Dunne: The hon. Lady refers to ambulance staff. In recent weeks—just before Christmas, in fact—the Department agreed a deal with trade unions whereby paramedics working in ambulances would have their banding increased from band 5 to band 6, phased in over two years so that they can demonstrate they have the increased skill competence required. That represents a significant increase in reward for paramedics; some 12,000 paramedics will receive a higher pay award, precisely to address recruitment challenges for that specific profession. So we are listening and we are doing something about this issue. I will try to give the hon. Lady other examples of where we are responding to specific pressures.

Lady Hermon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: No. The hon. Lady has had a fair crack.

I was challenged in this debate to refer to what the Government are investing in the NHS and I obviously take some relish in responding to that challenge. We are investing an additional £21.9 billion in nominal terms, which is equivalent to £10 billion in real terms, to fund the NHS’s own plan for the future. By doing so, we believe that we are playing our part, through the measures announced over the last 12 months or so, to help the NHS achieve its five year forward view. It needs to do that not only by realising benefits from the Carter review to improve productivity, but by clamping down on rip-off staffing agencies and encouraging employers to use their own staff banks for temporary staffing needs, so that they can invest in their permanent workforce. That has been referred to by a number of right hon. and hon. Members.

Agency and bank working provide an opportunity for NHS staff to engage in more flexible working to suit their own circumstances, so I would not want to characterise all agency working as bad. What is challenging is when NHS organisations need, in some cases, to go out to external agencies beyond their immediate bank and pay significantly higher rates. That is why the Department introduced, a year ago, a number of measures to start to limit the ability of agencies to charge the NHS such high fees, and we have had some success in that. In the period for which I have figures—roughly the middle of last year—the agency costs to the NHS had been reduced by 19% over the equivalent period the year before, so we are doing something about those fees. We are apprised of the problem and are bringing down the cost to the NHS of employing agency staff.

This issue is not just about pay. NHS staff, like many people, work hard to improve our public services. They have families and commitments, and they deserve to be rewarded fairly for what they do. However, as has been said, pay alone will not necessarily persuade the skilled and compassionate people that we need to choose a career in the NHS. It would be wrong to see the NHS employment package as just about headline pay. NHS terms and conditions have been developed over many years, in partnership with trade unions, and they recognise that it is a combination of pay and non-pay benefits, which need to keep pace with a modern, changing NHS, that help to recruit, retain and motivate the workforce.

Dr Whitford: Certainly the nurses I met during the lobby here, who had come from all over England, but particularly from London, described literally struggling and facing great financial hardship. That is very difficult for them. They work so hard for the benefit of all of us,
yet feel that they cannot go on in their profession because they simply cannot keep their families here in London.

Mr Dunne: I have already explained to the hon. Lady that we have a London weighting, which reflects the increased costs of living in London. I have also explained to her that average pay for nurses is significantly above the national average pay. She herself referred to average nursing pay of some £31,000.—

Dr Whitford indicated dissent.

Mr Dunne: If not her, then another hon. Member referred to it, and that is from the latest available workforce statistics.

Picking up on the hon. Lady’s point, it is important that NHS staff are confident that their employment package is competitive. We want employers to make better use of the full package in their recruitment and retention strategies. NHS Agenda for Change staff have access to an excellent pension scheme, far in excess of arrangements in the wider economy, which includes life assurance worth twice the annual salary, and spouse, partner and child benefits. They have annual leave of up to 33 days—six and a half weeks—plus the eight bank holidays, which is far better than that which is available in the private sector, and in many other elements of the public sector. They have sickness and maternity arrangements that go well beyond the statutory minimum and, as I have touched on, there are flexible working, training and development opportunities for staff at all grades. For too long, the NHS employment package has been a well-kept secret and we want leaders to make the very best use of the overall NHS employment offer to help recruit and retain the staff they need.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): The Minister has outlined the pay and conditions package—or part of it. Does he believe that staff within the nursing profession are confident at the moment about their pay and conditions package, or does he feel, as I hear, that they are undervalued within the system?

Mr Dunne: I have tried to indicate in my remarks that we do not undervalue anyone who works in the NHS. The role of our nurses in particular provides the backbone of the entire health service. Understandably, people are concerned about their level of pay. With several years of pay restraint, that is no surprise—it is the case right across the economy—and that is why we will look carefully at the recommendations of the NHS Pay Review Body, I have already said that we recognise that there should be some increase in the award to take into account the cost of living.

You will be pleased to hear, Sir Roger, that I am going to conclude my remarks, by reconfirming that as a nation we are extremely proud of our NHS. The patient surveys we undertake every year tell us that our patients are proud of our NHS. Our staff tell us, in the surveys we undertake of them, that they are proud of working in our NHS. This is not just me saying this, reading it from a sheet; it is what staff tell me whenever I visit an NHS facility. They are proud of their job. They are proud of looking after their patients, and they want to continue to do so.

The Government have to take tough decisions, and in this area we have done so to protect jobs through pay restraint. Average NHS earnings for most staff groups have continued to grow. We are committed to ensuring that they have the right number of colleagues working alongside them in hospitals and in the community.

I strongly believe that the issue of recruitment and retention is not just about pay. It is about creating a culture in which learning, development and innovation are encouraged. It is about creating an environment where staff want to work, take pride in what they do, and are well motivated and feel safe; an environment where employers promote the importance of the values of the NHS and work incredibly hard to keep staff safe, and where bullying and harassment are not tolerated.

6.26 pm

Catherine McKinnell: I do not think that anyone could argue with what the Minister has just said about NHS staff being proud of what they do and wanting to continue. But even while this debate has been going on, I have seen several tweets. For example, one asks:

“please tell me what the RCN”—it says the Royal College of Nursing, but I say the Government—

“is going to do. I am seriously starting to struggle now”.

Others say that they

“know so many young people who would be great nurses but lack of bursary & low pay put them off”.

Those tweets reflect NHS staff’s real live experiences of the current pay situation under Agenda for Change and the continued pay freeze.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed knowledgeably and passionately to this very important debate, whether in speeches or interventions. I feel very strongly that we have won the argument today. There is a high degree of cross-party consensus on many of the issues we have outlined, and the Government are either burying their head in the sand or deliberately not facing up to significant challenges regarding pay, recruitment and retention for NHS staff. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) pointed out, by failing to address the issue we are taking advantage of those who work in the NHS and are pushing their good will to the limit. What disturbs me even more is that not only their good will is being tested; their very ability to survive in the job is being tested, too. I have received a number of testimonies and seen the evidence—the Government seem to deny the figures, even though they are there in black and white and I set them out clearly in my opening speech—about the real-terms pay cuts that NHS staff are facing. They simply cannot manage, and that is a shameful situation.

I said in my speech that it is the very people the Government rely on to deliver a high-quality NHS service in extremely challenging circumstances who are being badly let down by the Government’s current policy. How have we reached a situation where nurses, midwives and other invaluable NHS staff are struggling to pay their bills and put food on the table? They are pawning their possessions and turning to payday loans. On the softer side, they are turning to agency work to top up their pay—not to afford the luxuries in life, but the basics. It is a completely unsustainable situation, and the Government must take urgent action to lift this
burden off our NHS staff so that they can do their job, which is caring for us and our loved ones without the fear of financial insecurity hanging over their every working day.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered e-petition 168127 relating to pay restraint for Agenda for Change NHS staff.

6.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall
Tuesday 31 January 2017
[Joan Ryan in the Chair]

Immigration Rules: Spouses and Partners

9.30 am

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered immigration rules for spouses and partners.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Ryan, as we debate what I believe is a vital issue to revisit and reconsider. It affects the family lives of many thousands of our constituents in a most intrusive way, and it calls on us to consider where our priorities really lie: in pursuing utterly misguided targets at all costs, or in protecting people's human rights and the best interests of children?

I understand that this is the first time Parliament has considered the matter since a few months after the draconian new rules were introduced in July 2012, so the debate is overdue.

I want to thank those colleagues who helped me secure the debate, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), who accompanied me to the Backbench Business Committee. I also thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), the hon. Members for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), for Bradford West (Naz Shah), for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), for South Down (Ms Ritchie) and for Bedford (Richard Fuller), and my hon. Friends the Members for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless), for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) and for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for their support. That is MPs from across the United Kingdom, and London in particular.

Tens of thousands of adults have been forced by the Government to choose between the country that is their home and that they love and the people who they want to share their home with and who they love even more. That is a horrible and cruel choice. What is the Government's justification for that? The official Government position is that it serves to protect the public purse and encourage integration. The first of those is of dubious accuracy and questionable relevance. The second I fail completely to understand at all, so I will listen with interest to what the Minister has to say if he wants to maintain that argument. I simply note that it was comprehensively rebutted in a report for the Children's Commissioner that I will consider shortly.

On the public purse issue, the Government claimed that the requirement would save £660 million over 10 years—it would be good to know if they are doing up-to-date research on that—but Middlesex University has persuasively argued that the coalition Government, who introduced the rules, did not take into account the loss of the wider economic benefits of migrant partners' economic activity. In fact, its model suggested a cost to the taxpayer over that period of £850 million.

Needless to say, the Government did not accept that analysis and pressed ahead, fixing a threshold at the level that the Migration Advisory Committee said would be the annual gross pay required for a couple at which £18,600, and thousands of pounds extra if there is a child or children involved.

The rules mean that we no longer have a fairly light-touch financial maintenance test broadly equating to income support levels of £5,500. Non-EU applicants wishing to join their spouse or partner here are now required to show that their UK-settled sponsor earns at least £18,600, and thousands of pounds extra if there is a child or children involved.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): The threshold is utterly unfair, particularly in places such as Rochdale where wages are much lower than in other parts of the United Kingdom, and London in particular.

Stuart C. McDonald: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I will come to the disproportionate impact of the threshold in just a moment.

When those two rules are combined, astonishingly almost half the UK population would be excluded from ever being able to sponsor the person they love to come and join them, if that person happened to be from outside the EU. As the hon. Gentleman just said, there are disproportionate impacts on some segments of the population, for fairly obvious reasons related to average incomes, so even higher proportions of young people, women and some ethnic minorities, and essentially all those who live outside London and the south-east, are affected.

Right now, the judges of the Supreme Court are busy again deciding whether the rules are in fact illegal and in breach of human rights. They might force the Government to choose between the country that is their home and that they love and the people who they want to share their home with and who they love even more. That is a horrible and cruel choice. What is the Government's justification for that? The official Government position is that it serves to protect the public purse and encourage integration. The first of those is of dubious accuracy and questionable relevance. The second I fail completely to understand at all, so I will listen with interest to what the Minister has to say if he wants to maintain that argument. I simply note that it was comprehensively rebutted in a report for the Children's Commissioner that I will consider shortly.

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Needless to say, the Government did not accept that analysis and pressed ahead, fixing a threshold at the level that the Migration Advisory Committee said would be the annual gross pay required for a couple at which they would not receive income-related benefits, assuming weekly rent of £100. I am not criticising the MAC, which functions like a finely tuned, high-spec computer performing some amazing analysis. However, as with such a computer, the principle of "garbage in, garbage out" applies: if a half-baked question is asked, a half-baked answer is given.

As the MAC pointed out, its deliberations were based purely on economic considerations and did not take into account wider legal, social or moral issues related to family migration. That was absolutely correct. Of course, in implementing its recommendation, the Government
did not think to factor in that even if £18,600 was the right threshold, both halves of the marriage or partnership should be allowed to contribute to meeting it, not just the UK sponsor. A talented non-EU national could have a job offer—they might even have worked in the UK in the past under a different visa—yet they cannot join their spouse or partner here if their UK spouse or partner is, agonisingly, just a few hundred pounds short of the income threshold. That makes absolutely no sense.

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):
I, too, pay tribute to the MAC for its work. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the MAC recommended a range between £18,600 and £25,700 and that, given that range, the Government chose the lowest figure they could?

Stuart C. McDonald: It is true the Government chose the lesser of two evils, but I go back to the point I made before: it all depended on the question that the Government asked of MAC, which dictated the answer that came back. They could have looked at a million different alternatives. For example, in some litigation before the courts, reference has been made to the minimum wage, which is considerably less than £18,600. In my view, there was nothing wrong with the threshold previously in place, which was broadly £5,500—a rate that equated to income support at that time. There is even a case for removing the financial threshold altogether. So, yes, the Government chose the lesser of two evils, but that was from the question they asked in the first place.

The all-party parliamentary group on migration rightly pointed out that there will be many cases where the separation of parents leads to increased reliance on social security benefits. All of that is largely hypothetical anyway, since as we all know the non-EU spouse is prohibited from accessing social security benefits in any event for five years.

Ultimately, we should not engage in a balance-sheet debate that excludes from consideration family life and the best interests of children. We are talking about people—husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters—whose lives are being absolutely ruined. I have no doubt that colleagues will raise many constituency cases today, and each of them is absolutely deserving of our attention.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to look at issues such as caring responsibilities? A number of constituents have come to my surgeries whose spouse would be able to care for and look after them, but they have been prevented from getting into the country, which has had a hugely detrimental impact on the constituents’ physical and mental health.

Stuart C. McDonald: I agree, and that is a perfect illustration of what the all-party parliamentary group was saying about how the rules can lead to an increased reliance on social security benefits. It also puts a big question mark over any Government argument that the rules somehow benefit integration. They certainly do not benefit the integration into society of the UK sponsor left here picking up the pieces.

All of that suffering is well documented in various reports and pieces of research, and I thank everyone who has been involved in documenting the effects of this mean-spirited and cruel Government policy. Utterly compelling is the report prepared in September 2015 for the Children’s Commissioner for England about the effect on at least 15,000 children—by now the figure is probably pushing on 20,000—living in “Skype families” across the UK. It detailed how the Government’s policy was causing those children separation anxiety, increased levels of anger and disobedience, greater levels of aggression, signs of depression, disrupted sleep, eating problems, social isolation and withdrawal, and feelings of guilt. Ultimately, what matters is that those children are being kept apart from one parent by the Government’s nasty immigration policies. In short, the Children’s Commissioner was clear that the Government’s legal obligations to children are not properly recognised in the rules and that too many decisions completely fail to take into account the best interests principle.

Last week, Phoebe Griffith of the Institute for Public Policy Research told members of the Home Affairs Committee that the net migration target had “created a whole set of quite perverse incentives”. She used policies on international students as an example, but I think that an even clearer example is the drastic changes to the immigration rules for non-EU spouses and partners that were introduced in July 2012. The real reason for the rules is the Prime Minister’s near-pathological obsession with her bogus net migration target, and it seems that it does not matter to her who is hurt as a result. Too many UK citizens with non-EU spouses and UK children with non-EU parents know that better than any of us. How many more families do the Government want to plunge into the nightmare in pursuit of the target? Will they apply the same rules to EU spouses after Brexit, for example?

For the reasons I have explained, and many more that I am sure hon. Members will touch on, the Government should go back to the drawing board and put families and children first.
Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) explained. The policy has had many negative consequences and it should make us reflect on the social contract that should exist between the UK Government and citizens. If citizens pay their taxes and act within the law, the Government have an obligation to protect their rights, including the right to a family life.

However, it is clear that the Government are failing in that obligation by standing in the way of UK citizens who have married partners from outside the EEA. The rationale for that policy is that the Government want to prevent migrants from becoming a burden on the state—the value of the person being determined only by how much money they have. My understanding was that the Tory party believed in small, limited government that gives citizens the maximum freedom to pursue their lives. Yet the Government are obstructing citizens’ most fundamental relationships: those between spouses and between parents and children.

Ryan Shorthouse, the founder and director of the Conservative think-tank Bright Blue, went so far as to say that the rules are not conservative and that they damage society by splitting up the key ingredient of a compassionate society, the family. The system does not work and does not deliver positive results for the UK or its citizens. I do not expect the Minister suddenly to deviate from the Government’s irrational commitment to reducing net migration, but at the very least I would like to see changes to the spousal visa application process.

First, the minimum salary requirement has to be reduced so that it more accurately reflects the wages of all UK citizens, not just the richest. Research conducted by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford shows that the financial requirement disproportionately affects women, ethnic minorities and those outside London. It is estimated that 41% of people in Scotland would be ineligible to sponsor a non-EEA family member, compared with 27% in London. Paradoxically, that means that the UK Government have created an immigration system where getting access to the areas with the highest population pressures is easier than getting access to Scotland, which has lower average wages than London but is in desperate need of more people.

The Home Office might feel generous in stating that any deficiency in income can be topped up with savings. If a sponsor has a shortfall in income of £2,000, the Home Office formula would require them to have £21,000 in savings to meet the financial requirement. That is an absurd amount, considering that more than 16 million people in the UK and almost half the people of Scotland have less than £100 in savings. The Government can hide behind the income threshold analysis outlined by the Migration Advisory Committee, but that would simply be an exercise in dehumanising my constituents and trying to put a monetary value on the family relationships of UK citizens.

Secondly, the Government must reduce the application fees, which are large and increasing. From March 2016 they rose by an unjustifiable 25%. To apply for a spousal visa in person now costs £1,311, while phoning the international helpline costs £1.37 a minute. When the £500-per-person NHS levy is taken into consideration, families can easily spend between £5,000 and £10,000 on fees over a five-year period, and possibly more, depending on how many children they have. Far from being a burden on the state, spouses of UK citizens are providing exceptional amounts of money just to have their applications considered.

Thirdly, it is time to simplify the application process. By that I do not mean simply making it an online process. A typical document that applicants are expected to complete is the FLR(M) application form, which is 81 pages. It covers every aspect of a person’s life—where they have lived, their relationships, their housing situation and their personal finances. Aside from the unnecessary and intrusive questioning, applicants are asked if they have been involved in genocide, war crimes or terrorist activities. It would be helpful for the Minister to outline how many war criminals have been apprehended thanks to question 10.8 in the spousal visa application.

In conjunction with a more streamlined application process, I would like the Minister to consider relaxing the rules on evidence requirements. For instance, applicants are required to provide original hard copies of documents in support of their application. We live in an age when payslips, bank statements and bills are increasingly moving online. Little guidance is available through official channels and applicants are forced towards often unreliable and out-of-date sources on the internet to learn what documents they need to provide.

The infamous inflexibility of visa assessors makes the process even more difficult, as applicants know that one small and even insignificant mistake can lead to a refusal with life-changing ramifications. The Minister will be pleased to know that I have brought a copy of the 81-page application form with me today. I invite him to take it with him, complete it and prepare the evidence that he would need to submit a successful application for himself and a partner and children. As a highly paid Minister, he cannot understand the years of uncertainty and financial pressure that the process creates for UK citizens and their families. Completing the application will, however, give him a limited understanding of how his laborious system works in practice.

Time constrains me from touching on the many other issues associated with spousal visa rules. I regret that I cannot highlight even some of the absurd situations that my constituents have experienced because of the inflexibility that is at the heart of the policy. A drastic change of attitude is required at the Home Office. It should stop treating UK citizens and their families as if they have done something wrong and need to justify their existence, and as if they are unwelcome in the UK. UK citizens deserve the Department’s support, no matter whom they marry. Freedom to marry and live with a loved one should not be reserved for those who have the money. If the Minister is content to divide families then let him keep the rules. If not, let him reform them as a matter of urgency. Families in the UK have suffered enough.

I want finally to thank my researcher, Colin MacDonald. He was born in the USA to a Scottish mother, was raised in Australia and now lives in Scotland with his wonderful Chinese Singaporean wife. If Colin says that the system is overly complicated, expensive and discriminatory, the Government should listen, because he knows it inside out. His tireless commitment to helping others has gone a long way to reuniting wives with their husbands and children with their parents.
The case would be laughable if the process had not caused an overwhelming amount of stress and pain for Beth, Willie and their families. After they applied relentlessly and jumped through the burdensome hoops, and after I made the Immigration Minister aware of the case—I am grateful for his assistance—the Home Office has now accepted that a real relationship exists between Beth and Willie. However, anyone who thinks that is the end of the story is probably inexperienced in dealing with the immigration system.

The Home Office—after first emailing an incorrect address—has requested that Willie makes the final international health surcharge payment on his application and sends over his American passport. However, Willie has already made that payment a long time ago, and UK Visas and Immigration already has his passport. My office has been trying for weeks to get the situation resolved but, frustratingly, UKVI is all over the place with the case and does not realise that Willie has completed everything that has been asked of him and more.

Hopefully that case will be resolved soon enough. It should have been a clear cut case for UKVI, but needless problems and delays have caused much stress and misery for the family, cost a significant amount of taxpayers’ money and caused real logistical problems for the employer, who deserves great credit for holding the job open in good faith despite the Home Office’s delays.

The previous Immigration Minister, the now Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, said last year: “The Government certainly do recognise the contribution that skilled and talented people from outside this country can make to our economy, and I have been very explicit about the way in which our immigration rules are designed to facilitate that.”—[Official Report, 26 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 689WH.]

We have heard that refrain time and again, despite the barriers erected and fortified by the same Government. My question to the current Minister is whether he will apologise for the stress caused to Beth, Willie and the entire family. They have done everything asked of them and met every criterion that the Government set, at great expense. All they want is to help to take care of Beth’s mother, live together in the UK and contribute to wider society.

That case highlights the deep flaws rooted in the immigration system. Despite Beth earning more than the £18,600 minimum annual income that was put in place in 2012, Willie experienced a number of issues when trying to secure the appropriate visa to join her. When the coalition Government introduced the minimum income threshold, it was widely criticised and challenged in the courts. Civil society at large, including the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the Migrants’ Rights Network, BritCits and the Family Immigration Alliance campaigned against the minimum income requirement, claiming that it would divide families and make it harder for the overseas spouses of UK citizens to join them. In my experience of helping people go through the visa process, the initial fears raised back in 2012 have proven entirely correct.

I will touch on some common criticisms of the minimum income requirement. First, notwithstanding the Minister’s earlier intervention, the threshold was set too high, with hard-working and genuine applicants losing out as a result. I do not doubt that we all value the positive contribution that our international friends make to life.
in the UK. They enrich our communities, and we offer some the opportunity to better themselves. However, the threshold prevents many people from being able to live a life in the UK, especially when we consider that as many as 45% of people in the UK earn less than the required threshold, particularly in areas outside London and the south-east.

Secondly, research conducted by the University of Oxford confirms that the policy disproportionately affects particular groups. It found that the minimum income requirement has “important indirect effects across gender, ethnicity, education, age and place of residence.” Female workers hoping to act as sponsors for their male partners are particularly disadvantaged, with 57% not earning enough to sponsor a non-EAA spouse.

The financial threshold has been called unfair, disproportionate and counterproductive, and it is for that reason that the UK is now considered to have the least family-friendly immigration policies in the developed world. For a party that preaches the importance of family, it seems strange that the Conservative party would design a system that breaks families apart; as a result of the Government’s policies, families have been separated and children are growing up without a parent.

It seems entirely nonsensical and almost beyond comprehension that no account is taken of foreign spouses’ prospective earnings. Because of the financial threshold, many skilled workers may be discouraged from returning to, or choosing to settle in, Scotland, and will instead go elsewhere. Instead of the savings originally predicted, the minimum income requirement could end up costing the UK more, with the loss of tax revenue from migrants who have been unable to come to the UK, and with some families unnecessarily having to rely on benefits because the migrant partner is unable to join them.

The Government must review this unfair policy, which is hurting families all over the UK. We need a reasonable immigration system that does not separate children from their parents or wives and husbands from each other, and does not prevent migrants from making a positive contribution to the UK. We need a fair, robust, and secure immigration system that takes account of the varied social and economic needs of different areas of the country and does not discriminate against half the population. Perhaps even more importantly, we need to allow UKVI officers and the Home Office in general to exercise common sense, which in many cases would save taxpayers money and end the continuing stress of so many people like Beth and Willie.

9.57 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I apologise for not being here in time; I have already done that through the Speaker’s Office. The Heathrow Express was late, and as a result I had to run; Mo Farah and Usain Bolt have nothing to fear, no matter how hard I run. That is how I got here. I apologise to the proposer of the debate, the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kirkintilloch and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), and I congratulate him on his presentation. Unfortunately I missed it, but I am sure the gist of what he said will be exactly the same as what I will say and what other hon. Members have said.

It is a pleasure to see the Minister in his place. I know he works hard on these issues; we bring issues to him and he responds to us faithfully, and we very much appreciate that relationship as elected representatives. I thank him for that. I also thank the UK Border Agency staff, who I speak to regularly and who always give me advice and assistance within the rules that have been laid down. I have to say that I am not happy with some of those rules.

It will be no shock that I take a more humanistic understanding of the issues regarding immigration rules for spouses and partners in the UK. The rules introduced on 9 July 2012 by the Home Office mean that, to bring a foreign spouse into Britain, somebody would have to maintain employment that provides a minimum income of £18,600. That has left some 33,000 people unable to remain with their spouse, as many do not earn the required amount to satisfy that visa requirement. In Northern Ireland, and I suspect in Scotland, many people are not in that income bracket, which is an issue of concern.

We know how the system works and we understand it very well. For families with one child, the income requirement rises to £22,400, rising a further £2,400 for each extra child. By its very nature, the income needed almost debars many people from qualifying. For me, that is an extortionate amount for genuine couples who are marrying for love, not for benefits from the UK Government or the system we have. It seems that the rules introduced have affected the more vulnerable and the less wealthy.

Recent studies show that around 47% of British people do not earn enough to fall in love with a foreign national; it is as simple as that. What is worse, under the rules a migrant applicant’s overseas income does not count towards the threshold. Will the Minister consider looking at that as one way to address the issue? That would go a long way to getting an arrangement that works. How can it be fair that a migrant’s income is not taken into account at all? With great respect to people who live in London, the rules appear to suit only those who live in London, graduates and those in well-paid jobs. Some 73%—nearly three-quarters—of people living in the capital meet the threshold in the immigration rules for spouses and partners and are more likely than the rest of the country to sponsor a spouse from outside Europe. Surely many people outside London would love the opportunity to live with their spouse.

The law also discriminates against women, with research showing that some 55% of British women and 53% of those under 30 are excluded from bringing a spouse into Britain. If we are unfairly discriminating against women, that is an issue we have to consider. I understand that there are rules in place for a reason—for our protection—and I do not for one second believe that there should be an onus on the Government to take care of people who are not British. However, it is clear that the level of income needed is not what it takes to run a household in the United Kingdom. The Government set a minimum income for a standard of living that is much less than that, and we must consider that.

We should welcome those who wish to make a life in the United Kingdom with their families, work hard and contribute to our society. One argument heard when the legislation was introduced was that the Government would save some £650 million. That is not a sum to be
sneered at; we have to be realistic. The Government stated that the minimum income rule was to prevent unqualified spouses from coming to the UK and becoming dependent on the state. However, further research done by Middlesex University found that if most spouses turned away at the borders had found employment, they would have made a contribution of more than £850 million to the UK economy. To me, the figures are simple. Let them in.

As a married man, I believe in marriage between one man as husband and one woman as wife. I consider it the most intimate of human relationships and a gift from God. In the Bible, Hebrews 13:4 tells us: “Let marriage be held in honour among all”.

Why is a marriage between a UK citizen and a foreign national not held in the same honour or deemed less? No Government, no party and no institution should deny any man the right to be married to his wife or any woman the right to be married to her husband. Marriage should not be established in the UK by the taxman or Government penalties.

I have been involved in a number of immigration battles. As I was just saying to my colleague, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), I deal with these issues every week in my office, and they are terribly important. I feel frustration on behalf of my constituents who happen to be married to someone from another country. This issue comes up all the time. One immigration battle involved a two-and-a-half year fight by a husband and wife, costing in excess of £7,000 for the solicitor’s fees and other fees—that is £7,000 for a person who does not have £18,500. Right away, that imposes a strain on newly wedded couples. Is that how we would like to start our married lives, given the strains and adjustments that are already on a new marriage?

We also need to think of the possible effects on the children of these marriages. The rules have been criticised by the Children’s Commissioner. More than 15,000 children are separated from one of their parents because of our broken system. I find that fact utterly heartbreaking. A Filipino lady who had married a fellow from Newtownards came to see me. They had a child. We played by the immigration rules, but because of those rules, she had to leave her baby at home with the dad, go back to the Philippines and then start again through the system. It took her almost nine months. During those nine months, she could see her child through Skype but could not hold them in her hands, cuddle them or love them. That is an example of what I have been involved in.

Imagine parents being separated from their children, who are living in another country, all because they do not earn the recommended minimum income for our country. Is that how we would want our child to be raised? Is that how we would have wanted to be raised, as children? Those are the questions we need to ask ourselves. Can we not do more to make provisions for couples who have children? Again, I ask the Minister what we can do to assist. I have seen the devastation at first hand in my own constituency.

I want to give another example. A number of people from the Philippines and lots of people from across the eastern bloc work in my constituency. A young Filipino came to Northern Ireland with a visa more than six months ago but unfortunately could not get one for her 12-year-old son. He was sent home because she did not have the required minimum income to sustain him; that was the consequence of the Government’s scheme. We can imagine how hard that was. The case was won on appeal—there is an appeal system, and it works—but that child has still not been given his visa months later. His mother rings my office every week asking when her son will be able to start a life with her. I see the heartbreak in that young woman’s eyes and hear the pain in her voice every week. Cases such as that make me say we must do better, and I implore the Minister to do that. I know he is a compassionate man who is always responsive when we ask him to do things; we can never, nor will ever, fault him for that.

The agri-food industry has brought workers over to my constituency, where we have a number of agri-food businesses. In one company, 40% of the workforce is from eastern Europe and in another the figure is 60%, so we can understand the importance of that workforce to those companies. Some of the workers have met and married local girls and guys. With Brexit on the horizon, their visa situation must be made clear. They ask me to know about it all the time. I spoke to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she visited Northern Ireland, and she was very keen to ensure that the people working in the factories will have security and tenure.

The Minister and I have talked about this before, but we have an opportunity for an overhaul that protects us but allows for marriages that are not determined by someone’s ability to earn a high wage. Let us protect the people who are here and ensure they can continue to offer something and work hard. The local caretaker has as much right to love as a doctor. The song “Love Don’t Cost a Thing” certainly does not apply in the UK Visas and Immigration department, and we need to revamp and look again truthfully and sincerely at our criteria. I believe we can ensure that people cannot claim off the state without splitting up marriages and families. It can be done, so let us do it.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I want to start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald)—or Kirky East, as we like to call it—on securing this extremely important debate and on his knowledgeable speech. He has a background in this area. Everybody who has spoken today has demonstrated how much they care about the people they represent. It is important to do that, even when we feel like we are banging our heads against a brick wall, and even when we feel that the Government are possibly not listening and that nothing will change. People need to know that there are Members in this place who care about them and will keep speaking up for them; that makes a difference to them. I congratulate everyone who has spoken today on demonstrating how much we care.

When the topic of spousal visas comes up, as it does from time to time, people generally react with shock to the news that UK citizens are not automatically entitled to bring their partner to live with them in the UK, as my
hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan)—land of my birth—said. When I detail the hurdles and hoops that most couples have to jump through, the response is always one of disbelief. People think I got it wrong. They say, “Surely it is an infringement of civil liberties to be denied the right to live with your spouse,” or, “Is there a price on love?” Well, according to the Home Office, there is a price for marrying someone from another country, and it is a high one.

Applying for a spousal visa is an expensive process that should, in itself, indicate the commitment to the relationship. In addition to the application fee, which is now more than £1,300—as my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde said, that is an increase of 25%—lawyers’ costs can be not inconsiderable, as applications often drag on for years through the appeal or reapplication process, putting not only a financial strain but debilitating emotional stress on couples and families.

If people can find the money to make an application, the three main barriers preventing many of them from living with their non-British or non-EU partners are the minimum income threshold, as we have heard; the complicated application process; and, perhaps most importantly from what I have experienced through my constituents, the culture of disbelief at the heart of the Home Office. We have heard examples, notably from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Gavin Newlands), who talked about Beth and Willie in Houston—the Houston. He told us that even when an MP gets involved, that often makes very little difference. The MP must then battle for months on end to get mistakes rectified. One mistake in that case was the Home Office calling for a passport that had already been sent in. Then we heard the horrifying story from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) of a baby being separated from its mother for nine months. It is not necessary to be a psychologist to know the damage that that could do to the baby’s development.

I want to share a few examples of my own. It was difficult to decide which of my constituents in this position to talk about, because there are so many and all are struggling, but I will start with Jane. She was a young Scottish woman who emigrated to New York in the early 1960s; she was just 18 years old. She met and fell in love with a young man, later to become her husband, Jay, on a family holiday in Pakistan when she was just four years old. They became the best of friends as they continued to meet over the years during regular family holidays. As they grew into adulthood, friendship blossomed into love. Sasha and Jay got married in 2011 and are now the proud parents of two beautiful children. People might expect that to be the “happily ever after” ending to the story, but no: the Home Office was ready to rain on their parade, and rain it did. It took decision makers at the Home Office a shocking five years to accept that that was a real relationship. In fact, Sasha’s husband was able to join his wife and children in Glasgow only last week. The Home Office did not believe that they were in a relationship. It was a sham, the Home Office alleged. That Sasha had not visited her husband very often since the wedding was one excuse used. Well, that was correct: Sasha did not visit her husband as much as she would have liked, because she had to work every hour she could to maintain the minimum income requirement and to take care of their two children. That is what the Home Office told her she had to do. As my hon. Friends the Members for Inverclyde and for Paisley and Renfrewshire North said, if someone is female and lives north of London, they are far less likely to be able to reach the minimum income requirement.

The result was that the two children, born in 2012 and 2014, got to know their father, during their most formative years, as a face on a laptop. In whose view is that fair? Six years on from their wedding day, that young couple and their children are no longer a Skype family and are finally able to live together as a family, but why should that have taken so long? Why is there so much distrust? Who benefits from it? Is it the Home Office? Is it immigration lawyers? It is certainly not the British citizen, and definitely not their children. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East told us, the Children’s Commissioner said that the Government were not meeting their legal requirement to children. I argue that they are not meeting their moral requirement to them, either.

As we have heard from other hon. Members, no one is disputing that there has to be a system. There must be procedures and checks, and documents and statements must be verified. We know that that has to be done, but it can be done without the cost of what it should be. It can be done without insensitivity, and so it should be. It can be done without the Home Office contradicting another Department under the same Government—I
am talking about the Department for Work and Pensions. The Minister’s colleagues in that Department tell us that a couple require £5,972.20 per annum to live on; that is the current rate of jobseeker’s allowance for a couple. Let us add in an amount for housing benefit, using average rents in Glasgow, which are about £250 a month in social housing and £500 a month for a private let. That adds on between £3,000 and £5,000 a year, so the DWP thinks that a couple can get by pretty well on anything between £9,000 and £12,000 per annum, and the Home Office reckons that a couple need £18,600. Well, which is it? If the DWP is correct, the Home Office needs to reduce that threshold. If the Home Office is right, surely those on jobseeker’s allowance are in for a bumper pay rise. Considering that those under the age of 24 apparently require so much less on which to live, the injustice is even greater for those under the age of 24 who want their spouse to come and live here.

Who else needs very little to live on, according to this Government? The answer is carers. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) talked about people being unable to bring their partner over to care for them. I want to talk about a constituent who has been deemed to be too poor to support herself and her husband, because she is a carer.

Christine was not always a carer. She worked freelance, so it was not easy to demonstrate that she earned enough every year to meet the minimum income requirement to be allowed to bring her husband to live in Scotland. She was getting there, however. She was building up her portfolio and excitedly looking forward to being permanently reunited with her husband. Then both her parents became ill, one of them very seriously with leukaemia. She did what she believed to be the right thing and moved in with them to care for them, but that decision to return the love and care that her parents had shown her as a child, and save the taxpayer thousands of pounds at the same time, means that she has had to reduce the amount of paid work that she does. In fact, yesterday she told my office that her mum had become very ill and in recent weeks she has earned nothing and relies on her husband to send money from Nigeria.

As the hon. Member for Strangford asked, can the income of the man currently supporting a British family not be counted towards the minimum income threshold? I ask that because the decision that Christine took to care for her parents in effect means that she may never be able to bring her husband here. I know that she is watching, so I am saying “may never”, because I hope that she will—and she could do with him right now. She could do with a helping hand with her parents and with someone looking after her from time to time. She could do with a hug from the man whom she loves and who loves her, but she is being denied that because she chose to care for her parents. Perhaps the Minister will offer to look into that case for me and consider making an exception in Christine’s case.

Do I have another few minutes, Ms Ryan?

Joan Ryan (in the Chair) indicated assent.

Anne McLaughlin: Great. I have an endless supply of these stories, as have other hon. Members, but I will not refer to them all. The people we talk of are not exceptions

The Government, as on many things, hide behind the idea that “Yes, that’s terrible, but it’s an exception to the rule; that sort of thing does not happen very often.” These people are not exceptions, because we hear about this all the time, and what is happening to them is definitely not acceptable.

When this debate came up, my office and media manager, Annette, went off and wrote much of this speech. I did not ask her to do that; she did it without asking. Why? Because she has recently divorced her husband after years of trying to get him here for even a visit—he did not want to come and live here, but wanted to visit and eventually she was going to go and live there. She could not even get him here for a visit, and it would have been years before she was able to go and live there. Failing that, they had no way of continuing their marriage. She knew that this country would never welcome her husband at any stage if it would not even allow him to come in for a visit. I remember well that he was rejected at one point because he had a job and then rejected at another time because he did not have a job.

Annette has a simple ask, which I share, and I am sure we all have the same ask. It is that we treat people as we expect to be treated ourselves. Most of us believe that being treated with respect, fairness and compassion is not too much to expect; it is not, but the fact that we seem unable to bring any of those basics to the process leaves me feeling embarrassed and, to be frank, utterly ashamed.

10.20 am

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Let me say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. We all commend you for the dedication you have shown, despite the challenges you faced this morning, in being here promptly to preside over this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on bringing forward this debate on an important subject. Any MP with any minority communities in their constituency will have experienced the unfairness of these rules.

We are here to discuss the fairness, practicality and justice of the maintenance funds requirements for spouse and partner visas. Sometimes people talk about these issues, in particular in the tabloid press, as though fairness and justice in relation to migrants is not a concern of the British people. However, I was outside No. 10 last night at the biggest demonstration on Whitehall that I have seen in 30 years as a Member of Parliament. Those people were concerned precisely about the fairness and justice of the way the new American President is treating migrants, such as the complete suspension of refugees entering the country and barring people from an arbitrarily chosen list of majority Muslim countries. Sudan is on the barred list but Saudi Arabia is not, where all the 9/11 terrorists came from but, by coincidence, President Trump still has business interests. The remarkable thing about that huge and, for the most part, good-natured demonstration was that the vast majority of people who had come to demonstrate at very short notice were not from the communities affected; they were British people concerned about fairness and justice in relation to migration.

Jim Shannon: I know the hon. Lady shares my annoyance and concern over the way the situation was handled.
People on planes landing at airports in the States were turned away because of a decision by the President. That is an example of the harshness from President Trump and is why people protested last night and we are having this debate today.

Ms Abbott: Exactly. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for showing how the demonstration corresponds with this morning’s debate. The issue is not just that they are seeking to tighten immigration rules in the United States, but the harshness, the unfairness and the arbitrary way of how it has been done. These maintenance funds requirements are another example of harshness and unfairness, and of not thinking through how the changes would operate in practice. I have no hesitation in saying that this policy and these maintenance funds requirements are impractical, unjust and counterproductive.

As other Members have reminded us, this issue is still before the courts. This is not just a question of Opposition MPs making all sorts of aspersions on Government policy. In July 2013 the High Court did not actually strike down the rules as unlawful in general, but did find that the way they are applied amounts to a disproportionate interference with family life in certain cases. Several Members have raised the issue of the interference of these rules in family life. In July 2014 the Court of Appeal allowed the Government’s appeal against the High Court decision. In May 2015 the Supreme Court granted permission to appeal against the Court of Appeal’s decision; it heard the appeal last year and is yet to hand down judgment.

We might think that, faced with court rulings saying that these maintenance funds requirements have a disproportionate effect on family life, any Government concerned about supporting family life might step back and review their operation. When all is said and done, however we define a husband and wife and however we define a family, strong families are one of the building blocks of our society. Whatever their concern about what the tabloid press says about immigrants on any given day, no Government should wilfully pursue policies that have the detrimental effect on family life that these maintenance requirements do.

Like many Members who have spoken, I deal with the practical consequences of these rules every week in my advice sessions. As we all appreciate, I have the difficult task of trying to explain to distraught husbands or wives that these rules exist and that because of someone’s country of origin, they face this arbitrary hindrance on family reunion. In June 2013, as other Members have mentioned, a report by the all-party group on migration called for an independent review of the requirement and its impact. The Government have yet to respond to that demand.

As we know, the policy requires non-European economic area visa applicants to have available funds equivalent to a minimum gross annual income of £18,600. It is inherently discriminatory because it requires a higher income threshold in cases that include non-EEA children. It is also discriminatory because in many cases only the British and settled visa sponsors’ employment income can be considered. It discriminates against women because their incomes tend to be lower, and effectively encourages family and partnership break up. As other Members have said, the Migration Observatory found that 28% of non-EEA men and 57% of non-EEA women did not meet the threshold. Consequently, the policy hits some ethnic groups harder than others, notably Pakistani and Bangladeshi applicants.

Mr Goodwill: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. Will she say what the official Labour party policy is on this issue? Would she reduce that figure or would she abandon it altogether?

Ms Abbott: We would do what so many people have asked the Government to do: review this policy and put in place rules that are fair, equitable and do not inevitably lead to the break-up of families.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Joan Ryan (in the Chair): Order. Can I just say that it is not acceptable for a Member to join the debate during the concluding speeches and to intervene?

Ms Abbott: The policy also discriminates against young people who have relatively low incomes. As has become clear in this debate, as a result of the impact on partnerships and families, these provisions may be in breach of fundamental human rights—the right to a family life—as they effectively split up families. The Minister asks, “What would a Labour Government do?” We certainly would not bring forward regulations that could put the Government in breach of the European convention on human rights.

As we have heard from Members from all parts of the United Kingdom, the policy discriminates regionally. Some 30% of British employees in London do not earn enough to sponsor a non-EEA spouse, and that rises to 49% for those in Yorkshire and Humberside while 51% do not earn enough in Northern Ireland—of course in Scotland it is even worse. I will say, as a London Member, that although it is relatively easier for London migrants to hit that income threshold, it is not easy in communities such as Hackney.

Simon Danczuk: The truth is that the policy discriminates against people who have less money—not against poorer people. That is the simple fact of the matter, is it not?

Ms Abbott: This policy is nakedly discriminatory against poorer people. What sort of migration rules say that the poor do not have the same right to family life as the wealthy? That seems contrary to British values, as I think both parties could agree.

It is relatively easier for London migrants to meet the income thresholds, but meeting them is not at all easy in the poorer parts of London. The rules cause a lot of misery and unhappiness and result in unnecessary splits in families, as hon. Members have described. I have always been in favour of an open and frank debate on migration, but I worry about a growing callousness in how we debate the issue. It tends to the conclusion that migrants are not people like us and that they do not have feelings for their family like we do, so the importance of their family to them can then be disregarded. How can it be right that people are separated from their husbands, wives and children by the Government’s regulations?

The Home Office impact assessment estimated that more than £660 million would be saved over 10 years. Anyone who is concerned about the taxpayer has to
step back when confronted with that, but that assessment has been disputed by research from Middlesex University, which says that the Government assessment takes no account of the reduced level of employment and therefore the reduced taxes as a result of discouraging both sponsors and their spouses from staying. Middlesex University estimates that the policy could cost the UK £850 million over 10 years.

In conclusion, it is long past time that we moved away from a deficit analysis of immigration that always focuses on the harms and the cost to the public purse. That has happened to such an extent that we have to make a set of rules that are contrary in principle, if not in practice, to the idea of the importance of family life. We all want, as do all our constituents—even those from migrant backgrounds—fair rules and the reasonable management of migration. Nobody doubts that, but we seem to be moving step by step into a realm of callousness, unfairness and injustice, which is counter-productive to building a good society. As many other institutions have done, I urge the Government to review how the rules work and to replace them with a set of fair regulations on income that reflect the overall impact of migration on society, which is actually a positive one. Doing so would mean that we would not have to hear any more of the tragic stories that we have heard this morning of families who are arbitrarily separated by a set of unfair and ill-thought-out rules.

10.33 am

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), and indeed the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), on securing the debate. I intend to leave some time for the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East to conclude.

I will seek to respond to the points that hon. Members have made. We welcome people who wish to make a life in the UK with their family, to work hard and to make a contribution. However, family life should not be established here at the taxpayer’s expense and all migrants, including those who are joining family, must be able to integrate into our communities.

The immigration rules for spouses and other partners were strengthened in the last Parliament. They have three aims. First, they tackle abuse. The minimum probationary period before partners can apply for settlement is now five years rather than two, which is a better test of the genuineness of the relationship. It deters applications based on sham marriages and the criminals who seek to profit from them.

Secondly, the rules promote integration. The minimum income threshold for sponsoring a partner ensures that they can take part in everyday life to facilitate their integration into British society. Being able to speak English is also essential and helps migrants to participate in the community and find work. That is why the rules require a partner to be able to speak basic English, at level A1, before they can come here, and to speak intermediate English, at level B1, and to pass the “Life in the UK” test before they can qualify for settlement.

**Ms Abbott:** We all share the Government’s concern that people should be able to speak English. However, if the Government are really concerned, why have they cut funding for English as a second language? Why have they cut the funding available to local authorities that were helping to provide that English training, often in the context of schools or other institutions?

**Mr Goodwill:** People have to get an English qualification at level A1 in their country before they come here. I represented Yorkshire in the European Parliament, and having represented many of the communities there, I know the disadvantage that many children face when they start school—perhaps second or third-generation English-born children—if they do not speak English as their first language. Having that ability in English is absolutely vital not only for the integration of spouses, but for enabling children to progress in life. That is why we set these levels and why, from 1 May 2017, we are introducing a new English language requirement for partners applying for further leave after two and a half years in the UK on a five-year route to settlement. That will require them to progress to A2 level from the A1 level required on entry.

Thirdly, the rules seek to prevent burdens on the taxpayer. That is achieved through the minimum income threshold of £18,600 a year to be met by those wishing to sponsor a partner to come or remain here, with higher thresholds for also sponsoring dependent, non-EEA national children. It is right that those wishing to establish their family life here must be able to stand on their own feet financially. That is the basis for sustainable family immigration and for good integration outcomes.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** The Minister argues that migrants coming here should stand on their own two feet, so why will he not take into account their potential earnings when they go out of their way to show that that is exactly what they intend to do?

**Mr Goodwill:** That point was raised in the debate, including by the hon. Gentleman’s Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin). Employment income from the migrant partner will not count towards a minimum income threshold. We will not take into account the previous, current or prospective earnings, or any job offer of the migrant partner, when they apply for entry clearance to come to the UK. Employment overseas is no guarantee of finding work in the UK. Partners coming to the UK with an appropriate job offer can apply under tier 2 of the points-based system. Those using the family route to come to the UK must be capable of being independently supported by their sponsor or by their joint savings or non-employment income. When a migrant partner is in the UK with permission to work, we will take their earnings from employment here into account.

As I was saying about the rules relating to the £18,600 threshold, it is right that those wishing to establish their life here can stand on their own feet financially. The previous requirement for “adequate” maintenance meant that any sponsor earning, after tax and housing costs had been deducted, more than the equivalent of income support for a couple—around £5,700 a year—was deemed to have sufficient funds to sponsor a partner. That was not an adequate basis for sustainable family integration.
and provided little assurance that couples could support themselves over the long term. That is why the minimum income threshold for sponsoring family migrants was introduced as part of the reforms of the family immigration rules implemented in July 2012.

Simon Danczuk: The Minister made the point that he has represented parts of northern England. Does he not accept that the threshold discriminates against people in the north of England, such as those in Rochdale and other towns and cities?

Mr Goodwill: I am coming to precisely that point. We have heard the Migration Advisory Committee described in glowing terms in this debate, and I pay tribute to the work it does and the analysis it undertakes before reaching its conclusions. Its report, published in November 2011, recommended that the threshold for a couple should be set between £18,600, the level at which a couple settled in the UK generally ceases to be able to access income-related benefits, and £25,700, the level at which the sponsor becomes a net contributor to the public finances by paying more in tax than they consume in public services. The lower figure of £18,600 was chosen, partly because of the points made about incomes being lower in other parts of the country.

Jim Shannon: I suggest respectfully and gently to the Minister that we need to consider regional variations in relation to that figure. In my contribution I referred to myself and those I know in Scotland. The threshold should fall to £15,000. I think that that is the figure we should consider for regional variations; it would adequately enable people to live in my constituency and across Northern Ireland.

Mr Goodwill: I appreciate the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. The provisional annual survey of hours and earnings data shows that gross median earnings among all employees in 2016 were £23,099 for the UK as a whole, but they exceeded £18,600 in every country and region of the UK—in Scotland the figure was £22,918, and in Ulster it was £20,953. Incidentally, for Yorkshire and the Humber, my own region, the figure was £21,235.

That income threshold, and the higher thresholds if children are sponsored, means that the family will generally be unable to access income-related benefits once the partner and any children qualify for settlement and thereby gain full access to the welfare system. That is a fair basis for family immigration that is right for migrants, local communities and the UK as a whole.

The Migration Advisory Committee also considered the case for setting a different level of income threshold by country and region of the UK. It noted, for example, that a requirement that varied by region could lead to sponsors moving to a lower threshold area in order to meet the requirement before returning after a visa was granted, and that a family living in a wealthy part of a relatively poor region could be subject to a lower income requirement than a family living in a deprived area of a relatively wealthy region. The MAC could therefore see no clear case for differentiation in the level of the minimum income threshold between UK countries and regions, and the Government agree. A single national threshold also provides clarity and simplicity for applicants, sponsors and caseworkers.

Anne McLaughlin: Surely the Minister understands that, regardless of what average earnings are, we get to the average by having lots of people who earn more and lots of people who earn less. What about the people who earn less and will never be in a position to reach £18,600? Why should their husband or wife not be able to come and live with them here, in the country of which they are a citizen?

Mr Goodwill: Basically, the argument behind it, to which the Migration Advisory Committee also subscribed, was that there should not be a burden on the taxpayer. The levels have been set so that people will not be liable to claim benefits. The hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), speaking from the Labour Front Bench, discussed challenges in court, as did other Members. The Government’s position on this issue has been supported all the way through the courts, which is why we are now at the Supreme Court, the last point of appeal.

I will touch on one or two points made during the debate. The hon. Member for Inverclyde mentioned third-party support. Promises of financial support from family and other third parties cannot be counted against the minimum income threshold. We want the couple to demonstrate that they can stand on their own feet financially, with adequate resources that are under their own control and not somebody else’s. Promises of support from a third party are vulnerable to a change in another person’s circumstances or in the sponsor or applicant’s relationship with them.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde also raised the issue of fees. Income from application fees helps provide the resources necessary to operate the immigration system, with the remainder currently provided through general taxation. In the recent spending review, the Home Office set out its objective to work towards a border, immigration and citizenship system that is fully user-funded by 2019-20. The recent fee increase reflects this objective. Fees are set above cost recovery to reflect the administrative cost of processing an application and the benefits arising to those granted leave. It is right that fees are charged directly to users of the immigration system who benefit directly from the services provided.

Simon Danczuk: The Minister is doing an exceptionally good job of reading out the policy, but does he accept from all the examples given by various Members of Parliament and many others who deal with such applications that the system does not work and continually falls over for individual constituents?

Mr Goodwill: I am certainly more than happy to become personally involved if there are cases where we have not applied the rules correctly. Sometimes we make mistakes—sometimes documents are lost in transmission, for example. I know that the civil servants working in the Home Office who provide support to MPs are assiduous in ensuring that any mistakes that we make are quickly rectified and that the people involved are not put at a disadvantage.
Anne McLaughlin: I mentioned Christine, my constituent, who is now unable to meet the minimum income threshold because both of her elderly parents are sick and she is their carer. She is saving this country thousands of pounds. Probably the correct rules were applied, so I am asking the Minister not to do what he has offered to do—intervene when the rules have been applied incorrectly—but to consider making an exception in the case of Christine, who could do with her husband being here and who has selflessly given up the potential to earn enough money in order to look after her parents. Will he consider looking into her case and making an exception?

Mr Goodwill: I will certainly consider the case, and I would welcome a meeting with the hon. Lady so that she can explain it in more detail.

Under the rules, the income from employment of the UK-based sponsor can be counted in one of two ways. The person must show either that they have received the level of income relied on from employment held for at least six months at the date of application, or that they are currently in employment earning that level of annual income and have earned that amount from all employment undertaken in the previous 12 months. That provides some flexibility for those who change employment. It also gives us some assurance that the person is qualified for and can hold down employment at the level of income relied on. We otherwise risk being presented with applications based on earnings that do not accurately reflect the employment capacity of the person concerned. In order to maintain the integrity of the system for all applicants and sponsors, we need rules in place to prevent that.

The rules also take into account a wide range of other sources of income for the couple and their cash savings. Since July 2012, many changes have been made to the rules to enable more sources of income and savings to be counted and to introduce more flexibility on the required evidence. For example, cash savings, which previously must be held for at least six months prior to the date of application to help show that they are under the couple’s control, can now include proceeds from the sale, within that six-month period, of a property or investments owned by them.

The rules do not take into account the employment prospects of the migrant partner or a job offer to them, as I mentioned; employment overseas is no guarantee of finding work in the UK. However, when they get here, they can contribute to the family income and meet the rules in that way. The couple can rely on accommodation provided by a third party. The minimum income threshold reflects average rent, so that the couple can be expected to make their own arrangements later if need be. The immigration rules for spouses and partners have been upheld as lawful by the courts.

I was looking forward to hearing what the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson would have to say on behalf of the official Opposition. I had rather hoped that she would fill some of the vacuum that seems to be Labour’s immigration policy at the moment. She talked a lot about US immigration policy and criticised our policy, but she failed miserably to propose concrete alternatives that would be operable and maintain our wish to counter those who seek to exploit the UK with sham marriages. Hopefully things will become clear at some point between now and the next election.

Jim Shannon: In my contribution, I asked the Minister a question, which I think I saw him take note of, about those who are applying to come to the United Kingdom. Can their income in the countries they work in be part of the equation? I ask him to look at that and, if necessary, come back to me and to all hon. Members present with an answer in writing.

Mr Goodwill: I am happy to have another look at that rule but, as I have already mentioned, the fact that a person has a job abroad is no guarantee of employment here in the UK. However, if that person arrives in the UK and works, their income contributes to the family income and will be taken into account.

We continue to keep the immigration rules for spouses and partners and their impact under review. There were 28,443 partner visas granted in the year ending September 2016—a decrease of 26% from the 38,355 partner visas granted in the year ending September 2010. Our overall assessment is that the current rules are having the right impact and are helping to restore public confidence in the immigration system. I am grateful to have had the chance to hear the views of hon. Members on these issues.

Stuart C. McDonald: I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. They have made some incredibly powerful and heartfelt contributions on a whole range of troubling issues, including the ridiculous income threshold, the crazy evidential requirements that too many applicants have to meet, the cost of applications and the processes involved—we could even throw in the ridiculous appeal times that too many people face. There is also a chicken and egg situation with visit visas: people are refused a spouse visa because they are a few hundred pounds short of the financial threshold, and when they apply instead for a visit a month later, they are denied it because the Home Office does not think that they will leave again. It really is a horrible situation, and too many people are left in it.

The Minister is a very engaging chap: he is always open to meetings, and I absolutely respect him for that. He inherited these rules—that is his unfortunate position—and he has done his best to defend them, but the Government’s arguments are indefensible. Once again, they are operating at the extreme—other Governments are not doing this. What is more, the Government are completely out of tune with public opinion on the issue. If you went out into the street right now, Ms Ryan, you would struggle to find anyone who thought that an £18,600 threshold was a reasonable way to calculate who should be allowed to come and join their family here. Most people would find it totally outrageous that somebody’s job offer or potential earnings could not be taken into account towards the target.

These rules are, essentially, the Prime Minister’s; she introduced them and she made these migrants subject to the net migration target. What does it say about the Government that they have an official target that encourages the Home Office to pursue and implement policies that reduce the number of husbands, wives, children and parents able to come into this country? That is little short of appalling and shocking. I hope that the Minister or the Home Secretary will take away the powerful
Like other hon. Members here today, I think that the rules need to be fundamentally rewritten. I will make one final ask of the Minister: will he think again about the refusal to take applicants’ prospective earnings into account? A commitment was made in Parliament, not by the Minister’s immediate predecessor but by the incumbent before that, to look at that again. It is the most ridiculous of all the rules, and I hope that it, at least, can be looked at anew.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered immigration rules for spouses and partners.
know that there are west midlands programmes, but our reaction to them is often a little borough-specific rather than cross-borough.

My office has organised a petition, which I will present to the House shortly and which will indicate the strength of feeling in my constituency about the reroutings. As a result of our efforts, some temporary bus stops have been installed closer to the station, but while that eases the inconvenience for people who can easily walk the rest of the way, it does not solve the problem for elderly and disabled people.

The route shift started as a trial, apparently because congestion around the station was causing regular delays, but I have since been told that it will be staying in place. Obviously nobody likes it when a bus is delayed, but surely operators should try to find more realistic timetables for accessible routes, rather than making their services more difficult to use for those who need them most. I have had representations about that from many people in my constituency who have disabilities.

Another service in my constituency, the S11, has also been redesigned in the name of efficiency without proper care having been taken to protect the interests of its users. The S11 and a couple of connecting services have been shortened to save money and make them more reliable, but they now bypass several residential areas: Hampton Lane, School Lane and Grove Road, which now have no direct connection to the wider public transport network. Once again, that is not the end of the world for someone who can easily walk to the new stops, but it creates much more serious problems for less mobile residents. I myself have had a difficult experience of late: an unfortunate accident meant that I was unable to cover any real distance by walking. It gave me a real insight into the difficulties that come from just trying to cover short distances. Unfortunately, Transport for West Midlands has told me that it cannot act, as the route is privately run.

The S11 situation highlights how much privately run services depend on a good and responsible operator. Unlike National Express, the company running the S11 route, Diamond, has been very difficult to engage with. That is a key point. At least National Express has been willing to talk to and engage with a parliamentarian—myself—and with local councillors and the wider community. However, I have genuine concerns about Diamond. I have been lucky to get a single response out of the company, despite having written to it about residents’ concerns at least 10 times. I am also sorry to say that when Diamond ran a consultation—a fact-find, if you like—on this issue, it chose to do so on a Saturday morning, a time when the elderly residents to whom the bus service is so important use it much less than they do during the week.

All of that suggests that Diamond is more interested in tick-boxing the boxes than in engaging seriously with users’ concerns. I will clearly name Diamond and say that at this moment in time it is effectively failing the people of Solihull, in the provision of services and—more crucially—in these key consultations and fact-finds.

My team and I are still taking action. I have written about this issue several times in the local press and we are distributing hundreds of leaflets about petitions, to make sure that people have an opportunity to make their views known. If Diamond will not do this consultation, I will try to do it for Diamond, and I will present the results to Diamond at every given opportunity. When the operator refuses to engage and is not accountable to any public authority for its decisions, it is really an uphill battle for local communities to put across their views and concerns.

That such small changes to just two routes could have these effects highlights how important local bus services are to some of the less mobile, and often less visible, members of our community. I have no reason to doubt that every bus route in my constituency goes through neighbourhoods where people depend on it to provide a vital link to the rest of the town. When neighbourhoods lose their link to the wider community, it is not just those neighbourhoods that lose out; local businesses lose customers or potential employees, while sports teams, social clubs and charities have fewer members and volunteers.

That is another important point. In Solihull, we rely on a sea of volunteering. I was at a dinner the other night where I was told that up to 800 charities are based in Solihull. I run a scheme—a “points of light” scheme—to recognise those groups. If someone is volunteering, by definition they are doing so for free, but they need to get to their place of volunteering, and it is much more difficult for them to do so if the buses and the wider transport links are not in place.

A better connected community is better for everybody in it, and we all have a stake in making sure that our town is as accessible as possible. That is why it is so important that bus services are run well, and that those who run them are accountable to the people who use them.

I am not one to get misty-eyed about the prospect of the Government running services directly, or one to hark back in time. A good operator can often move more quickly than other bodies to put things right when there is a problem. I mentioned National Express earlier, showing the company in a poor light, but one area where it has engaged with people is in redesigning the timetable of the No. 31 bus after I wrote to say how schoolchildren were being left to wait at the school gates for 45 minutes for a bus home, which I believe was also a very serious safety issue. National Express took that on board and actually made the correct changes to the timetable.

We must always make sure that operators live up to high standards, are responsible, and are responsive to local concerns when they make decisions about routes and timetables. The networks that they run bind our communities together, and their profits—and, yes, the convenience of sprightly bus users—cannot be their only considerations. Basically, we need to work from a base of considering those who are least mobile and who need bus services the most in order to get around.

11.4 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): Thank you very much, Ms Ryan, for calling me to speak. I think that this is the first time I have served under your chairmanship.

I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) on securing this debate about bus services in Solihull. I can assure him that I am very keen to support his aim of improving those services.
My hon. Friend eloquently described just how important buses are to communities. They are indeed a “lifeline” and without them it would be impossible for many people to get to work, to access public services, including health or education services, or simply to go shopping or socialising. I was particularly struck by his points about the amount of volunteering that takes place within Solihull, that volunteers need transport to do their volunteering and that our communities all benefit from the work of volunteers.

It is important to note that more than half of those people who rely on bus services outside London do not have access to a car. Buses play a vital role in our economy; with 4.4 billion passenger journeys last year, buses are by far the most popular form of public transport. They are way ahead of rail in terms of passenger journeys.

Customer satisfaction with bus journeys is very high, with 86% of passengers satisfied with their service. That picture is consistent across the country and it has been so for many years. Under-21s make up about a third of bus passengers and bus use among older people is increasing as a result of the national concessionary fares scheme. So buses are critical across the country, as my hon. Friend articulated when speaking about Solihull.

It is because of their importance that we are committed to improving bus services, and expenditure on buses reflects that. I will make a couple of comments about support for buses as a whole and then I will make some suggestions, specifically to respond to the points raised by my hon. Friend. I just want to put the comments that have been made into some perspective.

This year, the Government will spend more than £1 billion on the concessionary travel entitlement, and my Department provides more than £240 million in direct subsidy to bus operators and local authorities in England, to help them to deliver local services. Bus services in England outside London are deregulated and it is indeed for commercial operators to determine how, where and when their services operate. About 80% of the bus services in our country operate in this way. Local authorities have powers to subsidise services that are not commercially viable but which they consider socially necessary. Again, however, that is a local decision and it is up to local authorities to decide which services they will fund.

Local bus services must also be registered with the traffic commissioner who has responsibility for such services. The commissioner can take enforcement action against an operator if its service does not run reliably.

Julian Knight: The Minister is obviously making some very good points, but much of this process relies on a two-way engagement. Unfortunately, I have found that often there is only a one-way engagement; the operator says what will happen and it happens.

Andrew Jones: I agree that communication must be two-way; if it is not two-way, then it really is not communication. So my hon. Friend is correct about that and I will say a little more about engagement in a moment.

A traffic commissioner can take enforcement action if an operator does not operate its service reliably. Nevertheless, whoever provides bus services, it is important that operators and local authorities ensure that the interests of passengers, and consequently the interests of the wider community, are taken into account when any changes to bus services are being considered.

I also agree with my hon. Friend that good customer service includes proper consultation. He mentioned that a consultation event took place on a Saturday morning. That would have suited some people, who might be at work during the week, but it will not have suited everybody. A company must ensure that it engages everybody—all those who will be affected by any changes—in a proper consultation, and then take any concerns into account.

Passenger Focus has produced best practice guidance on how a company should consult when it makes changes to local bus services. It includes four key principles: collate, which basically means that the company should formulate its proposals; consult, which means the company must consider when to consult, what to consult on, who to ask and how to carry the consultation out, making sure that it captures all the local information; consideration, which means the company must go through and assess all the responses properly; and communicate, which means the company must communicate its decision to all those who are affected. So collate, consult, consider and communicate—happily alliterative, which I am sure is no coincidence. The basic principles are clear and the bus companies should be operating them, up and down our country. I urge all bus companies and anyone making or considering making a change to bus services to follow that excellent guidance and adopt those principles.

Craig Tracey: I take on board the Minister’s point, but those are best practice principles and in many cases that is not what is happening. Does he accept that? For example, the 116 route in Kingsbury was pulled with the minimum amount of notice, which left my constituents unable to get to work because there was no alternative service.

Andrew Jones: I indeed accept my hon. Friend’s good point. He has raised this issue as a vigorous champion for his area on several occasions. When we do not see that best practice happening we are right to hold bus companies to account, in representation of our communities. That is our job here. We must stand up for people who need bus services and who, although they do not necessarily have the sharpest elbows, must have their voices listened to.

My Department, and through it the Government as a whole, is taking action to support transport within communities in many other areas, and I would like to mention a couple of them that will, I think, be of interest. At present, each year about £2 billion of public funding for transport services is provided by a number of agencies. For example, we have the £250 million a year that is spent on the bus service operators grant, which the Department for Transport provides to bus operators, local authorities and community transport organisations on the basis of the amount of fuel consumed—a pence per litre rebate. The Department for Communities and Local Government provides £317 million a year to local authorities to support socially necessary bus services. The £1 billion a year spent on home-to-school transport is provided to local authorities by DCLG. The £150 million a year spent on non-emergency patient transport is provided by the NHS to individual local clinical commissioning groups.
The idea involves: avoiding the duplication of commissioned services; allowing networks to be designed so that they complement each other; reducing administrative costs, potentially by centralising commissioning; enabling the skills of professional staff, such as those who are scheduling services; allowing networks to be deployed across all the services; and, most importantly of course, achieving overall cost efficiencies, and through that ensuring that services are more viable and that a better footprint of travel and transport is available to our constituents. We have been running 37 pilots on the idea for almost two years. I have met with some of the operators around the country and it is heartening to see the enthusiasm with which they are participating and taking on the opportunities. That is happening across the country and will be of much interest to colleagues.

A further area that always attracts interest from colleagues is the community transport sector. Providing transport solutions also requires the effective use of all options, and this could be relevant to the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Solihull and for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey). It could be a traditional fixed-route bus service, a community bus, a dial-a-ride or another type of demand-responsive transport, such as taxis. The role played by community transport operators is vital in linking individuals and communities to existing transport networks, work, education, shops and services.

In recognition of that contribution and important role, the Government launched a £25 million community minibuses in round one of the community minibus scheme—we have had delivery of more than 200 already. We have been able to secure funding for a further round, applications to which closed in December. The Community Transport Association UK is working with the Department for Transport to make that scheme available for us. That is an additional £2 million to provide a further set of vehicles for these impressive organisations.

The bus market is a deregulated one, and it has not changed much in its regulatory form for many years. However, the Bus Services Bill has completed its journey through the upper House and will shortly enter our Chamber. The deregulated market for buses has worked very well for much of our country, but we must recognise that in some areas it has not always responded effectively to the changing needs of the population or taken passenger needs properly into account. That has resulted in insufficient service co-ordination and sometimes poor ticket integration and ineffective on-road competition.

I want to build on the success of the bus market and the strong companies that are out there working to deliver buses, but I want to encourage more people to use them. The Bus Services Bill is designed to put more passengers on to buses. When we set about drafting the Bill that was the aim we had in mind—to improve services and increase passenger numbers. The Bill provides tools that will help local authorities to achieve that aim. It is an enabling Bill that will create a suite of powers to allow local authorities and combined authorities to choose what is right for their area. The powers include new and enhanced partnership provisions, which will allow local authorities to work with bus companies to agree their own standards for services in an area. That is the model that is most likely to be adopted.

When I have talked to councils and combined authorities around the country, they have been very tuned in to the Bill and to the opportunities it presents. Nearly all of them have focused strongly on how partnership will be able to improve their services. That is pretty likely, because when we look at the bus market and at which bits of it are growing strongly, it tends to be those areas where we have good effective partnership between the entrepreneurial spirit and determination regarding customer service that we see from so many bus operators, and the effective planning and co-ordination that can come from local authorities.

I recognise that partnerships will not necessarily be the best solution everywhere. In some cases, the market will be working well and nothing will need to change. If it is not broken, it does not need to be fixed, and there is an opportunity for the status quo to continue in the Bill. In some areas, we intend to allow local authorities, particularly combined authorities, to use new powers to franchise bus services in their areas—like the system in London. Franchising will enable authorities to specify the services that passengers want and to deliver an integrated network of services. Private operators will compete for contracts and deliver those services. It is not a suspension of the market, because competition would move from the kerbside to the tender. That will be a feature of the bus market in a couple of areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull detailed how he has communicated with his local bus company, Diamond, but not had the response he desired. That is not acceptable. As he has built a reputation here as a vigorous champion for his area in general and for buses in particular, it is more than fair to say that he should get an adequate response from important local providers.
I will write to Diamond’s parent company, to say that we have discussed the issue in the House, that we regret the level of engagement locally and that we ask it to sort it out.

I have been to Birmingham to meet the West Midlands Bus Alliance. I attended the launch of the Swift card, and I have my Swift card here. I have no doubt that local authorities in the area see buses as a key part of public transport provision. They are champions for buses. I have been most encouraged, hearing about their transport plans and how they want to work together. The outlook is positive, I hope—I have been encouraged by their work so far—but I will highlight my hon. Friend’s concerns to them to ensure that they are sighted on the issue, too.

In summary, I hope I have been able to demonstrate that the Government are committed to maintaining and improving bus services in all areas. We are taking an imaginative approach to the co-ordination of public services. We are supporting services through extra Government grants and working to bring forward a regulatory regime that will enable greater planning and greater co-ordination, all of which will put the bus customer at the heart of the marketplace. We want to see bus services thrive, whether in the largest cities or the most rural villages. The point is that buses matter, and we want to see more people using them to ensure we get all the benefits that my hon. Friends have so clearly articulated.

Question put and agreed to.

11.22 am

Sitting suspended.

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Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered future operation of the Severn Bridges.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Davies. I welcome the select band of hon. Friends who are here today, while other business is on in the main Chamber.

On 13 January the Government announced their consultation on the future management of the Severn bridges. We were promised it in the autumn, with the Government saying it would be about a year to go until the handover, but better late than never. I have called this debate in part to recognise that the Government have moved some way towards recognising how hard hit we in south Wales have been by the level of tolls, although they have not gone far enough—I will move on to that later—but also, crucially, to get more clarity from the Minister on what the Government are planning when, at long last, the Severn bridges concession ends.

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a critical stage to get this right for the future. Given the inflexibility of the 1992 legislation, it is important that we scrutinise the plans now and future-proof them so that we will not need to unpick things in years to come, for example because we had not thought about vehicle categories. That is a very important point. We must be able to shape the new regime for the benefit of our constituents and businesses. I agree that we will want to get that right.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is the moment to have a strategic plan? Action on the inequity of the tolls is long overdue, but we also need to look at the future of the jobs for those who work in the toll booths and at the general management of traffic, bearing in mind the proximity of the Brynglas tunnels. There has to be a strategic approach.

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a critical stage to get this right for the future. Given the inflexibility of the 1992 legislation, it is important that we scrutinise the plans now and future-proof them so that we will not need to unpick things in years to come, for example because we had not thought about vehicle categories. That is a very important point. We must be able to shape the new regime for the benefit of our constituents and businesses. I agree that we will want to get that right.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate again; she has had many debates on the topic and I have made the same observation, but I want to say it again. Does she agree that the need to get this right for the business community extends way beyond south Wales to the west of Wales, mid-Wales and the north as well? It is critical that we get this right for businesses right across the country.

Jessica Morden: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; this issue has ramifications for the whole economy of Wales, in south Wales and beyond, including his constituency. I thank him for being here today and for making that point.
Jessica Morden: Getting more clarity about the direction of travel is important for my constituents who commute, the businesses that do business across the bridges and those who work on the bridges. In recent years those people have had to suffer the highest toll in the UK, and commuters have just had to absorb the annual increases, however unfair they are. Constituents have had to turn down job offers because the toll is equivalent to nearly an hour on the minimum wage. Just this morning I received an email from a constituent, who said:

“The tolls add a considerable amount to the cost of travel to Bristol, where a lot of attractive jobs for young graduates like myself exist. Many of my friends who have graduated from university recently and are looking for a job fail to look at Bristol because in my opinion, the toll gives...the impression that Bristol is out of reach, even though in actual fact, travel time is not much more than to Cardiff.”

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for securing this debate and for the campaigning she has done on the issue, along with so many of us. She is absolutely right to mention Bristol. I have heard again and again from businesses and individuals in my constituency who trade across the Severnside area, particularly in the creative industries. We have people working in the BBC drama village in Cardiff Bay and the BBC natural history unit in Bristol. Does my hon. Friend agree that sorting out the tolls is absolutely crucial to growing and strengthening that creative economy?

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend is right. House prices in Bristol mean that more and more people are choosing to live in Severnside, Monmouthshire and Newport and to commute. Our local economy is interlinked with Cardiff, but also with Bristol. It is incredibly important that we do all we can to support that growth.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and making a powerful argument for reducing the tolls across the Severn to Bristol. Does she agree that we must also improve train services between east Wales, Bristol and the west country? That would also help jobs in our area.

Jessica Morden: I thank my hon. Friend. He anticipates a point that I was going to make later in my speech about cross-border travel and the capacity of our rail services for those who commute to Bristol and beyond, which is clearly inadequate. When we are looking at tolls, we need to consider the wider picture and take a more holistic view of our transport networks.

Businesses, especially those in logistics and the provision of services, are trying to compete with firms in the south-west that do not have to factor in the toll, and they are losing out. Some businesses in my constituency are hit by up to half a million pounds a year, which just has to come off the bottom line. At present there are no effective discounts or incentives for off-peak travel. The tolls have to come off the bottom line. At present there are no effective discounts or incentives for off-peak travel. The toll revenue for operations, maintenance and debt repayment. The Minister will be aware that there is a strong consensus in the Welsh Assembly, the Welsh Government and among many users of the bridges that the tolls should be scrapped altogether, not least because removing them would boost productivity in Wales by up to £100 million, as a recent Welsh Government study has shown. Tolls represent an unfair tax. In an ideal world the UK Government would pay for the maintenance, not the people and businesses of Wales, particularly after such a lengthy period with such eye-watering tolls.

Scraping the tolls would be a symbolic move, especially with the uncertainty around Brexit. It would be helpful to hear from the Government why they have not included that option in the consultation. I am sure that many people would like to back it. I hope that the consultation is a true one, not just a paper exercise, and that the Government have an open mind on it.

Mr Mark Williams: The hon. Lady touches on a point of principle there. The people of Wales pay taxes the same as everyone else. That money goes towards road repairs right across the country, so why should the people of Wales in effect pay twice?

Jessica Morden: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which I will come to later when I talk about the debt that the Government say they have to recoup. That is interesting, given the money they have recouped in the past from other sources.

The Minister will say that halving the tolls will allow people of Wales in effect pay twice?
a lifestyle choice—a very good choice, as it is an absolutely wonderful place to live. In response, the UK and Welsh Governments need to work on a holistic transport plan that includes the metro, and the Government must help to make up the shortfall from the loss of EU funds. While I am being parochial, the Government should support a new station bid for Magor and provide greater rail capacity, especially on the commuter services from Newport and the Severn tunnel junction, which have been dubbed the “sardine express”—I have had debates on that in the past—and the Welsh Government should look at the matters that are devolved.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way. I agree with her point about rail. I and others have been campaigning for a new station at St Mellons Parkway—I hope the Minister will be listening closely, because the decision is going to be taken—and for funding for the south Wales metro. Does she agree that the tolls are not only a tax but a time penalty for Welsh residents, because unlike the Dartford crossing and the M6 toll, which have much faster technology—Dartford has got free flow—we do not have free flow or the faster toll technology on the bridge?

Jessica Morden: I absolutely agree, and I will come to the issue of free flow later. The fastest transaction at the moment is the TAG, which takes six seconds, but there is further scope for helping with congestion.

Will the Minister tell us where the figure quoted in the public consultation of a 17% traffic increase over 10 years has come from? How much of that will be in the first year? In fact, it would be particularly helpful if he could publish all the research that the Government have commissioned on traffic modelling in relation to the end of the concessions and the traffic flows. I know that all hon. Members would be grateful for that.

If, as the consultation indicates, the Government decide to continue tolling, the toll level should not exceed the cost of operating the two bridges. Severn River Crossing collects about £90 million-plus each year, and that is going up. Maintenance and operation costs are between £13 million and £15 million. Based on a rough, back-of-the-envelope calculation, that requires a toll of about £1, which means the Government will still be charging three times more for cars and 10 times more for lorries. The Government argue that they will have to recoup a £60 million debt for fixing defects but, as the Welsh Affairs Committee has documented, they have done very well out of the bridges so far: the Treasury has received £154 million-plus since 2005 in unexpected VAT—more than enough to cover the debt and undertake the resurfacing work, which the Government value at £12 million, with a lot left over.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), why do we have to pay for resurfacing on this stretch of road out of bridge tolls, when for any other stretch of road the cost is taken out of general taxation?

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. On that point, if one of the many other bridges in the UK failed—God forbid—it would be repaired by the Department for Transport. Does she agree that the Government should be responsible for repairing both Severn bridges?

Jessica Morden: I agree with my hon. Friend—I agree with everyone. That is clearly something the Government should take on board. Given that they have absorbed the VAT charges into the general Treasury coffers, surely we should be dipping into the Treasury’s coffers to pay for the resurfacing work.

The Government have recouped a substantial pot of money. We should not forget that they wiped £150 million of debt from the Humber bridge. Wales deserves the same. Has the Minister estimated the date by which the outstanding Government debt will be paid off? I understand that, under their current plans, it could take 18 months. Is their intention to reduce tolls at that point to reflect that?

Will the Minister tell us how the Government calculated the £3 figure? There is no rationale for how it was reached, and it would be really helpful to have a breakdown to know how the tolls will be spent. Will the Minister confirm what ongoing method will be used to calculate the tolls in future? The consultation does not make that clear, and we need to know how the Department for Transport will assess the tolls annually, because we have suffered years of annual increases.

It is also crucial that we know from the Government when the new tolling regime will come into force. We are currently no clearer about the expected timing of the handover of the crossings. It is anticipated that the revenue target will be met in October, and that the actual transfer of services will occur at some stage after that. What is the current plan? It is important that we get clarity about the handover period and know when the bridges are formally to be run by the Department for Transport. If there is a gap, and VAT comes off the bridges but the tolls remain at the current level, there will potentially be a period when businesses that claim back their VAT will, in effect, have to pay more. Have the Government given any thought to that?

The Department for Transport said that it is a year to go until handover. When does it expect that date to be? Does that mean, for instance, that if the formal handover has not taken place by January 2018, we will have to endure yet another retail prices index increase next year?

The mention of free flow is welcome, but many will be disappointed that it may not be seen for some years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) said, the main benefit is the reduction in journey times and congestion. Although free flow is clearly a future consideration, I ask for two things: first, that under free flow the tolls will not go up for a return journey; and secondly, that all back-office functions for dealing with evasion and administration should be sited locally. It would be an advantage for free flow if those who carry out the back-office functions know the local area and the local issues. Will the Minister give us some clarity about the Government’s current estimate of the costs of free flow?

Free flow will be looked at in future, but what thought has been given to improving the TAG? It is the fastest current form of payment—it takes about six seconds—but it is important to improve it if we are to tackle congestion. Severn River Crossing has made strenuous efforts to promote the TAG, and nearly 30% of users now use that method of payment, but only an improved season TAG discount and a first-time trip TAG discount beyond a halving of the toll will materially affect TAG take-up.
[Jessica Morden]

With that in mind, will the Government consider a more ambitious future for the TAG to speed up traffic in the short term?

I am pleased that the long-awaited consultation has been published. I will certainly encourage all those with an interest to contribute their thoughts to it.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Probably every Welsh MP has some sympathy with the points that the hon. Lady is making—not necessarily with all of them, but certainly with some. As she is drawing to the end of her speech, may I ask her about a point of principle? Is she against the whole idea of using a tolling mechanism for constructing new bridges and roadworks? Is the Opposition’s view that there should not be tolls and that we should always fund new road improvements from the Exchequer?

Jessica Morden: I think that, after many years of pretty eye-watering tolls on this bridge, it is time we looked for a much fairer regime for people who live in south-east Wales. The tolls have hit my constituents and businesses especially hard. As I have said, there is a strong call, supported by the Welsh Assembly and the Welsh Government, to scrap the tolls altogether, and I have huge sympathy with that. If this Government are not willing to go that far, as indicated in the consultation, we should surely have a £1 maintenance-only toll.

Nick Smith: It seems to me that we need some transparency from the Government about the finances, because at the moment they seem very opaque. We have got to find out what is happening with the treatment of VAT, with the future debt costs, and with the resurfacing and maintenance costs. We need the Government to be absolutely clear about what the costs are so that the public can take a view about whether it provides value for money.

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend is completely right. More clarity would be most welcome so that, when statutory instruments are introduced on the matter, we are far clearer about what the effects will be. The consultation contains more detail about the options that are not being considered than about those that are on the table. It says that Highways England will have the responsibility in future, but will it contract out any elements of the operation or maintenance of the bridges? What maintenance charges, other than for the resurfacing, do the Department for Transport anticipate for the bridges in the first 18 months?

The consultation mentions the option of removing tolls between 10 pm and 6 am—off-peak travel—but does not seek views. Will the Government speak to businesses and others to gauge their views? Business representatives I met in my constituency on Friday said they thought it would be extremely attractive to companies based in south Wales, particularly in the logistics industry, so more work should be done to pursue that option.

To conclude, the Severn Bridges Act was written almost 30 years ago. As we have said many times, it was an inflexible piece of legislation that was not future-proofed.

I have one plea for the Minister: whatever legislation we have to pass—the consultation made mention of statutory instruments—we as local Members should be consulted properly. We and our constituents need to be able to take part, because in the months to come we will have many more detailed questions, although I hope that the Minister can answer some today. I appreciate other hon. Members supporting the debate and I look forward to their contributions.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Moving from Newport East to Newport West, I call Mr Paul Flynn.

2.50 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Davies. I think this is the first time I have served under your chairmanship. I am sure it will be a pleasure.

Many congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden). For the entire parliamentary career of her predecessor, who was first elected in 1965, this was the dominant issue. If we look back over the years to see how we got into this position, as early as 1936, there was a Bill to build a bridge across the Severn, but to our great shame it was opposed by Newport Council, which did not want one built.

There was, however, the misery of the Beachley-Aust ferry, which I can vividly remember crossing on in the late ’50s in my Mini. I do not know whether anyone else can remember it, but it was a terrifying, nightmare experience—we were packed in such that we could not open the car doors once stuck on the ferry, which followed a zig-zag course across the turbulent waters of the Severn that were rushing past. It was an incredibly hazardous journey, but with huge queues to get on the ferry, so the people of Wales were prepared to take anything to get a bridge there and see the disappearance of the ferry.

A deal was therefore struck, but in later years it became clear that the fragility of a single crossing made a second one necessary. I do not think any Members present were in Parliament at the time, but in 1992 another deal was done. What was put in law, however, was clear. A formula was agreed and the Severn Bridges Act 1992 stated that, once the obligation was paid to the company, bridge tolls would cease. That obligation will run either this year or early next year. The bridge will then come into public ownership and will be in exactly the same position as any other part of the motorway system. They should be treated accordingly, as my hon. Friend said. The Humber bridge had £150 million of debt written off, but the Severn ones need a much smaller amount, and it should be written off, making the bridges part of the national, multi-billion-pound bill for all highways. The bridges are in no way different from any other stretch of motorway.

I find the Conservative party’s treatment of the reduction in tolls distasteful. It had to come—it is in the 1992 Act that the tolls have to stop, and it would be illegal not to do so. If the Government do not stop the tolls, there will be a legal challenge, as has been suggested in the Welsh Assembly. That is the legal position. A wonderful picture in the South Wales Argus had a trinity of Tories, all grinning widely, lined up against a background of the bridges. The local MP and the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Transport were all trying to get across this confidence trick: “We’re going to lower tolls for you. We generous Tories are going to get the tolls down—they won’t be £6.70, £5.70 or even £4.70; they will be £3.70.” That was what the Government said.
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) on securing this important debate. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) agree that rail electrification to Swansea not yet materialising and Government reluctance to reduce greatly or scrap the tolls indicate a reluctance by the Westminster Government to support the economy and its vibrancy in south Wales?

Paul Flynn: Absolutely, because both those things would have a major effect. It is a matter of great regret that the Government have not been inclined to spread the very welcome electrification of the railway that far. Certainly, economic vibrancy means everything. The cost of the toll is not huge given other motoring costs that we pay—buying a car, insuring it, fuelling it—but it is a psychological barrier for Wales. It seems to be in the way, and people see it as a great disincentive to business and leisure traffic.

To get back to the trinity of Tories posed by the Severn bridge, £3.70 was the figure they were quoting. I challenged the Secretary of State for Wales about that, because he described £3.70 as a 50% cut. A well-known conclusion about opinion polls is that 50% of the population do not understand what 50% means, and we can include the Secretary of State among those people because in no brand of mathematics is £3.70 half of £6.70. The next week the new rate was announced, with the huckster, the snake-oil salesman, saying, “No, not £3.70, it’s going to be £3”—but no reason why—“or, better than that, £1.50, but, sadly, both ways.” That is how this confidence trick is being sold to the people of Wales and the west of England.

There is no case for continuing with the tolls. If the Government are going to charge £3, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East asked, how is that figure reached? In no way can all the costs be put together and multiplied, even with extra costs added here and there, to get to a figure of £3. The Welsh Affairs Committee investigated, and its figure was an absolute maximum of £1.50, which was very generous in allowing for how things would be run and all kinds of new arrangements for the TAG system. Will the Minister tell us what makes up the £3? I believe that most of the costs are for running the bridge itself—costs that would disappear if the Government abided by the Severn Bridges Act and got rid of the tolls altogether.

For 50 years, the people of south Wales and the west of England have been double taxed. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) said, we are all paying our taxes—we pay for roads throughout the country in the same way as everyone else does—so why on earth should we have to pay twice for our local road? The toll is almost unique now, with few others left. The Government should sweep away any debt and take the bridges into the roads spending budget.

You will remember, Mr Davies, from your reading of Welsh history and your deep knowledge of religion, this passage from Genesis, at chapter 24, verse 60:

“And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.”

That verse, in an interesting part of Welsh history, is the reason why the Rebecca riots started. For those less well versed in Welsh history, what happened was that between 1839 and 1843 the hosts of Rebecca were formed, when men dressed up as Rebecca—a bit of cross-dressing, which was rather unusual at that time in that part of Wales—to charge against the toll gates and destroy them. The toll gates, owned by alien landlords, were barriers to the free movement of goods and people, so the Rebeccas destroyed them. It is time for the Hosts of Rebecca to be revived. We remember their cause, because we now have a similar situation: a Tory Government are out to disguise a rip-off as an act of generosity.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend speaks with the greatest eloquence, as ever, and his example is one for readers of Hansard to enjoy. Does he agree that given that we have had to wait for electrification, that we do not have clarity about new stations and that there is still this chokehold over the Severn bridges, which is coming off a little but not nearly enough, many people in Wales—particularly south Wales—look at the Government’s support for High Speed 2 and think, “We’re being treated differently from the rest of the UK?”

Paul Flynn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I wish the Government would not try to pose as generous people who are giving us a gift. Those three grins should be wiped off the faces of our trinity of Tories.

Glyn Davies rose—

Paul Flynn: I thought that might excite the hon. Gentleman. I will give way in a moment. We must get through to the reality of this: it is not an act of generosity or a cut; it is a rip-off.

Glyn Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to interject in his colourful presentation. I read an article by Lee Waters, a Labour Assembly Member who is concerned about reducing the tolls. I do not think he voted against doing so in the Assembly, but he certainly made a lot of public comments acknowledging that one consequence of cutting the tolls completely would be far less spending on other considerations that he thinks are important. Does the hon. Gentleman have any sympathy at all with Mr Waters’ views?

Paul Flynn: Mr Waters takes a view that is very much on the side of the environment and so on, but the vote in the Assembly to get rid of the tolls was unanimous. I do not know what Mr Waters has said, but it is the unanimous view of the Welsh Assembly that the tolls should disappear altogether. We want to hear from the Minister how the £3 figure was made up. How much of it is the cost of running the tolls? How much of it would disappear? We need the answers today. We have been far too tolerant for so many years in putting up with double taxation in south Wales.

Chris Elmore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his quick canter through the history of the Rebecca riots, which are a fascinating part of our proud Welsh history. He is talking eloquently, as usual, about the impact on people—our constituents—but there is also a massive impact on business. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) talked about businesses in the city that they both represent. In my constituency, there are large-scale companies such as Rockwool and Northwood & WEPAL Ltd. The latter produces toilet roll—we are a proud toilet roll-producing constituency—and travels right across the United Kingdom. The toll is
a double tax on business. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West agree that that has a negative impact on bringing new start-up businesses to Wales?

Paul Flynn: Absolutely. It is a mega-disincentive to all forms of activity and commercial life. It is seen as a problem at the docks in Newport and in every other industry. Take the leisure trade: do people go on holiday in Cornwall or face the obstacle of the bridge and possible hold-ups there? I am sure that it is a disincentive to all commercial activity in Wales.

I was part of agreeing the deal in ’92, and I think the only person who objected to it was a Member who wanted to bring the toll up from £4.90 to an even fiver. Other than that, there was unanimity in Parliament at the time that we had to face the issue, we needed another bridge and we would put up with the misery of paying tolls for it until a specified time. That time will be up this year. The debt that we owed to the Severn bridges company will be discharged. It has made its money. The bridges are ours. Let us treat them in the same way as every other piece of road in the motorway system.

3.3 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) on securing the debate. She has pursued this issue rigorously for years, and her contribution was once again principled and enlightening. I am sure that the people of Newport East and indeed Wales as a whole will have been pleased to hear their views so well represented. As we have heard, the Severn bridges tolls have a significant impact on their lives, their businesses and the wider economy of Wales.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) on a characteristically colourful contribution, which I am sure will echo down the airwaves. I have a vivid picture of him in his Mini trying to address the challenges of the Severn. My first car was a Riley Elf, which was a similar kind of vehicle. I am glad that we live in the 21st century. I enjoyed his account of the Rebecca riots, which I have not recalled since I was a history undergraduate. It all came back to me, and I am sure we will be able to use that in future debates, too.

Other hon. Members made powerful interventions. We heard important contributions about double taxation, the importance of listening to the staff who work on the bridge, which my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) raised, and the sense of disadvantage that is felt in Wales.

This debate is timely. As has been explained, it is projected that Severn River Crossing plc will have generated the revenue that was originally agreed—£1.029 billion in July 1989 prices—by late 2017 or early 2018. The concession period is drawing to a close, the crossings will soon revert to public ownership, and now is exactly the right time to look again at the tolling regime, challenge it and change it.

As my hon. Friends have made clear today and on other occasions, many businesses in Wales believe that the Severn crossings tolls impede business activity across the bridges by deterring inward investment in Wales.

The tolls, which are among the most expensive per distance travelled in the world, are a deterrant for small businesses hoping to operate in the south-west of England, for example. Hon. Friends have made the point about potential links with Bristol.

The Department for Transport is currently consulting on reducing the Severn crossings tolls and related issues. It proposes in its consultation document that tolls on all vehicles will be at least halved, while tolls on buses and small vans will be reduced by more than 75%. We would welcome a reduction in tolls, which would particularly benefit small business owners using small vans, and we would also welcome VAT no longer applying. The Department also proposes to replace the existing legislation with a charging order and replace tolls with charges, which would make them easier to reduce. Other options under consideration include the introduction of a free-flow electronic charging system, the levying of charges in both directions rather than a charge being applied to only westbound traffic, and the removal of charges at night.

The Department for Transport has said that the crossings cost approximately £15 million per annum to operate and maintain. The Government have also stated that they need to recover costs of £63 million from work that they funded to address the original bridge’s latent defects, such as corrosion of the suspension cables. But as has been pointed out, similar debt was written off for the Humber crossing, so why not for this one? That work has already been paid for through general taxation, and people entering Wales should not be forced to pay for prior expenditure associated with the Severn bridges.

The Welsh Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure pointed that out, and also said that “the tolls should be removed at the earliest opportunity, alleviating the burden on the economy and removing the significant threat they represent to trade in a post-Brexit world.”

Indeed, the National Assembly for Wales last year voted for the Severn tolls to be abolished, but the power to do so is not in the Welsh Government’s remit. In 2010, the Welsh Affairs Committee recommended that the charge be reduced to a maintenance-only toll, which, as we have heard, would stand at around £1.50. Neither option is being consulted on.

The Department for Transport says:

“The Severn Crossings are a key link in the economies of South Wales and the South West of England, and continue to foster the economic and cultural landscape of their surrounding areas.”

That is quite true, but why does the Department not therefore look at the research commissioned by the Welsh Government that suggests that removing the tolls could boost the south Wales economy by more than £100 million a year? Although it is encouraging that the Department proposes reducing the charges and keeping them under review to see whether they can be reduced further, we believe that all options should be considered and be part of the consultation.

We are pleased that the Government are consulting on the introduction of free-flow toll technology on the Severn crossings—that could help to reduce congestion, which is projected to grow—but that needs to be introduced at the earliest opportunity. We saw how long it took even to implement card payments at the crossings. It is also worth pointing out that congestion management problems should not be dealt with simply by maintaining...
The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies.

Dickens said:

"An idea, like a ghost...must be spoken to a little before it will explain itself."

The hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) has certainly spoken to and about this idea on many occasions, including today, and I congratulate her on taking the opportunity to make the case that she has made before once again. Relatively recently, in July 2015 in this Chamber, she raised these issues and asked the Government to do many things. I will address as many of those issues as I can in the time that I have available. As is inevitable on these occasions, I have a pre-prepared script written for me by my officials, which will inform me, but I will not be constrained by it. As I have said before, I feel it is important in Westminster Hall debates to answer the points made by hon. and right hon. Members here today. They have made their points well and they know best what should be done to promote the Welsh economy both at home and abroad when the crossings return to public ownership.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I am sure that is very welcome.

Paul Flynn: Will the right hon. Gentleman elevate himself to a star in the political firmament by abandoning his pre-prepared script and answering the debate? It would be a rare and delicious experience for us.

Mr Hayes: I was hinting at that already and I have done so many times previously. Although I would not claim to be the shiniest of stars, I am starlike—at least, I have done so many times previously. Although I would not claim to be the shiniest of stars, I am starlike—at least, I have said regardless of their contributions.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I am sure that is very welcome.

Paul Flynn: It depends how we look at history. I once read a book that asserted that only the future is certain, but the past is always changing. We have just seen an example of that and of somebody rewriting his own history. However, it is a matter of great honour and pride to us in Newport that in 1839 the last Chartist riot took place in order to set up a republic. We have week-long celebrations every year. That is our view of history and the Chartist riot was contemporaneous with the Rebecca riots. It was a glorious start to socialism in this country and throughout Europe, and something of which we are very proud. Of course, there is a black history interpretation whereby people with a Conservative mood of mind try to fictionalise those great events, but they were heroic and it is time to bring them back.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I confirm this is in order because it is a bridge to the future.

Mr Hayes: I did not want any historical inaccuracy—I have used the word now—to stand on the record uncorrected. I know you would not have wanted that either, Mr Davies.

I want to turn now to the specific matters relating to the Severn crossing. The hon. Member for Newport East generously acknowledged at the outset that we have begun the consultation that was promised previously. In the debate that I referred to in 2015, I referred to "the need to offer some light at the end of the tunnel for my constituents."—[Official Report, 21 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 436WH.]

That is part of the reason why she secured that debate then when she sought further progress on the character of tolls, which I will try to address today. She will know that the current consultation invites contributions on a range of issues, many of which have been raised here. It is a real consultation, and we are genuinely open-minded about how we move forward. The Government have made some proposals, as was also said. None the less, to
be meaningful, the consultation has to respond to consultees’ ideas and thoughts. We have not come to any predestined conclusion, and I will take into account the various comments that have been made.

I want to deal with five matters. First, on the amount of the toll, the hon. Lady and other hon. Members will know that we have proposed effectively to halve the toll by reducing it to £3. She will also know that that will be welcomed widely by regular users of the route, for any reduction of that scale and size is bound to be welcome. However, the hon. Lady asked for more detail on traffic flows. That is a perfectly reasonable request and I will make more information available following today’s debate. It is important that we gauge the effect on traffic flows of any changes we make both in the toll and in the way it is collected.

There were changes to traffic flows—I discussed this before the debate—when we changed the tolling system at the Dartford crossing in Kent. We believed that if we could automate the process it would improve the flow of traffic and ease congestion and so on. If we were to make that change at the Severn crossing—we are consulting on that and people will offer views—it is important that we gauge the likely effect on the convenience of travellers. The hon. Lady is right to ask about that and details will be provided.

The hon. Lady also asked us to break down costs in greater detail, and that is also a reasonable request. There are a variety of costs. My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), who always speaks with great authority on all matters to do with Wales—indeed, on all other matters as well—said that a balance has to be struck. A perennial debate on river crossings—bridges and other structures—is how much the Exchequer and the user should each contribute. That debate continues almost wherever some fee or charge is made. It is easy to describe it as double taxation of those concerned but, my goodness, we could say that of any charge that is made for any public service. I suspect that the answer—and I hate to sound tediously consensual—is that a balance has to be struck.

Jessica Morden: Tolling at £3, in part, to pay back the £63 million cost to the Government of the latent defects on some of the bridges, when the Government have in fact recouped more than double that in an unexpected tax windfall, seems especially unfair—particularly when the Government stepped in and wiped £150 million off the Humber debt. Does the Minister appreciate how strongly people feel about that?

Mr Hayes: The reason I said I wanted to break down the costs is that, as the hon. Lady will understand, as well as a capital cost to be recouped in the form of a debt, maintenance costs are associated with any crossing of this kind. She will be familiar with the details of the Severn Bridges Act 1992, which makes it clear that those costs can be included in any tolling system through to 2027. The operational, maintenance and servicing costs are real, and are borne by those who pay for the crossing through tax and tolls. As I have described, a balance has to be struck, and that is why the Government are engaged in consultation in response to calls from the hon. Lady, among others.

Having been slightly unkind to the hon. Member for Newport West, I will mention that he has longer and more profound experience in this context even than that of the hon. Member for Newport East—certainly than mine; I pay tribute to the fact that both hon. Members have been consistent in advocating their constituents’ interests in making their case about the crossing. I hope that they, in similar good faith, will recognise that I will do my best to bring about a reasonable and fair outcome to the consultation, which will guarantee the interests of all concerned into the future.

Paul Flynn: How was the £3 figure arrived at? What are its components? Past examinations have suggested that there is no way that future costs would make it anything like that. Is not it true that the Wales Office has lost out to the Exchequer? The Treasury has said, “We want to continue to use the bridges as cash cows for as long as we can.”

Mr Hayes: The £3 cost brings the charge much more closely into line with the Humber estuary, the Dartford crossing, and so on; but none of those figures is magical or derived from a mystical process. They are designed to reflect the real costs of running the crossing—the operational and maintenance costs and the capital costs over time. I have already conceded in the third of my five points—you will remember, Mr Davies, as you follow such things assiduously, that I said I would make five points—that I would break down the costs further. I am happy to do so, in the interest of being straightforward in this debate and in the consultation.

It is true that businesses on both sides of the Severn have long called for reductions in tolls—thus our response, in the form of the consultation. The crossings will of course return to public ownership early in 2018, so this is the right time for what we are doing. The main proposal is to abolish the toll category for vans and small buses and halve the tolls for all vehicles. That 50% reduction should not be disregarded and I know that the hon. Member for Newport East would not want it to be.
Jessica Morden: The Minister just referred to the handover in January 2018. Can he be specific about the date? The consultation ends on 10 March. Presumably in October a car will drive through the Severn bridge toll plaza and the revenue target will be hit; what happens then? Potentially, with a handover period, businesses that can now reclaim VAT might be unable to do so. If the handover is not until January 2018 will there be an increase then, as there has been every year?

Mr Hayes: The hon. Lady is right to say that we need to set out the process, and that responsibility will pass to Highways England. The fourth of my five points is that it is important to be clear about how Highways England will manage the process. She asked particularly whether others will be involved and Highways England will contract the responsibility. That will of course partly depend on the results of the consultation. If we move to a free-flow system, like the one at the Dartford crossing, it will have implications for organisation and management. Fewer people will be involved at the crossing and more behind the scenes, and there will be advance booking as happens at Dartford, with an account-based system that will hopefully help traffic flow. That will require us to set out, following the consultation, the further steps necessary for the handover. I am happy to do that, but I do not want to pre-judge the consultation.

There are arguments for maintaining cash payment; I will be blunt about that. When we debated Dartford, the first time I was in the Department for Transport, we considered that closely because a cash system is simple and straightforward; but there are disadvantages—particularly the delays. Evidence from places in this country and abroad shows that automated systems can be highly effective, can be properly managed, and can offer considerable benefits, particularly to regular and business users. We will set out the transition process and it will to some degree depend on what we do about future toll collection.

The fifth point that I want to make is to express thanks to those involved over time in managing and maintaining the crossing. It is right that in any changes that take place we recognise the contribution that people have made to running this important crossing, which is a vital piece of UK infrastructure. It has benefited road users from England and Wales for 50 years, it is used by more than 25 million vehicles each year and it has provided road users and businesses in England and Wales with exceptional savings in time and money since the first crossing helped to connect the economies of both countries in 1966.

I enjoyed the story about the ferry, although I am not sure I was meant to enjoy it. It sounded like a hazardous—indeed tortuous—business, and I imagine that those who can look back on that will recognise just what a difference the crossing has made. As we now consider the next steps, it is important that we take account of the effects they might have on all of those involved in the process, and I wanted to do so publicly.

Let me summarise my response. I repeat that we have no preordained view about how this matter should unfold. It is important that these debates inform thinking, and they certainly do in my case. There is a strong argument for making as much information available as possible to Members of this House and more widely along the lines requested throughout the debate across the Chamber, and we will do so.

If the debate does no more than all of that, it will have achieved a great deal, because it has persuaded this Minister—if he needed persuading—not only of the importance of the matter but that we need to move ahead with as wide agreement as possible about the kind of tolls charged, the effect they have on people, the methodology that we employ and the steps we will take to manage that process. All of that will happen, and the hon. Member for Newport East can be proud of yet again representing her constituents and others so admirably.

As a postscript, the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Newport West can be pretty sure that my references to the pre-written script were as slight as the hon. Gentleman had hoped.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): We will finish where we started: I call Jessica Morden to wind up briefly.

3.32 pm

Jessica Morden: Thank you for ably chairing the debate, Mr Davies. My thanks to all hon. Friends who took part and in particular my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn). May I thank the Minister for his response and in particular the points about the staff who work on the Severn bridges, whom I mentioned?

I thank my hon. Friend for pointing out forcibly that we do not feel that the Government are being generous in their offer. For years, excessive tolls have been charged to people making essential journeys and we feel strongly that it is time to right that wrong. I worked out that this is about the 87th time I have spoken about the Severn bridges in my time here in questions and at other times. As the concession is nearing its end, the impression is that the Government have been dragging their feet. For instance, we expected the public consultation last autumn and it has taken its time.

Mr Hayes: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady. I have spoken already, but I omitted to pay tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). Were it not for him and his role in this matter—I mention him because he answered the debate last time round—I do not think we would have moved as quickly as we have. He has been determined to ensure that we responded properly to the hon. Lady’s concerns. It is not I but he who deserves the credit for any progress that has been made.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): That sets a precedent—an intervention on a wind-up.

Jessica Morden: I appreciate the Minister’s intervention. I thank him for his comments, but I am not sure whether we are that much closer to understanding the handover plan. The Department for Transport clearly cannot take over the bridges the minute the last car pays up and the revenue target is reached, so it would be useful to know about that, not least because I would not want constituents to face another annual
increase in January 2018. I would also like more detail
from the Minister on what can be done about the TAG
reduction.

I hope that this time we end up with a lasting solution
that means we can future-proof the legislation. Will the
Minister respond in writing to anything else we have
raised in the debate? That would be particularly helpful.
As in all our efforts in talking about the Severn bridge
tolls, we do so for our constituents, our businesses and
the wider economy of south Wales, which have been hit
hard by the tolls over the years.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered future operation of the Severn
Bridges.

3.35 pm

Sitting suspended.

Duodopa

Sir Edward Leigh in the Chair

4 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): I beg
to move,

That this House has considered access to Duodopa.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship,
Sir Edward. I thank the Minister for sparing the time to
respond to this limited debate this afternoon. The subject
is a serious one, especially for those people who contend
with advanced Parkinson’s disease and have so few
effective medications on which they can rely to give
them some control over their symptoms.

For the benefit of anyone who might not be familiar
with the condition, I will briefly explain what Parkinson’s
is. Parkinson’s disease is a degenerative neurological
disorder. It affects all aspects of daily living, including
talking, swallowing and writing. People with the condition
often find it hard to move freely, but there are also other
issues, such as pain, depression, dementia, hallucinations
and continence problems. The severity of symptoms
can fluctuate from day to day, and people can experience
rapid changes in functionality in the course of a day.

There is no cure, but there is a small selection of
treatments suitable for a few people in the advanced
stages of the condition. Those treatments include the
drug Duodopa. I was involved in the campaign to allow
routine prescribing of Duodopa without recourse to
special, case-by-case requests by clinicians. Since 2015,
the treatment has been available to those people in
England who are deemed suitable.

I called today’s debate to discuss the new proposal by
the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
to advise clinicians not to offer Duodopa at any stage.
That recommendation is being made despite the scarcity
of treatment options and the proven effectiveness of
Duodopa. I accept that the Minister has no control over
NICE recommendations, but I wish to highlight some
anomalies.

First, in clinical practice, Duodopa is used only when
all other interventions have been shown to be ineffective,
or clinically unsuitable options. Despite that, evidence
presented in the draft guideline compares Duodopa to
deep brain stimulation, which is another treatment for
advanced Parkinson’s, and to the best medical treatment,
which for advanced Parkinson’s is often apomorphine.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon.
Gentleman for bringing this matter to Westminster Hall
for consideration. I hope that the Minister will be able
to respond positively. As a result of the background
information that I got in relation to this issue, I would
like to ask this question: does he agree that the evidence
from clinicians and experts that NICE made a pivotal
mistake in comparing Duodopa to treatments such as
deep brain stimulation means that the institute needs to
step back now and withdraw the proposal before even
more anxiety and turmoil is caused to people with
Parkinson’s?

Mr Sharma: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that
intervention. I will come to that point later and respond
to it.
That incorrectly assumes that the populations given the treatments are the same, which is not the case, as UK clinicians recommend Duodopa only if their patient cannot have deep brain stimulation or apomorphine. It is therefore illogical to say that deep brain stimulation or apomorphine is better value for money, as they are not suitable for direct comparison. As one person with Parkinson’s explained,

“I was at the end of the road before I had the Duodopa. I was literally wheeled into hospital to have the pump fitted and the Duodopa titrated, and about a week later I came out walking. I responded very quickly and noticed a huge improvement in my quality of life, and I always live in dread that it will be taken away.”

In these circumstances, I very much hope that something can be done to bring NICE to the mainstream view on the subject.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I have been involved for 15 or 20 years in supporting Parkinson’s disease patients or those living with Parkinson’s disease, and I think it is terrific that Members of Parliament initiate debates that raise its profile, raise awareness and ask the Minister to come before us and share views on where we are. I therefore congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing and introducing the debate.

Mr Sharma: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his kind words and support.

This issue is of great importance to a relatively small number of people, but given that the treatment is currently available through NHS England, to withdraw it on the basis of an apparently flawed assessment would cause concern among a much wider community, as it might be seen as setting a precedent for decisions on other treatments in future. I would welcome the Minister’s comments on that.

Secondly, although it is well known that Duodopa is more expensive than some other therapies, it is not offered to everyone, and we believe that some of the economic modelling does not take into account the discounts that the manufacturer offers NHS England.

Duodopa was classified by the EU as an orphan treatment, meaning that the number of people for whom it is a suitable treatment is fewer than five in 10,000. There are known issues with using standard health technology assessment methodology to evaluate the efficacy of orphan medications—issues that are thought to place orphan medicines at a disadvantage compared with treatments in more widespread use.

In Scotland, Duodopa was considered by the Scottish Medicines Consortium and approved on the basis of its processes for evaluating orphan treatments. NICE concluded that for Duodopa the cost per quality-adjusted life year—the generic measure of the value for money of medical interventions, based on quality and quantity of life lived—was more than £500,000, but the SMC concluded that the cost was less than £80,000 when using a calculation appropriate for an orphan drug. Indeed, a recent parliamentary question revealed that, from July 2015 to December 2016, just 75 people in England had been given Duodopa.

Thirdly, if Duodopa treatment is denied, that means there will be increased costs from social care and other things on which the person with Parkinson’s will become dependent, to say nothing of the quality of life or dignity of that person, which cannot be so easily reduced to a monetary figure. As Professor David Burn, the national clinical director for the UK Parkinson’s Excellence Network, has commented:

“To not offer Duodopa as a treatment option is putting people with Parkinson’s in England at a disadvantage compared with other developed countries.”

I acknowledge that the Department of Health has no direct control over NICE, and I recognise that NICE needs to be independent of political considerations. However, since NHS England has in recent years determined that Duodopa can be routinely used for patients where appropriate, and both NHS Scotland and the SMC consider the treatment to be appropriate, NICE appears to be out of step with the prevailing opinion. Specifically, I look forward to the Minister’s guidance on what options are open to the Government when the basis of a proposal made by NICE is so flawed. The consequences of these proposals going ahead would be catastrophic for the dozens of people for whom this drug was their last resort, and would add pressure to an already buckling social care system.

4.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Sir Edward. I add my congratulations to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) on securing the debate. It is right that we use the opportunity to discuss matters such as this one in Parliament and to ensure that we, whether that be NICE or the Department, get this right.

May I start by agreeing with the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall? He made the point that it would be completely wrong for NICE to make an evaluation based on flawed data, flawed information and a flawed methodology. If that were the case—we will talk about that during the next few minutes—it would require action. He also made the point that it is right that we have a body such as NICE that attempts to validate the treatments that are available in a coherent and consistent way.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the quality-adjusted life year issue. There has to be a method of comparing drugs that are available, for example, for Parkinson’s with those available for cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy, and we have to be fair to the community as a whole. That is what the NICE process is intended to do. It is also important to make the point that at the moment, the drug is available in NHS England. It has been commissioned since 2015 by the specialised commissioning team. That will continue—the updated NICE guidance will not change it—until NHS England’s specialised commissioning group makes a different decision, if that is what happens.

I will make a few points about Parkinson’s first of all. We know that it is a terrible, progressive disease and that there is no real understanding of what causes it. The occurrences of it are rising. Some 130,000 people in England have been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, which is caused by the death of a type of cell—those containing dopamine—in our brains. As the hon. Gentleman said, the disease causes tremors, stillness, slow movement, speech impediment and so on. Of
those 130,000 people who are suffering from Parkinson's disease, something like one in 1,500 are given Duodopa. There are currently 75 people in England who receive it, and the cost is roughly £28,000 for each of them.

The process is that when a diagnosis of Parkinson's is made, NHS England typically refers the patient to a specialist centre for neurological care and an evaluation. A set of processes are carried out by the neurosurgeons in an attempt to remedy the dopamine issue that will have caused the Parkinson's. The typical and main treatment is a drug called levodopa, but for a number of people there are side effects and it eventually stops working. As a follow-up remedy, as the hon. Gentleman said, either apomorphine, brain stimulation or Duodopa is prescribed, or a combination of those three things. How they interact with one another is quite complex, but those are the typical prescriptions if the main treatment is not successful.

As I said, the cost of Duodopa is something like £28,000 per patient per year, and 75 people are receiving it, so that is around £2 million a year, which is not massive in the great context of NHS spend. Nevertheless, it is typically £20,000 to £25,000 per quality-assisted life year. The hon. Gentleman referred to, on the use of the drug. Those guidelines were put out to consultation, which closed in November. It is true, as the hon. Gentleman said, that those draft guidelines said that in NICE's view, at no stage in the treatment is Duodopa to be recommended. The reason given was that, under NICE's evaluation criteria, the cost of the drug is too high.

I have the NICE report in front of me, and the actual analysis is quite complex. The hon. Gentleman said that the report talks about the figure of £500,000—or alternatively £80,000, as I think I heard him say—per quality-assisted life year. I think it also comes up with lower numbers, but the truth is that it does not come up with a number that is anything close to the normal threshold at which a drug is approved for use, which is typically £20,000 to £25,000 per quality-assisted life year. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the methodology that was used. The consultation process drew in points from members of the public, from the profession and indeed from the company that markets the drug, which did say that there were methodology issues—I think it used the phrase "issues with the mathematics". Those points will all be referred to the NICE committee and will be taken into account if and when the final analysis is confirmed or changed.

However, I will say that a quality-assisted life year figure in the order of £80,000 is quite a long way away from where it needs to be. There are various remedies for that. In similar debates I have made the point that one option is for the drugs companies involved to review their pricing. These things are not necessarily set in concrete. When they price a drug they are doing two things, and the cost of actually manufacturing the drug is often quite small compared with the invested intellectual capital that they are trying to recover. There is a choice, because if the drug is not prescribed they are not recovering either of those costs. I simply make the point that there is an opportunity for the company to do that.

As the hon. Gentleman said, it is true that NICE's recommendation is that a combination of apomorphine and deep brain stimulation is more effective as a treatment and in terms of cost. We are having this debate on the draft guidance, and even if that guidance is confirmed, it will then have to go to the NHS England specialised commissioning group, which will have another opportunity to look at it in the round. As he said, Duodopa is a little unusual in that it is currently being prescribed. It is not as though it is a new treatment—it was prescribed in advance of the NICE recommendation.

I will say a little bit about NICE. It is very easy to knock it and say, "These guys don't know what they're doing. They don't understand what is going on. It is obvious that if they were a bit more diligent or a bit better trained they would not have given this answer." I looked at who was on the committee for the Parkinson's guidelines. There were 18 people; it comprised consultant neurosurgeons, neurology pharmacists, people from patient groups and physiotherapists, so there were a number of people with a great deal of experience in managing Parkinson's disease. It is important that the decisions on how we make drugs available are made by scientists, based on rigorous criteria and an attempt to look at the science rigorously, and not by Members of Parliament, as I think everybody in the Chamber would agree.

Glyn Davies: I intervene only to reinforce the Minister's point. I remember being involved in campaigning against NICE and calling it out for everything I could when bowel cancer drugs were not available. That was driven by my personal interest, but in time I have come to realise—partly because my son who works for a drug company lectures me about this—that the principles behind NICE are absolutely vital. If we ever move away from that, we will finish up in a complete free-for-all, with all sorts of pressure and inducements from Members of Parliament not to follow proper procedure.

David Mowat: I can only concur that many of us benefit from lectures from our children, and it is nice to know that my hon. Friend does. I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall. If NICE has made a mistake, if something has been wrong in its analysis—this is why draft guidelines are published—and if things are brought to its attention that are not adequately reflected in its work, it has the opportunity to change that and will do so. Given the points that we have just heard, that is the right process.

When the finalised position is established, NHS England will consider whether to accept the NICE guidance. It will make a decision on what it does regarding the cohort that receive the drug and new patients, for whom there is potentially a difference in treatment. That process is many months away, frankly. It will not occur until NICE has finalised its guidance and published the complete position.

I finish by agreeing with the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire. These decisions are very difficult. Only 75 people receive the drug, but for them it is potentially life-changing, as it would be for the people who will need it in future, and I do not want to underestimate that. I can only repeat the points made in the NICE guidance; it believes that there are other equally effective treatments, such as a combination of apomorphine and brain stimulation. I am not a
clinician, so it is not possible—and not right—for me to have a view on that, other than to say that until we are able to show that NICE has somehow been wrong in what it has done, it is right that we as a Parliament and as a group of MPs accept and respect that process, because we know that diligent scientists and clinicians have tried to get it right.

I thank the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall for raising this important subject; it is good that we have had the chance to talk about it today.

*Question put and agreed to.*
or frightened. We also believed that young people needed to understand about keeping safe, which is especially important for younger children at primary school, and as children got older and became teenagers, to learn about sexual assault, rape and sexual harassment, and to understand what that meant. Should the worst happen, they needed to know whom they should approach and what they could do.

We argued that all that should be taught under the umbrella of a broader subject: personal, social, health and economic education. The Education Act 1996 needed to be amended so that all taxpayer-funded schools, including primary schools and academies, should be required to teach it. We wanted it to be statutory to ensure that teachers would then be required to have the proper training that they needed to deliver the subject well.

We agreed that although parents would still be able to opt their children out of most of the lessons if they wished—it is certainly worth noting that, as the law stands, a parent can withdraw a child from sex education up to the age of 18, even though the age of consent is 16—we negotiated with religious faiths such as the Catholic Church, so that we would guarantee that every child got at least one year’s teaching in SRE before they turned 16.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): Does the hon. Lady concede that schools are currently obliged to follow section 78 of the Education Act 2002? That is about promoting “the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society”.

Diana Johnson: Of course, some schools do that very well, but I want to ensure that all schools—whether academies, free schools or primary schools—provide that level of education to equip our children and young people for what life will throw at them. We need to strengthen provision. That is my issue.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate and raising these issues. In respect of the previous intervention, it is not inconsistent with anything that she has outlined in her remarks to teach all young people about sex and relationships. Whether people are having sexual intercourse in a marriage or outside marriage, they need to know about how to interact properly in a relationship, with all that that might entail. That is a valuable point; it does not contradict previous legislation.

Diana Johnson: I accept that. It does not contradict it; it builds on it. That is where I want things to go. All the evidence shows that when taught properly, age-appropriate sex and relationship education and PSHE work. Research by UNESCO highlights that it can importantly, delay sexual activity and increase the likelihood of contraceptive use. It is a vital tool in the fight to address unacceptable attitudes to women, combat child abuse and tackle homophobia.

I was describing what happened in 2010, just before the general election. Unfortunately, the Conservative party, faced with all the evidence, decided that it was not willing to support the clauses to introduce PSHE into the Children, Schools and Families Act 2010, so it was passed without those vital clauses. The argument used with me at that time by Conservative MPs was that the issue was one on which families, not schools, should take the lead. At the time, it often struck me that although of course families play a huge part in equipping young people for growing up and what happens in life, they often do not feel able to talk about such sensitive issues and want professionals to help. I also thought at the time that the children and young people who are most in need of relationship and sex education are, sadly, often from families where there might be domestic abuse or poor communication. They are the very children whom we want to ensure can access good-quality PSHE and SRE.

In the seven years since, more and more MPs from both sides of the House have fought to make the Government see sense. We keep being told that it is being considered—“There’s a review. We’re having a look at it. We agree things need to be improved”—but there is no action. Over the same period of seven years, the obligations on schools have only become weaker. As more and more schools become academies and more free schools open that do not have to follow the national curriculum, the proportion of schools required to teach SRE has decreased; now only 40% of schools need to do so.

I called this debate because now, more than ever, the Government need to revisit the issue. The Children and Social Work Bill, which is about to enter Report stage in the Commons, now offers them the opportunity finally to amend the law to bring about the changes that should have been incorporated into law in 2010. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us today that the Government will accept the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy).

It is an understatement to say that since 2010, the arguments for improving sex and relationships education have only become stronger. When Labour tried to change the law seven years ago, we already knew that the case for doing so was overwhelming, but none of us predicted the shocking revelations that have emerged since, making the case even more overwhelming.

I am talking about things such as the revelations after the death of Jimmy Savile and Operation Yewtree. We have learned the scale of the exploitation of children and young people that has taken place over many years. Professor Alexis Jay estimates that in Rotherham alone, 1,400 children were abused in the sixteen years to 2013. Her report highlighted that in the minds of many children and young people, SRE in their schools was taught to an extremely poor standard and left them ill-equipped to understand that they were being groomed. We simply do not know the full scale of abuse across the rest of the country. It is thought that at any one time, approximately 5,000 young people are being sexually exploited. Online exploitation is now the fastest growing area of concern.

We also know even more than we did before about the shocking views that many hold about consent in relationships and women in general. A Fawcett Society survey released on 20 January asked:

“If a woman goes out late at night wearing a short skirt, gets drunk and is then the victim of a sexual assault, is she totally or partly to blame?”
Four in 10 men and a similar proportion of women said that she was. On the same day that that survey was released, the world bore witness to the inauguration of President Donald Trump, a man who has boasted of harassing women and who stands accused of abusing numerous female contestants on the American “The Apprentice”.

Half of all female students say that they are sexually harassed every single time they go out to a nightclub, half of all women in the workplace say that they have been harassed and one quarter of the female population has experienced domestic abuse, many on more than one occasion. By the time they start secondary school, the majority of children will already have been exposed to online pornography, often of the most violent nature. Eight in 10 teenagers get most of their teaching on sex and relationships from unreliable sources outside school.

It is no wonder that since Labour first recommended changing the law in 2010, even more organisations have joined the call for a change in the law. The Select Committees on Education and on Women and Equalities have also recommended changes, as has the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. Our education system should be at the forefront of efforts to tackle those problems. I am the first to acknowledge that it is not the whole solution, but it has a big part to play and, sadly, we simply are not doing enough. A vacuum is being left that is being filled with unacceptable messages to our young people.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. One particularly important issue is that having such conversations in school, with age-appropriate information delivered by trusted adults that the children know well, provides a safe space. If any of those young people are experiencing difficulties or challenges, they know that they can speak without fear or embarrassment about anything that might be wrong in their lives. They can have an open and free discussion, which is incredibly important. Does she agree?

Diana Johnson: My hon. Friend makes the point well, and I absolutely agree with what she says about safe space.

I am coming to the end of my speech, but I have four asks for the Education Minister. First, will the Government accept new clause 1 of the Children and Social Work Bill on Report? Does she support making age-appropriate SRE—or, even better, the more encompassing PSHE—a statutory requirement in all academies, free schools, primary schools, and new grammar schools?

Secondly, will any amendment require schools to teach more than just the biology of sex in science lessons? Will schools be required to teach a broader form of SRE that covers consent and relationships? Will she commit to Labour’s original proposals by requiring PSHE to be taught in all schools? Thirdly, will the Government update the 17-year-old guidance on the teaching of SRE to cover same-sex relationships, child abuse, the dangers of online predators and internet pornography, transsexuality and violence against women and girls? Fourthly, what will the Government do to support our professionals to teach the subject in the best possible way? Four in five teachers feel that they are not sufficiently trained to teach SRE. What measures will the Government take to ensure that our teaching workforce get the training that they need?

In last week’s Adjournment debate, the Minister highlighted that we should take a comprehensive approach to the issue and take the time to review the options to ensure that we get it right. However, I say to her with the greatest of respect that that has already happened. We spent a great deal of time and consulted widely among the relevant people to ensure that our proposals were balanced and effective. I set out clearly in my introduction what steps Labour had put in place under the Children, Schools and Families Bill.

As recent events in the United States show, we cannot assume that the most unacceptable attitudes to women and others will go away on their own. Educationalists, law enforcement experts and campaign groups all agree that the fight must start in our schools. Now, more than ever, we need to improve SRE in our schools. I hope that in the coming debates on the Children and Social Work Bill, the Government will do exactly that; good sense will prevail and young people will finally get the relationship and sex education that they deserve to equip them far better for life than the current outdated provisions.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward—for the first time, I think—and to take part in this important debate. I regret that I was unable to speak in the debate a couple of Fridays ago on the Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (Statutory Requirement) Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). It is as well to put on record that, contrary to misinformation that circulated on social media, I did not participate in a wilful attempt to filibuster that Bill. In fact, I was a victim of the filibuster, because I did not get a chance to speak on the Bill in the four and a half minutes that were left after the previous debate, which was on the rather obscure issue of homosexual activity in the merchant navy. Anyway, I am here now.

I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), who is always very sincere in her beliefs, but I think she is wrong on this issue. The correct way to introduce these proposals would be via stand-alone, bespoke primary legislation, because this is a very significant issue. I rather regret that she brought up a whole range of other issues, including the proclivities of the newly elected President of the United States. There are major societal issues lying behind some of the very regrettable attitudes to women and girls, but I do not think that we should move outside the bailiwick of what we are here to discuss, which is PSHE in schools. The hon. Lady is asking us to disregard the professional duties and conduct of teachers, governors and headteachers—interestingly, she made no mention of parents.

Diana Johnson indicated dissent.

Mr Jackson: Well, very little mention. I stand to be corrected in Hansard.

Diana Johnson: I want to make it very clear that I mentioned parents quite a lot. I certainly said at the
Personal, social and health education is already a non-statutory subject on the school curriculum. Government guidance from September 2013 states that it should be taught in all schools as “an important and necessary part of all pupils’ education... Schools should seek to use PSHE education to build, where appropriate, on the statutory content already outlined in the national curriculum, the basic school curriculum and in statutory guidance on...drug education, financial education, sex and relationship education...and the importance of physical activity and diet for a healthy lifestyle.”

I agree that so much of what we want to happen should, in theory, already be happening, but I am aware that it is not.

The hon. Lady has put a strong case, but there are questions to ask about her proposal. How does she see the provisions in new clause 1, which has been tabled to the Children and Social Work Bill, sitting with the current legislation on sex and relationships education? We frequently hear calls for compulsory sex education, as if there were not already statutory requirements for schools to teach sex education. However, as I am sure hon. Members are aware, under sections 80 and 101 of the Education Act 2002, maintained schools in England and Wales respectively have a basic curriculum, which for secondary schools includes sex education. Section 403 of the Education Act 1996 sets out the detail of the sex education that governors and headteachers are required to provide and states that they “must have regard to the Secretary of State’s guidance” on how it should be taught. Primary schools may teach sex education if the governors think it appropriate.

The Bill that was promoted on 20 January by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion made no specific mention of the existing legislative provisions or of how her proposals would fit in with them. That lack of engagement with the current legislation meant that her Bill would have created significant confusion—and so, I believe, would proposed new clause 1 of the Children and Social Work Bill.

I am aware that there is some concern that sex education is not required in academies in the same way as in maintained schools, since academies are not required to provide a basic curriculum. They are, however, required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum within the requirements of section 78 of the Education Act 2002, to which I referred in my intervention earlier.

For a number of years we were told that SRE was needed to combat teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, but it is now argued that SRE is needed to ensure that young people can unavail the messages of pornography. People are rightly concerned that young people are getting the wrong messages on relationships—I agree with what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North said about some of those messages.
matter, which might be culturally sensitive. Sex education is a sensitive subject that requires close consultation. There is a thinly veiled attempt by some people—not the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North—to impose an ostensibly liberal agenda on the curriculum.

For all those reasons, the Government should listen to key stakeholders—not just to people who have a vested interest, but to constituents, charities, schools, governors, Members of Parliament and councillors. All their responses should be fed into the new guidance. However, we should think very carefully before disregarding the professional skills, knowledge and expertise of people at the lowest level of schools, the importance of a social and moral framework, or the centrality of parents.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I call Ann Coffey to speak for no more than five minutes, please. Thank you.

4.50 pm

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): Thank you very much, Sir Edward, for calling me to speak.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this important debate and on her excellent speech calling for statutory sex and relationships education, for which she has campaigned in Parliament with dogged determination for many years.

Across Greater Manchester, there are many excellent projects organised by children and young people to raise awareness in schools and workplaces. They are particularly valuable, as young people listen to each other. There are some great examples of children creating videos and other materials, including a YouTube video about being groomed via text, which was made by Stockport Young Partnership. There has also been a good response to materials such as “Real Love Rocks” by Barnardo’s and GW Theatre Company’s “Somebody’s Sister, Somebody’s Daughter”.

My hon. Friend is also right about the need to inform children starting at primary school. This week, we learned that almost 100,000 eight-year-olds have a mobile phone, and that more than 20,000 were given a handset from the age of six. We need to be concerned about the potential access that allows predators to our children. We are getting much better at recognising children who exhibit antisocial and aggressive behaviour often do so because of problems at home. Those children are often supported in primary school, but at the transition to secondary school they find themselves excluded, either for short periods or permanently. That increases their vulnerability, not only to child sexual exploitation but to other forms of exploitation by criminal gangs, such as drug running.

In Stockport last year, the number of children excluded from schools for a fixed period trebled in number from year 6, the last year in primary school, to year 7, the first year in high school. There has also been a rise in peer-on-peer exploitation, fed by websites that promote sex as a violent activity and blur the lines between someone consenting and not consenting.

Although much needed, compulsory sex and relationships education is not enough on its own. We need an environment that encourages children to take responsibility for other children and a culture of respect for each other that informs every day at school. That has been done effectively in some schools to deal with bullying. In Stockport schools, a restorative approach is being developed, through which children help other children to resolve their conflicts and reach resolution. They reach out to children who are not part of a peer group.

Another thing that young people told me again and again was how much they valued talking to their peers. We have many successful peer mentoring programmes in Greater Manchester. One school I visited had a big team of peer mentors, and children had to apply to become a mentor as if they were applying for a job; for example, they needed to have references.

We need to understand that children are a resource in themselves. They understand social media in a way that we cannot. They understand exactly the pressures that they are subject to, and they need to be part of designing projects to inform other young people.
Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. Could the hon. Lady conclude her remarks?

Ann Coffey: We need to give more young people the chance to do that. Thank you, Sir Edward.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Thank you.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Sir Edward, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on presenting her case, and doing so quite well. I will adopt a similar attitude to my colleague, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson). Education is an essential part of the life of a child. Education must be a priority, but we must acknowledge that in the educational life of a child priority must also be given to things that are not simply academic. A holistic education is important. There must be space for personal development and I am completely supportive of that.

In fairness to the hon. Lady, she set out her case fairly well, but I need to put on the record my concerns and those of many others. Things of a personal nature, such as matters of morality, are better left to parents than to others. That is why I stand today to stress that any change in standards of teaching must contain the ability for parents to withdraw their children from classes. As the father of three boys, I was happy that the school took the role of teaching the mechanics of the “birds and the bees”, but I was also happy—indeed, very happy—that the role of teaching morality and the ramifications of choices was left to us to determine and discuss as a family. It is important to put that on the record.

Currently, primary schools do not have to teach pupils beyond the basic biological aspects of sex education that are required by the national curriculum. Secondary schools are required to teach 14 to 16-year-olds about sexually transmitted diseases, and they should do so. All schools must have an up-to-date policy that describes the content and organisation of sex and relationship education that is taught outside of the science curriculum. This policy must be made available for parents, including information on parents’ rights to withdraw their child from lessons if they feel that is important to them. I think the hon. Lady herself said that; I believe that was what she was saying.

Diana Johnson indicated assent.

Jim Shannon: If that is what the hon. Lady was saying, that is good news—I think we are probably on the same wavelength. To me, this is essential for any family: the right to teach their child the morality and the standards they hope their child will stick to, and the right to withdraw their child from a lesson that they feel will not complement how they teach their child. Again, that is an absolute must for me and the people I represent.

I read a very interesting article by Andrea Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern, which warned that making SRE compulsory would remove the freedom of parents to decide how and when their child is educated on this subject. She wrote:

“For many years, sex and relationship education has not provided a godly stance on sexuality or sexual relationships. Instead, it reflects our society’s increasingly liberal sexual norms.”

It is important that we make the distinction—draw the line—between those two. She continued:

“Making SRE mandatory would limit parents’ freedom to withdraw their children from these lessons if so desired and usurp their responsibility in deciding what they should and should not be taught at what age.”

That is a very important comment from a lady who is greatly respected.

I do not believe that making SRE mandatory can or should happen. As parents, the buck stops with us. We do the best we can with our children and we must be allowed to do so in moral teaching. With the spread of social media, more and more of our young people are taking and sending inappropriate photos, and that can lead to unsafe situations. This is something that parents must take on board and discuss with their children; those who do not wish to do so can allow the school to do so. The choice must be available for parents and I stand firmly by that view.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op) rose—

Jim Shannon: I am happy to give way.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): I am sorry, but Mr Danczuk wants to speak.

Jim Shannon: That is okay.

The other thing I wish to mention briefly is the fact that we must also allow teachers who are uncomfortable discussing and promoting British moral values that might undermine their own dearly held personal faith to withdraw from teaching those values, with no penalty and no fear of losing their job. We have many examples of that. There is the example of Ashers in Northern Ireland. We have the case of the bed and breakfast owners and that of the Christian registrar. It is not enough for our Prime Minister to talk about freedom to live one’s faith; we must now have the support of the law to do that. Any legislation must protect the right of teachers to withdraw from promoting values that undermine their faith.

I will leave it at this. I understand that we cannot press our faith on others, but by the same token we should not be expected to directly oppose the teachings of our faith on the say-so of others. Teachers do not want their teaching to promote the latest Government definition of morality; they want it to help a child to have a fully rounded life and to make a difference. Allow them to do that in an appropriate way and legislate to protect them with any proposed changes. We must learn lessons, just as children learn. I, for one, have learned a lot from the Ashers case about the need for protection, and I hope that the Government, and particularly the Minister, can take that on board.

5 pm

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this important debate and for all the work she has done on the topic. We have heard some excellent arguments about the need for sex
and relationship education, not least from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey). I want to focus my remarks on my experience of uncovering allegations of historical child sexual abuse and also of representing Rochdale, a town that has been the victim of child grooming gangs.

Over the past few years we have seen a huge number of survivors of historical child sexual exploitation come forward, and I am sure that they have done this only now in part because of the lack of sex and relationships education back then. A review by the Cochrane Library of school-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse confirms what is obvious, which is that primary-aged children who are taught about the issues are three times more likely to report abuse.

My ex-wife, Karen Danczuk, successfully prosecuted her abuser late last year, after suffering in silence throughout her childhood and adolescence. She is now a patron of the National Association for People Abused in Childhood. She readily admits that she would have been more likely to disclose to the authorities that she was being abused if she had received relationships education. The fact that the abuse she suffered took place at home stresses the importance of that sort of education in schools. Likewise, kids in care and others who lack the typical family support structures may benefit from schools providing information about relationships.

Karen’s case also highlights that 11 is too late to start offering relationships advice in schools; her abuse started when she was about six years old. It is therefore imperative that children are made aware of the power within relationships much earlier in their education. I spoke to Karen earlier today, and these are her own words: “The thing to remember with cases like mine is that I didn’t know any other life. I didn’t know that this shouldn’t be happening. There was nobody saying, ‘It shouldn’t be this way.’ If there had been, maybe I would have recognised sooner that what I was going through was wrong.” What she is saying is that relationships education could be exceptionally helpful.

We also know, however, that the problem is not just historical cases. There are also the cases in Rochdale and Rotherham, towns that have been blighted through the sexual exploitation of vulnerable children. We need to see sex and relationships education improved right across the board. We should not have a postcode lottery. The status quo puts children who might not attend council-controlled secondary schools at risk. More academies and more free schools means that more and more children might be put at risk, and that is simply not acceptable.

All of that is why I support the attempts of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North to make sex and relationships education a statutory requirement in all state-funded schools.

5.3 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for bringing forward this important, interesting and informative debate.

We all have a role to play in raising awareness of the challenges and potential dangers our young people face and in ensuring that they are equipped to cope. Sex and relationships education plays a vital part in that but so does society, and debates such as this are really important in bringing the issues to the fore. As a teacher in Scotland I taught—along with physics—what is called personal, social and health education, and it was an element I really enjoyed. Through it, teachers are able to form great relationships with their pupils in ways they cannot always do in a subject class. Relationships, sexual health and parenthood education is an integral part of the health and wellbeing area of the school curriculum in Scotland. Schools equip young people with information on a range of issues, depending on their age and stage. Several Members have highlighted the importance of starting sex education young, and that is right. It is important that our young people are able to identify body parts and use their correct names, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North mentioned, at an early stage. It should not be when we get to teenage giggling that we have to start using the correct names; it has to be normalised very early on.

The curriculum in Scotland includes information on puberty, sexually transmitted infections, contraception, how to access sexual health services and issues such as looking after a baby when you are on your own. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North also highlighted the importance of having parents involved, and a really important aspect of the curriculum in Scotland is that children have to bring the stuff home to get it signed off, so discussion is instigated by schools, forcing parents to be involved. That is such a simple thing to do. Parents are also brought in to schools when a particular element is about to start and those who have concerns, such as those that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) highlighted, are able to discuss them with the school in an open and collaborative way. That is very important. There are schools, such as those that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North mentioned, doing that great work across the UK.

Sticking with parents, the hon. Member for Strangford also mentioned the requirement of allowing parents to withdraw from SRE if they feel that that is appropriate for their children. If parents who are involved and are interested in every aspect of their child’s education want to give their particular flavour to something, that is up to them. They can teach the morality beyond the mechanics of sexual reproduction. That is important, but we must remember that many parents do not want to have the discussions with their children and the proposal we are debating attempts to address that.

A number of Members mentioned young people having respect for themselves, which is important, as is the consideration of different types of relationships. I want quickly to mention the Time for Inclusive Education—TIE—campaign and the great work it has done on the understanding that sexuality is not necessarily heterosexual. Great work is being done in schools just now and the Scottish SNP Government have made a commitment in their manifesto to work with the TIE campaign “to promote an inclusive approach to sex and relationships education”. [Interruption.] I understand, Sir Edward. I will just keep going.

I spoke to my son this morning. He is 18 and has just left school, and I asked him whether he had had information about online predators and other online dangers. He said that they had done a lot of work on that, talking about social media—
The guidance that schools, whether state-maintained or academy, rely on to teach the non-compulsory elements of SRE is 17 years out of date. It was written well before the advent of social media, access to the internet and even before Ofsted was set up. It has not been updated. The Department for Education, however, recognises that there is a problem and has appointed a new expert panel to review the guidance. Ofsted must ensure that the new panel has a say in the introduction of new statutory sex education. It is crucial that all children, under the age of 3 and children of all ages, gain the knowledge to contextualise some of the more harmful things they see in the world.

I hope, however, that the Minister will recognise that the Government are running out of time to amend the Children and Social Work Bill. Can she reconfirm, as she said at last Monday’s Adjournment debate, that the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families does not intend to use this Bill to pave the way for age-appropriate, statutory SRE? I want her to acknowledge that it was not the Department for Education’s refusal to amend the Bill that led to the last minute amendment of the Children and Social Work Bill. It was the Opposition’s refusal to accept the Government’s offer to amend the Bill. I was struck by the comments made by the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) about conversations between young people that exposed the level of vulnerability.

A British Humanist Association report looking at how PSHE and SRE are inspected in English schools was published this month. It found that SRE was not inspected well, rather than being rushed. This is why I believe the Minister should commit to including SRE in the Children and Social Work Bill. The report found that inspectors did not identify that many children are being taught inappropriate sex education. It found that secondary education places too much emphasis on the mechanics of reproduction and not on the mechanics of resilience they need to thrive. Children need to understand that it is important to respect themselves and others and to be kind and thoughtful about other people’s feelings. Our common goal is to prepare children to be part of a diverse and interconnected society, where each person has a right to a happy and healthy relationships, consent and respect for oneself.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Caroline Dinenage): It is a great pleasure to serve under your stewardship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this important debate and for her constant and consistent engagement on the important issue of sex education and personal, social, health and economic education. I also congratulate her on the important contribution she made to the Adjournment debate and her commitment to improve the quality of sex education in our schools.

I very much welcome the opportunity to debate these important issues again. As various Members have mentioned, we spoke about them in last week’s Adjournment debate, but it is always valuable to gather and hear more views from more Members from all parts of the House on these areas of concern. I entirely share the hon. Lady’s view about the value of children and young people having access to effective, factually accurate and age-appropriate sex and relationships education. I agree with her and the Opposition spokesperson that it has to be about more than that; it has to be about healthy relationships, consent and respect for oneself.
and others. Those things are so important if our children are to face the challenges of the modern world. It has been helpful to hear views from Members from all parts of the House, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson), whose birthday it is today.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families has already committed to come back to the House during the consideration of the Children and Social Work Bill with an update on how he intends to proceed. I have to be careful not to steal his thunder, particularly because he is as we speak on paternity leave, which is evidence, if needed, that he was definitely there for that class on which bit went where.

I reassure Members that the Government take the matter seriously. We welcome the extremely helpful input from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North, many other Members and the Women and Equalities Committee, and the ongoing scrutiny of the Bill. The issue is a priority for the Government.

Mr Jackson: The paternity leave of my hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families will no doubt be interrupted by the Whips tomorrow evening for the vote on article 50. May I press the Minister specifically on the issue of continuing to allow parents to withdraw their children from some classes under any new guidance issued by the Department? Hitherto, that has been a central tenet of Government policy on this sensitive issue.

Caroline Dinenage: The input of parents on this subject is fundamentally important, as is the input of teachers and other professionals. The Government are fully committed to exploring all the options to improve the delivery of sex and relationships education and PSHE. We want to ensure the quality of delivery and the accessibility of teaching so that all children can be supported to develop and thrive in modern Britain.

Dr Poulter: On that point, I am sure the Minister is aware that many young people find it difficult to talk to their parents about these issues. There is good evidence to suggest that young people sometimes find it difficult to talk to their parents with a strong religious background about such issues as homosexuality, particularly if they are coming out about their own homosexuality. I hope she will factor those issues in and feed them back to her colleague when he comes back from paternity leave.

Caroline Dinenage: That is why it is fundamentally important that we get it right. We have to proceed taking all views into consideration. The existing legislation requires that sex education be compulsory in all maintained secondary schools. Academies and free schools are also required by their funding agreement to teach a “broad and balanced curriculum”, and we encourage them to teach sex and relationships education within that. The Government believe that transparency and consultation between parents, teachers and pupils are vital in the effective delivery of SRE. When developing their SRE policy, all schools should consult pupils’ parents and make the policy available to parents on request and at no charge.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from any parts of sex and relationships education except the aspects included in the statutory science curriculum at each of the key stages. Many schools choose to cover issues of consent within SRE, and schools are both able and encouraged to draw on guidance and specialist materials from external expert agencies. For example, Ofsted publishes case studies on its website that efficiently highlight effective practice in schools, including examples of SRE as taught within PSHE. We are actively encouraging schools to use the Ofsted case studies as a resource when they are tailoring their own programmes to meet the specific needs of their pupils. Members have spoken about the support available for teachers, and that is the support. In addition, in 2014 the PSHE Association, Brook and the Sex Education Forum produced a supplementary guidance document on sex and relationships education for the 21st century, which provides specific advice on what are increasingly common risks to children in the modern world, such as online pornography, sexting and staying safe online. That very useful guidance provides teachers with the tools to support pupils on these challenging matters, developing their resilience and their ability to manage risk.

We are actively considering calls to update the guidance on SRE, which was issued back in 2000. Feedback we have received indicates that the guidance is clear, but we understand the argument that it is now 17 years old and needs to be updated, and we are exploring options for doing so. We are fully committed to improving the quality and accessibility of SRE and PSHE. Our intention is to follow a responsible and dynamic approach that engages a wide range of views, including those of parents, teachers and young people. We know that SRE is a developing and vital area of education and we need to do all that we can to ensure that our guidance is fit for purpose and can equip our children with the skills they need to be safe in modern British society.

More broadly, the Government have already shown an understanding of and initiative on the issues that are affecting children and young people today. The advent of social media and other online services has provided great opportunities for young people, but we are very aware that they can also compromise young people’s safety and expose them to a number of risks. The Government expect online industries to ensure that they have appropriate safeguards and processes in place, including access restrictions, for children and young people who use their services.

We have published a guide for parents and carers, which includes practical tips about the use of safety and privacy features on apps and platforms, as well as conversation prompts to help start conversations about online safety. We have also funded the UK Safer Internet Centre to develop new resources for schools, including guidance on understanding, preventing and responding to cyberbullying, and an online safety toolkit, to help schools deliver sessions about cyber-bullying, peer pressure and sexting.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) spoke powerfully about his ex-wife’s experience of abuse in childhood. He might be interested to know that the Government Equalities Office and the Home Office jointly funded a £3.85 million campaign, which was the second phase of the “This is Abuse” campaign, called “Disrespect NoBody”. That ran until May last year and asked young people to rethink their understanding of abuse within relationships. It addressed all forms of relationship abuse, including controlling
and coercive behaviour and situations, including in same-sex relationships. Some of it contained gender-neutral messaging; other elements depicted male victims and female perpetrators. It also had an online toolkit that provided advice, guidance and real case studies on issues around pornography, controlling behaviour, consent and rape. It was targeted at 12 to 18-year-old boys and girls, with the aim of preventing them from becoming either perpetrators or victims of abuse.

We welcomed the comprehensive report by the Women and Equalities Committee on sexual health and sexual violence in schools. I was privileged to be able to give evidence to the Committee. The report was published on 13 September last year and contained a number of recommendations, including proposals relating to SRE and PSHE.

I emphasise that we are unanimously in full agreement that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, in any form, is absolutely unacceptable and should not be tolerated. The Government’s aim is to ensure that our schools have the tools they need to deliver outstanding sex and relationships education that meets the needs of all pupils in our education system. As I have said, my hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families has committed to update Parliament further during the passage of the Children and Social Work Bill. This is an important issue, and we are serious about the need to use any and all effective means to remove sexual harassment and sexual violence from the lives of young people, to equip them with the confidence to know what healthy relationships look like and to have respect for themselves and others, and to prepare them for the various challenges they might face in modern Britain.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Does the mover of the motion wish to sum up? You can if you wish—there is a bit of time.

5.24 pm

Diana Johnson: I am very grateful for all the contributions made today. I understand that this is a very sensitive issue and that people have strong views about the role of parents and what should be taught in schools, and it is a positive move that we are able to have this debate.

However, as I tried to set out in my speech, seven years down the line from when we tried to bring in this measure in 2010, we still seem to be having the same conversations about reviewing things and looking at best practice. For many of us, the time has come—we need to act now for the benefit of children and young people.

I do not think the Minister was able to say directly what is going to happen to the new clause in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), which is to be considered on Report, and whether the Government are minded to accept it. That would be the most sensible course of action.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered statutory sex and relationships education in all Government-funded schools.

5.25 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Wednesday 1 February 2017

[MADINE DORRIES in the Chair]

Maintained Nursery Schools Funding

9.30 am

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. Only a few hon. Members have put down their names to speak, but there are rather a lot present. Interventions are welcome, but I will not tolerate their being used as an opportunity to make a speech.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered funding for maintained nursery schools.

It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. It may help if I say at the outset that I do not intend to speak for long and will take only a few interventions; otherwise I shall be unfair to colleagues, many of whom want to make speeches.

We are here because we fear for the future of maintained nursery schools—the jewel in the crown of early years education. Maintained nursery schools have an outstanding record of providing for the very youngest children: 60% of them are rated outstanding by Ofsted, and 39% as good. That record of excellence is equalled nowhere else in the education sector. It is not anything like equalled in the early years sector, where only 17% of other nurseries and preschools, and 13% of childminders, are rated outstanding. One would think that any Government would want to preserve and even expand a system that has affirmed that. More importantly, I agree that what is happening is disproportionate through the country.

Helen Jones: I agree with my hon. Friend. The real problem is demonstrated in the foreword by the Secretary of State to the Government’s consultation response. It displays astonishing ignorance for someone holding her office, because she talks continually about childcare. Childcare is not the same thing as early years education, and Ministers must stop confusing and conflating the two. Maintained nursery schools provide early years education. They are schools and must employ qualified teachers. They must have a qualified head. Indeed, many of the headteachers in the sector are highly qualified.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Unlike schools, they are not allowed to academise, for example, or to form unions of different schools that would allow them a centre of gravity that might just enable them to get through the difficulty.

Helen Jones: That is an interesting point, but not one that I have heard from maintained nurseries, which value their independence and their different way of working, and want to keep that special atmosphere. The problem, of course, is that they are funded not as schools but through the early years formula, which has been consistently cut by the Government. Its various incarnations have had various names, but the Library has produced figures showing that the predecessor grants that were originally rolled up into it would have been worth £2.79 billion in 2010. There was an immediate cut to £2.48 billion and continued decreases and, based on our indicative figures, the sum will be £1 billion by 2019-20.

The problem is that at the same time, the Government have changed the way they fund local authorities. Those authorities have the power to fund nursery schools on a different basis from other providers, but they do not have an obligation to do so. They face a double whammy, because most maintained nursery places—65% of them—are in the most deprived areas. It is councils in those areas that have faced enormous cuts in their budgets so that some are struggling even to fund statutory services. It is no surprise that there is pressure on maintained nurseries to close or amalgamate.

Helen Jones: I agree absolutely, for reasons that I hope to set out. Having just seen that every school in my area will lose money under the Government’s so-called fair funding formula, even though we were already one of the lowest-funded authorities in the country, I think that we should treat everything with a fair degree of scepticism until we see the basis on which all the funding is allocated.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this timely debate. We have a similar problem at the Hillfields nursery in Coventry, whose funding is similarly under threat. It has an excellent achievement record; Ofsted has affirmed that. More importantly, I agree that what is happening is disproportionate through the country.
Maintained nursery schools provide outreach to families, support to other providers, and initial teacher training places. Nowhere else in the sector does all that. Yet they achieve enormous success with children from the most deprived families in the country. Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School in my constituency serves, mostly, two wards, Orford and Poplars and Hulme, although it takes children from a wider area too. Those wards are among the most deprived 30% in the country. In Orford 33.7% of children are growing up in workless families. In Poplars and Hulme the figure is 32.9%. The fact that the nursery is rated outstanding in those circumstances is a tribute to the skill and expertise of the staff, but that is by no means unusual. The Government should pay heed to the words of a former chief inspector of schools, who said:

“The only early education provision that is at least as strong, or even stronger, in deprived areas compared with wealthier areas is nursery schools”.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a very good speech. The evidence is certainly there, from health visitors who see children at an early age, that targeted interventions for deprived families, single mothers and people in other situations that may interfere with a child’s life chances make a real difference. That is actually investing to save later on, because of the reduced rates of family breakdown and the improvement in a child’s life chances.

Helen Jones: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is interesting that there is a fair degree of consensus on that across the House. The evidence is there: if the Prime Minister really wants to improve social mobility, she will stop fixating on grammar schools and start investing in maintained nursery schools. Even if I believed that there was a test that could measure the innate ability of 11-year-olds—I certainly do not—as opposed to them being tutored for that test, 11 is too late for many children. They need intervention earlier on.

For example, the Ofsted report on Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School in my constituency is clear that most children come to the school with skills well below the level expected of their age group. However, by the time they go on to reception, the vast majority are achieving at the right level for their age. Furthermore—one of the teachers has tracked children’s progress through primary school—they maintain those gains in future years.

The fact that the school achieves that, while at the same time catering for children with disabilities and other special needs, and while—unusually for Warrington, which is largely white, British and monoglot—they have children speaking eight different languages, is amazing. On a recent visit there, I saw that all the children learn to sign; they all learn Makaton, because there are children there with communication difficulties and the staff want them all to be included.

Like most nursery schools, my local nursery also caters for children with special needs and disabilities. Some 49% of maintained nurseries are attended by children with the most severe degree of disabilities, 69% are attended by children with moderate disabilities and 72% are attended by children with mild disabilities. They get more referrals from councils than other providers, because they have the expertise. If nurseries close, the Minister has to tell us where those children will go. We already know that 42% of parents of children with disabilities find difficulty in accessing the early years provision that they are entitled to.

Maintained nurseries actually do more than simply cater for children with disabilities and special needs—they also provide advice to other providers. For example, a teacher at my local nursery co-ordinates provision for nought to five-year-olds with disabilities and special needs throughout the borough. Again, that is common: 46% of our maintained nurseries provide disability and special needs support to the local authority; 43% provide it to other maintained settings; and 47% provide it to private and voluntary sector settings as well. That outreach work, not only to families but to others in the sector, is a vital part of maintained nursery schools’ work.

Since the coalition Government took what I think was the retrograde step of not requiring children’s centres to employ a trained teacher, that expertise is largely in maintained nurseries. Some 71% of maintained nurseries support their local children’s centre and 60% of them support private and voluntary settings. In fact, in my area, the maintained nursery, the children’s centre and the private nursery were all built on the same site, precisely to facilitate that exchange of expertise. Because there is a real need to raise standards across the early years sector, we ought to cherish and facilitate that sharing of expertise.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a truly outstanding speech in support of maintained nursery schools. We heard reassurances from the Minister at the recent meeting of the all-party group on nursery schools and nursery classes, but my hon. Friend will be aware that those assurances are insufficient given the imminence of the threat to our maintained nursery schools. Of the more than 400 nursery schools, 67 think they will close by the summer. We need urgent action, not just warm words for the future.

Helen Jones: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The lack of urgency from the Government worries all of us who support the continuance of our maintained nurseries.

Maintained nurseries do a lot more than I have already described. They have regular contact with families. Because they are trusted by families, they can refer those in difficulty to other services, such as domestic violence services or English as a second language services for those who do not speak English. That is vital in ensuring that a child’s life chances are not damaged early on.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): This is a timely and tremendous debate, because my constituents are really worried. On the comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), does my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) agree that despite the Government’s wish to appear to be supporting working families and caring for the quality of early years education, they are trying to do that on the cheap? That decimates any remaining credibility they have on the issue. We need them to do the right thing.
Helen Jones: I agree with my hon. Friend; I said in a previous debate that there can be good early years provision or there can be cheap early years provision—there cannot be good, cheap early years provision. It requires high ratios of staff to children and properly trained staff. What sort of Government would want to put such a high-achieving sector, with such a wealth of expertise and such a record in promoting social mobility, in jeopardy? This Government, apparently. The Prime Minister’s repeated assertions about social mobility will ring hollow if maintained nurseries, which are the best engine of social mobility, as proven by study after study, start to close.

The Government need to look at this urgently. They need to ensure that they get a grip, to stop closures from coming this summer and to ensure the future of our maintained nurseries. They need to review the funding arrangements, and to recognise the interaction with other council funding; so far, they have not managed to do that. They cannot cut and cut and expect the same services. They also need to commit not only to interim funding, but to properly funding our maintained nursery schools.

Maintained nursery schools have far greater duties and obligations than other providers in the sector, and are supporting many of those other providers. What has consistently bedevilled early years provision in this country is that we do not have enough trained staff; most of the properly trained staff we have are in maintained nursery schools, and we would be very foolish to lose them. I can never make up my mind whether Ministers simply do not understand the difference between early education and childcare, or whether they are trying to disguise the fact that they have not properly funded their decisions and commitments on childcare, and so are taking money away from maintained nurseries. That needs to stop now.

The Government need to take this seriously. If they do not, the life chances of a whole generation of children will be damaged in a way that cannot be made up for later. The hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) was right: every teacher will agree that, with early intervention, money is saved and problems are avoided later on in the education system. The Government need to understand that and do the best they can for our youngest children. That, after all, is the mark of a civilised society. The Minister needs to make some commitments to that in this debate.

The basic point of the hon. Lady’s speech was the importance of maintained nurseries in our constituencies. I could not disagree with that at all; she is absolutely right. They play a critical role, and some other nursery and primary schools do not have the same focus. In my constituency of Chelmsford we have two excellent maintained nurseries: Tanglewood and Woodcroft. I was fortunate to be invited to Tanglewood a few weeks ago to see for myself the fantastic work done there. The Minister will be as familiar as the hon. Lady with the commitment and dedication of staff and what they seek to achieve. As the hon. Lady rightly said, more often than not they are dealing with some very challenging and deprived families in difficult circumstances. It is a joy to see the commitment of staff and the help they give to children who would not otherwise have such a start in life.

Maybe I am naive, but I was told in no uncertain terms that there are children at that nursery who have no concept of what play is. I imagine most hon. Members in this Chamber take it for granted that every child knows how to play and that it comes naturally, but for some it does not, because their parents were not taught how to play or have no concept of it. We get a full appreciation of the challenges those children face when starting from that base. These schools are so crucial because of the help and the start in life they can offer children who would not otherwise benefit.

The other thing I was particularly impressed by on my visit—this certainly did not happen at my school—was the number of members of staff who were parents of children who had been at the school. They were so impressed by what was going on that they wanted to become involved. Rather than just looking on from the outside, they wanted to actually play a part. They started their training and are now working there with the next generation of children, providing help with the benefit of the experience and knowledge they have as parents of children who attended the school. It is so important that we ensure that tradition continues.

I suspect that all of us, in our different ways, have had contact with my hon. Friend the Minister on these issues. We live in difficult times, and we have to be careful that we get value for money and do not waste taxpayers’ money. It is not an enviable job, but it has to be done regardless of who is in government. I have been impressed by my hon. Friend’s commitment. It is quite clear that she accepts and understands the role of these schools and wants to find a meaningful solution that will hopefully continue to provide a solution beyond 2020, so that these schools can continue to flourish and survive.

Lucy Powell: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his generosity in giving way. He is making a heart-warming speech about the emotional impact that nursery schools can have. May I reiterate the point he makes? The Minister came to our all-party group meeting last week, and I want to put on the record that her responses and the speech she gave at that meeting were very well received by the hundreds of nursery schools we had there. This debate is a good follow-on to that meeting.

Sir Simon Burns: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady and particularly pleased that I gave way to her. All too often, partisan issues blur a debate, but for her to be...
so fair in her assessment of that meeting and her dealings with the Minister is a refreshing reflection of her chairmanship of that all-party group.

Basically, we are all together in trying to find a positive solution. My hon. Friend the Minister has secured funding up until 2020, which I believe is an important step forward as a short-term measure to try to allay the fear of some of these schools that they may face closure, the deadline for which is, more often than not, July 2017. What my hon. Friend has done should ensure that that does not happen. I am also confident that as she continues the consultations and assessments, a longer term solution will be found, so that we do not have to keep coming back to this issue or see the closure of schools that provide such a vital service in all our constituencies, whether they suffer from severe deprivation across the board or, like my own, are more fortunate. Constituencies such as mine do not have deprivation across the board but still have areas where there is a vital role to play and job to be done by these schools, to help give every child the best possible start in life.

These schools fill a gap in the provision of nursery care and education for a targeted group who so badly need help and who disproportionately benefit. As the hon. Member for Warrington North said in her compelling remarks at the beginning, giving a child the best start in their early years is a far better investment than any amount of money thrown at an issue. They then get experience, confidence building and everything associated with that to be able to move forward in life. It encourages and enhances their learning development, social skills and interactive skills, which are so crucial.

I am more confident that the Minister is committed to ensuring that we come up with relevant solutions. It is quite clear—from not only the all-party group meeting, but the way in which she has made herself available to all hon. Members who want to feed in their concerns and viewpoints—that she is prepared to listen and work to find a solution that is beneficial to all. I am pleased that we have this opportunity to share yet again with the Minister our different experiences in the variety of constituencies represented in the Chamber today. I believe that this will be of invaluable help to her as she continues her work to find a resolution to the concerns and worries bedevilling many people quite genuinely.

As was said at the last meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on nursery schools and nursery classes, which my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) so excellently chairs, it was estimated in 2011 that 80% of three-year-olds from the most deprived areas attended a setting with a qualified early years professional compared with just 50% in more affluent areas. That was surely a good thing.

In my own constituency, Washington and Sunderland West, there are four maintained nurseries: Hylton Red House, Usworth Colliery, Oxclose and Pennywell Early Years Centre. I understand that I am lucky because there are four good maintained nursery schools in my constituency, but that also shows the demographics of my constituency. It must be pointed out that Sunderland has one of the highest numbers of these nurseries within our local authority area—a total of nine.

The Government have partially redeemed themselves with transitional arrangements. That is welcome, as it will help to mitigate any problems that nursery schools face due to the cuts in their funding. However, it must be said that funding will still be reduced and the transitional subsidy may not continue—the Minister may tell us otherwise this morning—after the two years are up.

In Sunderland, the baseline funding rate for three and four-year-olds for 2016-17 stood at £5.38 per hour, but through the early years national funding formula that will decrease to £5.11 per hour. That might not sound like much of a decrease, but it is per hour and it is the difference between survival and closure. As the Social Mobility Commission has stated:

"It would be a travesty if funding reforms mean that over time we lose more of the remaining high-quality, maintained nursery schools."

I could not agree with that more, and I hope that the Minister agrees with it, too.

The concerns expressed have been echoed by staff and parents at my local nursery schools—they have all been in touch with me. Claire Nicholson, the local headteacher of Pennywell Early Years Centre, has told me that "such a big percentage is going to be lost, that it won't allow us to be viable."

Also, nearly 100 parents at Pennywell Early Years Centre, in a letter they sent to me, have described their disbelief and dismay at the policy and the direction in which the Government are taking early years education.

These schools are a proven and vital part of our country’s strategy for improving social mobility, which is something we desperately need to be doing more of, not less. It is important that the Government do all they can to give children the best start in life. That is why many of us in this House, and specifically in this Chamber today, got into politics, and we will hold Ministers to account every step of the way on this matter. I urge the Minister not to squander the life chances of any of the children in this country, especially those in the most deprived communities. Our young constituents do not deserve this, and I hope that the Minister will reconsider for their sake.

9.59 am

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I am very happy to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I want to make a small contribution to this very important debate, because I passionately believe that nursery schools are a vital contributor to social mobility in this country. There is ample evidence to show that maintained nursery schools that offer high-quality early education can have profound impacts on the start of children’s lives. That is why it is not surprising that nursery schools have been described as the “jewel in the crown” of the education system. However, the current Government are allowing the crown to be tarnished by going down a route that will place all nursery schools under threat. That is especially true for children in some of the most deprived communities in the country.

10.3 am

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North.
(Helen Jones) on securing this important debate. During her comments, she drew an important distinction between childcare and nursery education.

I fully support the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns), who summed up very well the value of these schools. He also pointed out, rightly, that our hon. Friend the Minister is a supporter of nursery education. I am not here to seek to criticise her, because I know that she is supportive, but I want to refer to one particular school that serves my constituency and is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn)—Scartho Nursery School. I will speak specifically about that school, but my comments also relate to many schools across the country. I am here to support the hon. Lady, who will no doubt also highlight other issues.

Scartho Nursery School was actually under attack when I was a councillor for Scartho ward. The hon. Lady’s predecessor, Austin Mitchell, and I fought a campaign to ensure that it stayed open. We had the help of my now noble Friend Lord Willetts, who visited the school—were the Minister to speak to him, I am sure that he would remember, although it was 17 or 18 years ago. He was very impressed by the school at the time.

The headteacher, Liz Jeffrey, who is a constituent of mine, in a letter that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby will also have received, opens by saying: “We need your help!” She rightly points out that Scartho Nursery School “has been a beacon for Early Years Education”.

Indeed, the Grimsby Telegraph, on 26 April 2013, had the headline “It’s another cracking Ofsted for Scartho Nursery School”. That was the fourth inspection in a row from which it had received the “excellent” accolade.

The question is how we ensure that funding continues, and not just for Scartho nursery, but for similar schools up and down the country. We need a clear statement. From my earlier remarks, the Minister knows that I recognise her support for this sort of school. However, it would be helpful if, in summing up of the debate, she made it clear that the Government do indeed support maintained nursery schools. If that is the case, a funding formula to allow them to continue is clearly essential.

May I refer again to the comments from the headteacher of Scartho Nursery School? Liz Jeffrey says that, like many similar schools, it “prides itself on the fact that it caters only for nursery aged children, providing them with the best possible start to their education.”

It is that “best possible start” that we would want for our children and the children in our constituencies. As Mrs Jeffrey points out, “It is a specialist setting”.

I have visited the school on many occasions and I recognise its importance to people. I recognise how the community values it and, most particularly, how the parents value it. Generations of families continue to go to that school, which is a recommendation in itself.

Liz Jeffrey asks whether the Government are “willing to risk losing the four hundred nursery schools that have been referred to as ‘the jewel in the education crown’.”

She says: “We should be celebrating because at least 90% of nursery schools have been judged by Ofsted to be outstanding or good.” As I said, Scartho itself has received the “excellent” accolade on a number of occasions.

I want to tease out from the Minister an absolute commitment to the continuation of maintained nursery schools. Will she also meet the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and me, so that we can speak specifically about Scartho? The hon. Lady will also speak about Great Coates Village Nursery School, which also serves a number of my constituents. If the Minister would do that, it would be very helpful. With that, I will conclude and look forward to hearing a positive reply from the Minister.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing this debate and excellently setting out the case in her thoughtful comments. I run a great risk of repeating some of them, so I will be careful not to steal her thunder too much. There is such a danger that serious and important domestic matters that will have a significant effect on my constituents and their children will be lost in the noise of Brexit. I therefore welcome this debate and ask the Minister to make sure that this important issue is not ignored and that close attention is paid to the impact of the implementation of the restructured funding.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, 97% of state-maintained nurseries are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. Despite that amazing rating, which many sectors would give their eye teeth for, some 67% of such nurseries say that they will be unsustainable once transitional funding provided by the Government finishes at the end of this Parliament. As mentioned by the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), two of those 67% are in my constituency—Scartho Nursery School and Great Coates Village Nursery School.

I visited Scartho Nursery School last week and met its headteacher and governors, the headteacher of Great Coates, teachers, early years practitioners, special educational needs staff and, of course, the children. Some of the children had been in that setting for only two or three weeks but they were settled, happy, polite and engaged in their learning through play. They all understood the routine of the day such as when it was snack time and when it was story time—the important parts of the day—and were comfortable and confident within that space. They were making friends and were secure with the staff.

It was not that long ago, in April 2016, that a debate was held—some of the Members in this room attended it—secured by the late Jo Cox, on educational attainment in Yorkshire and the Humber. I was keen to contribute to the debate because of the significant detriment in our region experienced by our children. The links to poverty and attainment were laid bare and commitments were made to take this seriously. Yet we now know that in two years’ time transitional funding will be withdrawn, and indicative changers of attainment and social mobility in deprived areas will end. If, in the case of my two nurseries, they are unable to raise the £100,000-plus...
shortfall per annum, these essential facilities in our communities will be lost. They will be lost forever and the only ones who will suffer will be our kids.

In Great Grimsby if we lose this provision, which has around 200 children enrolled across the two sites, we will experience a double whammy of loss of provision and support. Over the past few years we have seen the closure of Sure Start centres at the heart of communities in favour of more centralised family hubs. That is okay, we might think, as private nurseries still offer excellent nursery provision. Yes, there are many in my constituency of Great Grimsby that parents love and that also provide happy, safe environments. It is great that parents have a choice of provision, whether they choose a childminder, private nursery or state nursery. However, through my discussions last week, I discovered that some of those nurseries have already decided that they will not offer the additional hours up to 30. That is due to the £4.30 per pupil per hour cost allocated for those additional hours under the free childcare pledge; the private nursery hourly rates are in excess of that and they are not allowed to charge a top-up so they will lose money. The headteacher of Great Coates Nursery Village School told me that she has already been approached by many parents wanting to take up the 30-hour offer. If private nurseries recognise that they are not able to provide a service for that figure and it is not sustainable, how do the Government expect the state-maintained nurseries to do it?

As mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North, it is important to raise the issue of the hidden costs for state-maintained nurseries, so I will repeat them. Nurseries remain within the early years funding bracket and yet legislation dictates that they operate within a schools framework in terms of having to have a headteacher and teachers including a staff member with expertise in special educational needs. The school I visited has children who will be eligible for free school meals by the time they enter infant school. Those two schools have a significant percentage of children who will be eligible, but they are not funded for free school meals. The proposal for the extension of the 15-hour offer to 30 hours will not see any change to that, despite some children then possibly being there for six hours a day for five days a week. The guidance issued by the Pre-School Learning Alliance is explicit that funding is only for education or care provision, not meals or drinks.

Some children at the nursery had evident special educational needs, from suspected autism to noticeable delays in speech development. Additional funding is available to support those children, but the length of time it takes for the children to achieve a diagnosis means that the nurseries are not receiving that much-needed funding and are providing the additional support through the good will of dedicated staff. What can the Minister do to ensure that the referral of children for SEN assessments at ages three and four is speed up?

I am beyond worried that those two excellent facilities that are much loved in the community and have served multiple generations of families, some of whom have gone on—this is exactly the same situation as the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns), who is no longer in his place, mentioned—to work in those establishments where their children were educated because they love them so much, will be lost. That will leave those with the greatest need without the right support. I fundamentally disagree with the idea that those learning establishments for our children who are at the most exciting and rich period of development in their lives should have to turn their attention away from those children in order to fundraise to cover substantial financial losses.

10.15 am

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): I have heard some excellent speeches today but I want to give particular credit to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for her excellent speech.

Halton is the 27th most deprived borough in the country, and its maintained nursery schools are important not only to the general population but for the difference they make for children from deprived and poorer backgrounds. They can identify at a very early age children who will struggle all the way through school and the rest of their lives. They are particularly good at that. My constituency has three maintained nursery schools: Birchfield Nursery School, Warrington Road Nursery School and Ditton Nursery School. All of them have been in existence in Widnes for 75 to 80 years to support children’s early education and parents value them greatly. The headteachers have told me that they are extremely worried that the schools may not exist for much longer if the national early years funding formula goes ahead as planned. Early Education forecasts that 67% of nurseries will be unsustainable after transitional funding finishes.

The evidence is clear that the quality of early education makes the most difference in raising achievement for the most disadvantaged children. That justifies such large Government investment in early intervention. Quality is determined by the qualifications of early years staff and teachers. Nursery schools in Halton employ well-qualified and highly experienced headteachers and assistant headteachers, as well as taking on and mentoring newly qualified teachers who work with them as early years specialists. They also have a number of staff members with early years degrees, a qualified early years teacher and special educational needs co-ordinators who are qualified and experienced teachers who have offered support across other settings and enabled transitions and planning to take place to support the most vulnerable children. Again, early intervention is crucial.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for taking an intervention and apologise, Ms Dorries, for not being here at the start of the debate. My constituency is very different to my hon. Friend’s, but it has the Fields Children’s Centre, which I have visited over many years. Does he agree that the work being done in this area is about far more than just childcare?

Derek Twigg: My hon. Friend is right. A whole sphere of things can make a difference. I will come back to that later in my speech, but he makes a very good point.

Halton is one of the 25% of councils that will lose money for early years in the revised formula. At present, early years is a priority for Halton and we feel there
should be funding to support it—early years has always been a priority in Halton. The 2015 Ofsted early years report endorses the consistent evidence of other national research that the most effective early education is provided by such nursery schools. Over the past five years maintained nursery schools in Halton have annually increased the average points progress made by children in all settings. We can demonstrate outstanding progress for children with special educational needs and disabilities, English as an additional language and those children entering our schools with low levels of personal, social and emotional development—that is really important—communication and speech.

The headteachers in my constituency believe strongly that nursery schools are in jeopardy all over the country because the qualifications of staff and the leadership of headteachers mean that they cost more than any other sort of nursery. The current system of funding early education, or what seems to be now called childcare, assumes that what every nursery offers is broadly the same, but it is not. They cannot be funded in the same way because maintained and private provision have completely different structures. I hope the Government will understand and address that.

Nursery schools lead to the kind of outstanding early years education we want for every child in our country. They play a key role in supporting training in the early years sector including work placements, initial teacher training, qualified teacher status and postgraduate certificate in education placements. Nursery headteachers and staff want to be supported to operate as system leaders for the future to ensure that early years professionals continue to have quality training and development and are able to have a positive impact on young children's learning.

The recent consultation showed no awareness of the reality of the funding crisis for maintained nursery schools, or of their remit and impact. Proposals should be founded upon research and a commitment to developing early years leadership. One headteacher told me:

“The consultation largely ignored social return on investment and places no weighting on rewarding those organisations mainly schools who have a statutory and moral imperative to support their communities.”

The proposed funding reform would effectively eradicate such nurseries, losing knowledge specialism and damaging the life chances of our most vulnerable children. Nurseries want reassurances from the Minister that the transitional funding mentioned in the consultation will get through to nursery schools and will be sufficient to keep them running while we move towards a new system and leadership model.

I recently asked my local authority, Halton Borough Council, about its view of the situation. People there told me that they will not know the final figures until they receive the census information in February. However, previous estimates based on this year’s funding show that the three nursery schools—even after applying the higher base rate for the maintained nursery schools—will face a shortfall for 2017-18. That takes into consideration the additional protection that nursery schools will receive. Halton Borough Council can only provide the higher base rate for one year, so the shortfall could rise in 2018-19 to £130,000. When the transitional protection is removed in two years, the shortfall could increase to between £160,000 and £190,000. Although the council is working with nursery schools on models and options to reduce the cost, it will struggle to save £130,000-plus, which might mean that it can no longer afford to retain our nursery provision. That is how serious the situation is in Halton, where securing good-quality early years provision is a particular challenge. If Halton ends up having to look at closure, it will be a considerable loss.

Before I conclude, I want to quote the headteacher at Ditton Nursery School, who told me:

“We have a higher base rate for next year (18-19) plus transitional funding for the following year. When this finishes we will have seen our individual budgets cut by between £50,000-60,000 but we have already cut staffing down to a minimum and although looking at a federated model are not sure we will be sustainable when additional funding finishes. Nursery schools drive high quality pedagogy across the sector. We provide outstanding support for Special Educational needs and disadvantaged children thus supporting their learning chances later in education. We offer partnership, innovation and system leadership within the sector, and also support Initial Teacher Training for Early Years. This would all be lost if we closed. We need to ensure that we retain high quality Early Years staff to work with our children—they deserve the best.”

I stress that—they deserve the best. The headteacher continued:

“This is difficult when facing such uncertainty. We want to retain quality staff to ensure the best outcomes for our children.”

I recently visited Birchfield Nursery School and talked to the headteacher there. I was so impressed by what was going on; there was a range of support for young people in education and play, and so on. The right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) made a very important point. Nurseries have seen an increase in the number of children who not only do not know how to play, but perhaps more surprisingly, are not able to speak at the age at which they should be able to start speaking. All the headteachers I spoke to said that. Even more surprisingly, that is the situation not just among poorer children, but across the sphere when it comes to talking and play. They said that children are told, “Get on and play with that,” and although most parents are still fantastic at helping their children to talk and at developing their education, a growing number of parents are not. The lack of parents talking and playing with their children is becoming a major problem for some schools. Dealing with that requires extra money and extra effort, and the schools are then making the difference, not some of the parents. Obviously they try and encourage parents to play with and speak to the children more—to have more conversations with them—but it is sometimes an uphill struggle. That is partly because of the nature of the society we live in, but in this respect nurseries are making a real difference to our children, particularly in deprived areas. That intervention is so crucial to helping children’s life chances. Maintained nursery schools have that impact because of the nature of teachers’ qualifications and experience, and because of how they work together.

I therefore urge the Minister to reconsider the plans. The real problem is that the Government are cutting education and funding, and they need to rethink that. She shakes her head, but she should talk to the headteachers. They tell me what is going on in their schools. This is not me making a political point; it is what headteachers tell me, so the Government need to think again about funding. At the end of the day we cannot lose these fantastic maintained nurseries—we must do all that we can to keep them.
10.24 am

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for securing this timely, much-needed debate. There is a huge misunderstanding about the challenge we have in maintained nurseries and the services they provide, and I welcome the opportunity to talk specifically about why the service should be offered considerably more protection from the Government.

Only two weeks ago, I met the headteachers and governors of the maintained nursery schools in Bradford, four of which are in my constituency. We talked about the funding pressure and challenges that this vital service is facing and the incredible early years education service that they provide. Of the four maintained nursery schools in Bradford West, all are considered good or outstanding by Ofsted, and all offer unique and exceptional early intervention for those most in need. They are what the former Education Secretary would no doubt have described as “a cluster of excellence”, but they are all facing an uncertain financial future due to the changes to Government funding for nursery provision. Although they have seen a short-term funding solution, it does not feel like a settlement that truly appreciates the high-quality services that they provide.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that an advantage of maintained nurseries, such as Surbiton Children’s Centre Nursery—the only one in my constituency—is that they have the security that private nurseries, often run by private tenants, do not have if the landlord decides that they do not want them to continue there, or if the rent goes up?

Naz Shah: Absolutely; I agree with the hon. Gentleman’s point. As I was saying, the settlement does not seem to recognise the high-quality services that they provide or compensate for the unique challenges that they face, and it will do little to ensure their long-term sustainability.

Nursery schools are the one aspect of the education system where the gap in attainment between the poorest children and the rest is significantly narrowed. The reason is that nursery schools are staffed by qualified teachers and led by qualified headteachers. They are schools, and although they are not afforded all the same protections by the Government as other schools, they represent the very best provision in terms of teaching quality and outcomes, and they play a vital role in social mobility. The Government’s funding proposals will have a devastating effect on such quality provision. The funding formula will make it impossible to pay for the qualified staffing teams that have consistently delivered such outstanding results in Bradford.

Let us be clear: we are talking about schools staffed by teaching professionals that also provide a hub of support for Bradford children’s centres and sit at the heart of Bradford’s early years provision. Those centres play an increasing role in the early years sector, providing training and support for other types of nursery provision, as well as being the only service where the outcomes for the poorest and most deprived children are on a par with those of their more affluent counterparts. That is the contrast only when compared with other forms of early years education, but across the entire education system. Such provision targets those who will struggle the most. It works with those who face the most uncertainty in their education and plays an innovative and exceptional role in the development of those with special educational needs and disability.

The question for the Government now is the same as the one that the Social Mobility Foundation asked: essentially, what do we want our early education to be? The Government seem torn between genuine development in early years and parental employment, but those things do not need to be mutually exclusive. I understand the concern that these forms of education provider may be more expensive, given that they are schools. They are also not consistently distributed across the entire country, with 64% clustered in the most deprived areas, but that is not a reason to allow the demise of expertise or to water down provision. They are located in those areas because that is where they add the most value and where they are essential.

All the evidence clearly demonstrates that maintained nursery schools are one of the most successful types of education provider, if not the most successful. That alone should be enough of a reason to give them the guarantees and support that they need, not just to maintain their current level, but to expand and to genuinely secure their long-term future. As children move through these providers, they not only develop in their environment but maintain momentum throughout the rest of their education.

I call on the Government to consider the wealth of data now available on the early years funding formula and to go back and try again to find a better way to support the nursery school sector. There is clear evidence that the early years funding formula will take money away from nursery school provision and that many nursery schools will become unsustainable in the very near future. There are many ways in which they could be guaranteed the funding that they need, but the Government need to go further and support the sector in its entirety, bringing provision up to par with that for other schools. These are expert institutions that have a genuine impact on social mobility, so I call on the Minister to do everything she can to ensure that the services they provide are not watered down and can be allowed to flourish as the models of excellence that they are.

In Bradford West, and in Bradford as a whole, we face the significant challenges of complex educational needs and deprived communities. When I have met nursery heads, as my hon. Friends have done, they have told me about the other services that they provide in the community. They act as a hub and a resource for their communities. With all the funding cuts we have had across the sector, with community centres closing down and other areas being affected, nurseries are the last thing we can afford to lose. They are the one hub that binds communities together, keeps families together and gives children a start. I really, really urge the Minister to reconsider the package and to bring something much more sustainable to the table.

10.31 am

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing this important debate. She said in her passionate and informed opening speech
that the record of excellence for maintained nurseries has been achieved nowhere else in the education system and should be maintained.

The Government’s proposed changes and the loss of transitional funding will affect nurseries throughout England, which will be a great loss to local communities. Maintained nurseries make the difference between early years education and early years caring very prominent. There is a real difference—I know that from my experience as a local authority councillor in Scotland. Nursery education is the crème de la crème. Children need looking after in their early years, but just looking after them is not enough. If our economy is to grow and thrive, we will need people who are able to grow and thrive and to overcome their disadvantaged backgrounds. The message that I have heard clearly today is that it is maintained nurseries that best make that happen.

The right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) did not really disagree much with the hon. Member for Warrington North. He, too, was very supportive of maintained nurseries, although he was trying to support his Government at the same time.

Sir Simon Burns: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I speak as an English MP about English maintained nursery schools, and I support my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford in praising maintained nurseries, the work that goes on.

Marion Fellows: I take refuge in my international observer status, which I frequently refer to on the Select Committee on Education. I look at things from a different perspective, but I passionately want children throughout the UK to have the best possible start.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) spoke about maintained nurseries as the jewel in the crown of the education system. She also made the point, which was echoed throughout the Chamber, that there are more maintained nurseries in deprived areas. That is undoubtedly a good thing, because that is where they are needed. If the United Kingdom is to move forward, we need to encourage and help those who are most deprived. Some of us here will not recognise the shocking statistics about parents not reading to their children or even talking to them, but there are such parents, and they and their children are the ones who need most help. That is why early years education is so important.

The hon. Lady said that the end of the two-year transitional arrangement could lead to a quite significant number of closures of maintained nurseries. She spoke about a drop in funding from £5.38 to £5.11 per hour—a huge drop that could lead to closures that I am sure no one in the Chamber wants.

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) reinforced the difference between childcare and early years education. He spoke eloquently and passionately about Scartho Nursery School, which typifies most maintained nursery schools. In fact, it would be difficult to name any hon. Member who has contributed to the debate without speaking passionately about the need to maintain these nurseries.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) said that she did not want this debate to be lost in the Brexit fog that has now descended on the main Chamber. I could not agree more. At times like this, we have to keep raising these issues and pushing the Minister to listen carefully, change her proposals and make a difference. Some nurseries will not even be offering an additional 30 hours of free provision because of the cost of implementation.

The hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), too, was passionate about the excellent nurseries in his constituency. He described the devastating impact of the removal of transitional funding: the expertise that has been built up in the maintained nurseries in his area in supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities could be lost—and once these services are lost, it is very difficult to get them back.

The hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) said that nurseries are the part of the education system that has the least gap between children. The evidence on the subject, which the Scottish Government have based a lot of their measures on, shows that if we can get children into nurseries and give them proper education early on, we can carry it forward—the right hon. Member for Chelmsford also mentioned that. I cannot overstate the need for maintained nurseries with excellently educated staff who reach out across the whole sector.

This is not my debate or my area, but it is quite useful to turn briefly to what is happening in Scotland, as I do quite often. The political will in Scotland is different. The First Minister has made it her main priority to close the attainment gap, and the Scottish Government believe that the best way to do that is through transforming early years education and giving all children the best start in life.

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. Ms Fellows, could you begin to wind up so that the other two Front Benchers have time to speak?

Marion Fellows: Yes. Let me just say that, as a former councillor, I know how partnership nurseries work in Scotland—the local authorities help to fund and give their expertise to privately funded nurseries—and perhaps the Minister would like to think about that. What is needed is political will. I urge her to take on board what she has heard this morning and make the changes necessary to retain maintained nurseries in England.

10.38 am

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on introducing the debate. I never fail to be impressed by the passion she brings to her speeches or by her campaigning zeal—I have campaigned with her since before I became a Member.

We know that this debate is of great importance; that is why we have had such a high turnout of Members and such a high-quality debate. I join the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) in praising nursery staff throughout the country for their commitment. He spoke more articulately than I can about all the work that goes on.

The Minister will be aware that Members here know the importance of maintained nurseries for sure, and the role they play in our early years system. They are invaluable. In fact, they are absolutely irreplaceable.
[Mike Kane]

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) spoke about Scartho Nursery School with such passion, because he knows that that sort of provision cannot be replaced in any constituency up and down the land if it is lost.

Maintained nurseries operate overwhelmingly in disadvantaged areas and, as has been pointed out, 98% of them are rated “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted. If 98% of them are rated so highly, why do we feel that they are suddenly being so undervalued by the Government, and why do they face this funding crisis? We are at the point now where there is no turning back.

Research by the all-party parliamentary group on nursery schools and nursery classes, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), who is no longer in her place but does speak about Scartho Nursery School with such passion, shows that dozens of nursery schools—I think she said 67—look like they will be forced to close by July this year. That is more than one in 10 nursery schools.

Almost 60% of those nurseries say that they will be unsustainable once the Government withdraw transitional funding support at the end of this Parliament, as my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) pointed out. She talked about educational attainment across the north and referred to the debate that Jo Cox pointed out. She talked about educational attainment in the north, but unfortunately we should remember that in London 55% of kids on free school meals get five good GCSEs. If we take the area which nursery schools get five good GCSEs. If we take the area that is doing. It is located in one of the 20% most deprived lower-level super output areas in the UK, but it received three “outstanding” judgments in its last three Ofsted reports. Nevertheless, it is really struggling financially and anything that the Minister can do to mitigate that situation would be hugely appreciated.

Mike Kane: My hon. Friend makes a fantastic point, as she defends the maintained nursery in her constituency. It has three “outstanding” judgments, yet it is under all that pressure. What sort of society are we living in when that is happening to professional staff, as well as to parents and their young children?

With so many nursery schools likely to rely on the transitional funding, this debate is of huge importance. In her eloquent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) said that the order of the day at the moment is survival or closure for most of these operations. So can the Minister tell us how the transitional funding will be awarded, which nursery schools will benefit, and how will she ensure that it is used in a way that supports our nursery schools up and down the land? I ask these questions because providing transitional funding is not the same as providing certainty. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) also pointed that out. We need long-term sustainability.

Right now, nursery schools across the country support some of our most disadvantaged communities and they are highly valued by parents, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) said. He was also absolutely bang on the money about the quality of training provided in these nursery schools. I remember being a PGCE—postgraduate certificate in education—student and spending two, three or four weeks at a nursery school, and I understood that those nursery teachers knew with 95% accuracy what the kids at that nursery would attain at their key stage 1 standard assessment tests and at their key stage 2 SATs, because they knew that what they could do was make the most important intervention in a child’s life.

The Minister and her colleague, the Secretary of State for Education, have said—rather frequently—that the Government are investing a record £6 billion in early years and childcare; we will see if she comes to that figure today. However, that assessment does not tell us the whole story. For instance, it does nothing to consider the impact of changes in the early years funding formula, and nor does it consider the impact of the savage cuts to local government funding that the Minister’s party has pursued for nearly seven years in government.

I will just turn to the situation in Scotland. The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) said, “Nursery education is the crème de la crème”, and I agree with her that nursery education is the best start in life. However, the Scottish National party Government are taking £150 million a year out of Glasgow City Council’s budget. How do we think that will impact on nursery schools in Scotland? And that is after Glasgow Labour had rebuilt every new school of the campus at £600 million over the last 15 years. What do we think those sorts of cuts will do for disadvantaged children in Glasgow? Let us also be absolutely clear that the SNP Government are failing to inspect nursery schools, with inspection ratios going up to years and years before the equivalent of Ofsted goes in and inspects those schools. I am afraid that the SNP Government have a record of failure in Scotland.

Marion Fellows: That is why they keep getting voted back in.

Mike Kane: That might be the case, as the hon. Lady suggests by chuntering from a sedentary position, but we now face a party that is like the Liberal Democrats of this Parliament—everybody else is to blame, except themselves. Having said that, we are to blame—all Members—for this situation, because we are not doing our research on what is actually going on north of the border.

Marion Fellows: Will the hon. Member take an intervention?

Mike Kane: No, I have no time.

Marion Fellows: You have done your slagging off.

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order.
Mike Kane: Many families are supported by nursery schools that are supported by the Government. However, the Government’s policy of tax-free childcare will do nothing for many working parents. The total benefit of tax-free childcare is £2,000, but that is only available to a family that spends £10,000 a year on childcare. It is quite a regressive tax and it does not really do much for those in the most disadvantaged communities, who rely on the maintained nursery sector.

The Government have to come up with a plan to protect some of the most valuable nursery schools in our country. The Minister has seen the passion that hon. Members across the Chamber have shown today, and we know that we get the biggest bang for our buck, educationally speaking, when it is spent on nursery education. However, I fear that unless the Minister comes up with a plan, her curriculum vitae will show that many maintained nurseries closed on her watch. I know personally that she does not want that to happen. Nevertheless, the risks are clear, and if she and the Government fail to act, a generation of children will really lose out.

10.46 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage): It is an enormous pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing this important debate, and indeed all the hon. Members. Members from different parties who have taken part; they have spoken with great passion about their own experience of maintained nursery schools. It has been great to hear the support from across the House for these valuable educational providers.

The issue of maintained nursery schools is of huge importance. I am pleased to have the opportunity to set out very clearly the Government’s position on the valuable contribution that they can make, not only to the lives of disadvantaged children, but to the wider early years sector. I want to make it very clear that the Government are committed to exploring all options to address the issues that nursery schools face, and we remain committed to ensuring that nursery schools have a bright future and can continue to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Nursery schools do indeed have an impressive history. Central to the development of the very early nurseries was the recognition that disadvantaged children could thrive and overcome their circumstances by attending nursery settings that blended both care and education. Today that approach is backed up by robust research. We know that the first few years of a child’s life are critical to shaping their future development. We also know that high-quality pre-school education reduces the effects of multiple disadvantage on later attainment and progress in primary school. In addition, we know that many maintained nursery schools go beyond the bounds of their immediate communities, using their pedagogical expertise to help other providers improve the quality of their provision.

In short, although maintained nursery schools are attended by only 2.8% of the two, three and four-year-old children who benefit from funded early education places, they nevertheless make a huge contribution to disadvantaged children and to the early years sector as a whole. Like other Members, I have seen that in my own constituency.

Helen Jones: If, as the Minister says, she understands and values the contributions that maintained nursery schools make, why did the Government create this problem by going for a flat funding formula? She says she is trying to put it right, but the problem is entirely of the Government’s own making, is it not?

Caroline Dinenage: I think that the hon. Lady is being a little narrow-minded. I was a mother under the previous Labour Government and both my children were in childcare. That Government presided over some of the most expensive childcare in Europe. I was literally working to pay for my childcare under her stewardship. We can all talk about past mistakes.

Helen Jones rose—

Caroline Dinenage: If the hon. Lady sits down, I will make a little progress. [Interruption.]

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. Ms Jones, you may get a chance to wind up at the end.

Caroline Dinenage: I put it on record that I want to preserve and promote the quality and expertise of maintained nursery schools. Social mobility is a high priority for the Government. That includes committing to the task of spreading existing best practice in high-quality early years provision across the whole system. We want all children, whatever their background and individual needs, to access the high-quality early education they deserve, wherever they come from. Nursery schools can play a valuable role in spreading that quality throughout the early years system, and many already do. I recently visited Sheringham Nursery School in Newham and saw at first hand the high-quality teaching and excellent system leadership it was providing to nurseries, private and voluntary providers and childminders across the local area. Many Members have already mentioned that issue.

Since I was appointed as Minister for early years in July, I have had many positive—but some challenging—conversations with nursery head teachers, staff and other early years professionals from across the country in an attempt to understand the issues these schools face. I have had a healthy flow of emails and letters from head teachers, governors and MPs on the subject of nursery schools. I really do understand the challenges they face. I have a very valuable one in my constituency, and I recognise the impressive support such schools have in their communities.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) and the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), who is no longer here, have mentioned, I spoke to the all-party parliamentary group on nursery schools and nursery classes last week. I was concerned by suggestions, as misquoted by the Opposition spokesperson, that 45 maintained nursery schools thought they faced closure. As a result, I asked my officials in the Department for Education to contact Pen Green, which is the maintained nursery that conducted the survey. Because the survey was confidential, Pen Green...
Caroline Dinenage: Thank you, Ms Dorries. Members will also know that I have committed supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools of £55 million a year. That is not for two years, as the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) misquoted, but until at least the end of this Parliament, so that current funding rates can be maintained. It will be £56 million this year. I cannot remember who it was, but one Opposition Member said that we need to spend more money and that we are doing it on the cheap. I would like to take a moment to think about that figure: £6 billion a year is a huge amount and is taxpayers’ money, but it is the right amount and it reflects the Government’s commitment to providing the high-quality, affordable childcare that hard-working parents need.

Caroline Dinenage: I am more than happy to speak to the hon. Gentleman and any concerned providers in his constituency. We took a view to try to make the funding fairer across the country. We have also set in place a 95% pass-through rate, so that 95% of the money that local authorities get will go on to providers, and that will help. In some cases, local authorities were keeping back up to 30% of the funding.

I need to make some progress. We know that for historical reasons those were clearly unfair and unjustifiable funding differences between areas and between different types of providers. That is why we introduced the fair funding formula which maximises the amount passed on to providers while ensuring that all local authorities are adequately funded to secure sufficient early education, including that provided by maintained nursery schools. I recognise that nursery schools have costs over and above other providers because of their structures and because of the nature of the communities they serve. That is exactly why I announced the additional £55 million a year for local authorities to allow them to maintain existing levels of maintained nursery school funding at least until the end of this Parliament. The Opposition spokesperson asked me how that money will be distributed. It will go to the local authorities, with the presumption that 100% of it will be passed on to the maintained nursery schools. It will not be part of the 95%.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) asked about SEND funding. In our early years national funding formula response, we said that through legislation we are requiring local authorities to set up a SEN inclusion fund and publish the eligibility criteria and value of that fund at the start of the year. It will be a local decision on eligibility, but it will be made in consultation with the local early years provider. It should be focused on low levels and emerging SEN, so that we do not have the issues with having to wait so long to prove that children are eligible.

Looking ahead, Members have asked me to share what I see as my future priorities for nursery schools. Those have developed out of the conversations and discussions I have had with head teachers, staff and early years experts, and they build on examples of innovation and partnership working that many, but not all, nursery schools currently demonstrate. Nursery schools should focus on the needs of disadvantaged children and children with special educational needs and disabilities, but all of them can drive early years system improvement by providing pedagogical leadership. We can work in partnership with other local childcare providers, including childminders, to deliver better quality and practice. We can maximise the use of their skills, experience and resources to become more sustainable.

As Members know, we have committed to consulting openly on the future sustainability of nursery schools. That is the right approach. Nursery schools operate within a changing world and it is important to recognise that it might not be the case that nurseries should provide more of the same, and in the same way. We need to ensure that they are focused on where they can have the greatest impact. The landscape for the delivery of children’s services is evolving. Partnership working is the norm in many areas, but practice is variable. Some local authorities, but not all, make full use of their nursery schools by commissioning services and asking them to co-ordinate or deliver quality improvement for their areas. System leadership of that sort makes very good use of nursery schools’ expertise and experience, and I want to encourage more of that.

However, some local authorities hardly engage with their nursery schools, leaving them isolated rather than drawing on the expertise and specialist resources they offer. The schools landscape is changing as more secondary and primary schools opt to convert to academy status and join multi-academy trusts. Moreover, all public bodies, including schools, are grappling with tight budgets. That will mean looking at how to deliver better value for money and getting the balance right.

We have a lot to bear in mind as we consider the future, but I think that we are coming from a strong starting point, given the tremendous track record nursery
schools have in delivering rich learning experiences and high-quality early education to disadvantaged children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. Our consultation will explore the vision in more detail, including the best ways to bring it about. I hope that those in the sector will take part and share their experience, wisdom and views with us once the consultation is launched. They certainly have not been shy in sharing those views with me so far. I appreciate it, and I sincerely hope they will continue to be honest and frank with me as we move forward together. The steps I have outlined will ensure the continuation of the important contribution that nursery schools make to the early years sector and the future opportunities of young children in deprived areas.

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Ms Jones, would you like to wind up in the few seconds left?

10.59 am

Helen Jones: I would. Briefly, I thank my colleagues for their contributions to this debate. I am far from reassured by what the Minister has said. She offered no certainty to nursery schools and clearly does not understand the problem.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered funding for maintained nursery schools.

Youth Justice System: Gypsies and Travellers

11 am

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers in the youth justice system.

I am very pleased to have secured this debate in order to raise the experiences and disproportionate representation of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in our youth justice system. This is a significant issue for the youth justice system. The most recent annual “Children in Custody” report, an independent report by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons commissioned by the Youth Justice Board, was published in November last year and revealed yet again the over-representation of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in youth custody. This is a significant issue for the youth justice system. The most recent annual “Children in Custody” report, an independent report by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons commissioned by the Youth Justice Board, was published in November last year and revealed yet again the over-representation of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in youth custody, as have numerous reports before it.

Despite a welcome decrease in the number of children in custody in recent years, analysis of the “Children in Custody” report by the Traveller Movement shows that the number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people in custody remains disproportionately high: 12% of children in secure training centres identify as Gypsy, Traveller or Roma, as do 7% of boys in young offenders institutions, and 51% of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in young offenders institutions report that this is not their first time in custody.

The figures, which are troubling in themselves, almost certainly underestimate the true position. The “Children in Custody” report is based on survey data, not on comprehensive and systematic monitoring of young offenders and children. The surveys completed by young offenders are based on information from only five young offenders institutions, and young offenders institutions sited in the adult prison estate are not included. Yet the Irish Chaplaincy, for example, estimates that YOI Isis, which is situated in Belmarsh prison, currently houses around 20 Gypsies and Travellers aged 18 to 21. There is little data available on sentence length, although we know that a third of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma boys in youth custody had been sentenced to less than 12 months in custody. It is therefore reasonable to assume that over a full year, the overall number of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma boys in custody in the youth justice system will be higher.

However, perhaps reflecting the relative paucity of data, such over-representation in the youth custody system does not always receive sufficient official recognition and attention. All too often, Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children are overlooked by both service providers and policy makers. For example, Charlie Taylor’s recent review of the youth justice system did not mention Gypsy, Traveller and Roma young people at all, despite the representations made to him by those groups.

Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children share similar characteristics with other children in custody, particularly in relation to having been in care and their poor educational experience. It is clear, despite the deficiencies of the data that we have and the lack of attention to their circumstances, that the disproportionate representation of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma young people in the
youth custody system reflects the widespread failure of support systems and services prior to those young people entering custody.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am delighted that my hon. Friend secured a debate on this subject. She is right that we have sufficient information, because of the work of the Irish Chaplaincy and others, to know that discrimination is a serious problem, but it is shameful that the Government do not collect the statistics. Would she welcome the Minister telling us today that the Government will use up-to-date census data and will have a comprehensive investigation of this issue?

Kate Green: As my hon. Friend will hear, that will be the precise thrust of my speech this morning.

Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children are disproportionately likely to be the subject of care proceedings. That feeds through to the significant numbers of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in custody who have been in local authority care: 47% and 33% in secure training centres and young offenders institutions respectively, according to the Traveller Movement.

Meanwhile, at every key stage of their schooling, Gypsies and Travellers have lower rates of attainment. Again, their poor educational experience prior to entering custody shows up in the youth justice system: 84% of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma boys in young offenders institutions had been excluded from school, and 55% said they were 14 or younger the last time they attended school.

Although their routes into custody offer a depressing reflection of the disadvantage that Gypsy, Traveller and Roma young people experience in wider society, what is even more depressing is that these failures continue while Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children are in custody. Generally speaking, those children have a worse experience in custody compared with other children, whether in education, safety, health, understanding procedures, or being prepared for life after release. At every stage when the state ought to be looking after these young people, helping them to develop and preparing them for positive lives on release, it fails them. That need not be the case.

Despite Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children being significantly more likely to have left education early, had lower rates of attainment and had higher rates of absences and exclusions, they have very positive perceptions towards education while in custody. Some 61% of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in custody compared with other children, whether in education, safety, health, understanding procedures, or being prepared for life after release. At every stage when the state ought to be looking after these young people, helping them to develop and preparing them for positive lives on release, it fails them. That need not be the case.

Despite indications of a positive appetite for education, opportunities are being missed. In secure training centres, only 55% of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children, compared with 70% of other children, said that they had learnt skills for jobs that they would like to have in the future. Youth custody institutions and facilities need to develop targeted strategies to improve educational outcomes for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma in custody, and need to promote courses that will allow those young people to lawfully participate in businesses that fit with their family lives and culture on release.

A similar picture pertains in relation to health. The Irish Chaplaincy’s “Voices Unheard” report first identified that a significant proportion of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma prisoners suffer mental health issues. The Traveller Movement’s research into the “Children in Custody” responses found that those children in secure training centres were twice as likely to report having unmet health needs, while a quarter of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma boys in young offenders institutions said they were disabled and 23% reported emotional or mental health problems.

Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in secure training centres were significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe and experiencing bullying or intimidation by staff or other young people. According to the Howard League, half had been restrained compared with 29% of other children. We see a similar experience in young offenders institutions with Gypsy, Traveller and Roma boys reporting higher rates of victimisation from other young people. Gypsy, Traveller and Roma detainees were also three and five times more likely to have their canteen and property taken off them by other young people in young offenders institutions and secure training centres respectively.

Finally, in secure training centres, Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children struggled to maintain contact with their families, and were less likely to know who to look for help when opening a bank account, finding accommodation or continuing health services when released. Gypsy, Traveller and Roma boys in young offenders institutions were also less likely to know who they should contact if they encountered problems on release.

It is clear that many steps need to be taken to address the poor outcomes for Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children in custody. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) suggested, a significant barrier is the lack of adequate data. In schools, every headteacher knows the exact ethnic breakdown of his or her pupils and is therefore able to adapt strategies and policies to correct any disadvantages they experience. Shockingly, such data are not available in the youth custody system. Reports such as “Children in Custody” present only a partial snapshot. As the then prisons Minister conceded on 9 March 2015 in answer to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith, Ministers “are unable to determine the actual number” of young Gypsies and Travellers in youth custody establishments.

The limitations of relying only on survey data are compounded by the fact that the youth justice system still uses ethnic monitoring systems based on the 2001 census classifications. Since 2011, the census has used the so-called 18+1 ethnic categorisation, which enables the identification of Gypsies and Travellers. Reflecting that, the police are expected to update their ethnic monitoring system soon to include Gypsies and Travellers, while the adult prison estate has monitored Gypsies and Travellers since 2011. The youth justice system will therefore be the only key criminal justice agency without proper modern ethnic monitoring of Gypsies and Travellers.
Given the troubling picture presented by the Traveller Movement, the Irish Chaplaincy, Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons and others, it is not surprising that pressure for the youth justice system to address the issue is mounting. In November last year, amendments tabled by Baroness Brinton to the Policing and Crime Bill would have required the introduction of ethnic monitoring in the youth criminal justice system for Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children and young people. In the debate on her amendments on 16 November, Baroness Brinton pointed to the need to move to the 18+1 system to consistently capture the representation and experience of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma young people in the youth custody system. The national police chiefs lead for Gypsy, Traveller and Roma issues, Deputy Chief Constable Janette McCormick, wrote to the Lord Chancellor, urging her to support the amendments.

I recognise that obstacles exist to introducing that system of ethnic monitoring in the youth justice system. In the Lords’ debate on the Policing and Crime Bill, Baroness Whitaker acknowledged that “many young people from the Gypsy and Traveller communities are fearful of admitting their ethnicity because of the bullying and exclusion” that they had previously experienced—but, as she pointed out, “trust can be developed if the information is shown to be helpful.”—[Official Report, House of Lords, 16 November 2016; Vol. 776, c. 1499.]

I also recognise concerns about the cost and complexity of changes to case management systems. Similar arguments were raised about the extension of ethnic monitoring to encompass Gypsies and Travellers in the police systems, but discussions with the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs Council revealed that there would be no cost to upgrading their systems. It is highly doubtful that the youth justice system can have a significantly more difficult or complex case management system than the police, which have eight or nine additional data sets and 45 territorial police forces to contend with.

From my conversations, I do not believe that what is needed in the youth justice system is a complete corporate systems overhaul, but instead a small amendment to existing data systems. In any event, the cost of updating the system is outweighed by the benefits of helping to turn around the lives of these children and ensuring they lead purposeful, positive lives on release. I know that point is recognised by Lord McNally, chair of the Youth Justice Board. I was very grateful to have the opportunity to discuss the matter with him recently and I very much welcome his constructive engagement.

I am also pleased that in a letter to Lord Rosser following the House of Lords debate last November in response to points he raised about the cost of changing systems, Baroness Chisholm said that the Youth Justice Board is committed to moving to the 18+1 classification, but I note that no specific timescales or costs were suggested in that letter.

Children from a Traveller background clearly experience greater levels of need and have worse experiences in custody than other children. A year ago, the then chief inspector of prisons Nick Hardwick said that “with any other group such huge disproportionality would have led to more formal inquiry and investigation into what part of their backgrounds or interaction with the criminal justice system had led to this situation.”

I applaud the Prime Minister’s commitment to monitoring racial disparities in public service outcomes and nowhere is that more acutely needed than in relation to Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children. I was therefore very pleased that in responding to me at Cabinet Office questions on 2 November last year, the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General said that he would ensure that every Government Department and agency would use the 2011 census classifications. Nowhere is it more surely time to move from warm words to taking action properly to capture and monitor the data needed to address the needs of this deeply disadvantaged group of children than in the youth justice system. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us the tangible steps the Government are taking to do that and that they are taking them quickly.

11.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) on securing the debate. She has a long history of engagement in these issues, both before coming into Parliament and since.

Young people are some of the most vulnerable in the secure estate. We are determined to improve standards in youth justice so that we not only punish crime but intervene earlier to prevent crime and reform offenders to prevent further crimes from being committed.

There has been a significant and welcome reduction in the number of young people entering the youth justice system in recent years. However, we are concerned about the levels of disparity that exist in the justice system. Last August, the Prime Minister announced an audit of public services to reveal racial disparities, and the review, headed by the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), has been established to provide an independent assessment of the treatment of and outcomes for black and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system. Gypsies and Travellers fall within the scope of the review. In November last year, the right hon. Gentleman wrote to the Prime Minister setting out some of his emerging findings. The final report is due to be published in the summer, and we will give its findings careful consideration.

We also welcome the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry launched in November last year, which will look at the effectiveness of Government policy in improving outcomes for Gypsy, Romany or Traveller communities across education, health and employment as well as the criminal justice system. We will monitor the outcome of that inquiry.

I note the recent report by the Traveller Movement on Gypsies, Romany and Travellers in the youth justice system, for which the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston drafted the foreword. I commend its work to promote increased race equality, inclusion and community cohesion.

The Youth Justice Board does not currently require local authorities to collect data specific to the identification of Gypsy, Romany and Traveller children and young people. However, the YJB and Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons publish an annual report, “Children in Custody”, which monitors the number of GRT children in young
offenders institutions and secure training centres. The latest report, published last November, found that of the young people surveyed in STCs, 12% identified as GRT in 2015-16, which was up from 11% in 2014-15. For young offenders institutions, 7% considered themselves to be GRT, which was down from 8% in 2014-15.

The report showed that in young offenders institutions there was no difference between GRT children and the rest of the cohort in understanding spoken and written English. It also showed that participation in education, work or vocational skills training in custody is higher for those identifying as GRT than among the rest of the cohort.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): As I think the Minister is indicating, surveys show that Gypsy and Traveller young people’s experience of education in youth custody is positive; to the extent that they are in vocational training, they want to do it and their perceptions of being in education are positive.

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. This is not a speech, Mr Lammy. It is an intervention.

Mr Lammy: I have seen that as I have been around prisons. That is something that the youth justice system can build on. I hope the Minister might indicate how that might happen.

Dr Lee: I know that the right hon. Gentleman is very interested in expanding the evidence base on the experience of GRT children in the youth justice system, in particular. As the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston indicated, the genesis of a lot the problems encountered in the justice system predates their appearance in the system. A lot of them relate to the fact that those children do not attend school, so their first opportunity to receive education is in the system. We are conscious of that, and we are pleased that some of the indicators show that, when those services are offered, children engage with them. We want that to continue.

As I said, the youth justice system is of great importance to the Government. We have made it clear that outcomes are not good enough for children in custody. Reoffending rates remain stubbornly high, and not enough is done to support young offenders. That is evident for all young offenders, including those who identify as GRT. We also remain concerned about the level of violence in the youth secure estate. Recent figures demonstrate that levels of assault, self-harm and restraint remain too high.

In December, we set out our response to Charlie Taylor’s review of the youth justice system and how we will improve outcomes for young offenders and safety across the youth custodial estate. We will develop a new pre-apprenticeship pathway to ensure that all children and young people are in education, training or employment on their release. We have committed to boosting the number of frontline staff in young offenders institutions, and we will develop two secure schools with a particular focus on education and health. They will look to attract a wide range of specialist providers and allow them the freedom to decide how best to deliver services. I look forward to updating the House on the progress of those reforms as the work develops.

It is important that ethnicity classifications for young people are robust and accurate, so any potential disparities must be identified and suitably addressed. In 2011, the National Offender Management Service adopted the 18+1 ethnicity monitoring system on the centralised database used in prisons and young offenders institutions for the management of offenders, following the change of ethnicity classifications within the national census. The 18+1 system included as additional categories “Arab” and “Gypsy or Irish Traveller”, but the new classification is not consistently used by secure children’s homes, secure training centres and youth offending teams.

The YJB uses a number of different IT systems to monitor performance across the youth justice system. The two largest systems are eAsset, the custody booking system, and the youth justice application framework, which is used to record the ethnicity of young people and draws on data from individual youth offending team case management systems. Both of those systems currently use criteria from the 2001 census categories, which means that they do not capture GRT as a distinct category.

I am pleased to say that the Youth Justice Board has confirmed it is keen to move to the 18+1 system. However, although we support working towards consistency in the data that are recorded, further work is required to assess the feasibility and costs associated with such a move.

Kate Green: I am very encouraged by what the Minister is saying. Can he indicate how quickly that feasibility work can start?

Dr Lee: No, but I will write to the hon. Lady with a guide to how long it will take. There are some issues around the implementation, as she will understand, not least because the national census criteria may change again. It is work in progress, but I am happy to write to her.

Not only would the YJB have to make changes to its central systems, but it is likely that the youth offending teams would have to amend their individual case management systems too.

Andy Slaughter: I am very glad about what the Minister has said, but to clarify that point, is he saying that that will happen and he is just going to give us a date, or that it might happen depending on the cost?

Dr Lee: No, I am not committing to it happening. I am committing to coming back to Members with the approach we are taking. There are potential issues not only with the costs, but with how the work is going to be implemented across a diverse set of institutions, which are run by different organisations. I am committed to coming back with a schedule setting out the timing and how we are approaching this issue.

Work has begun on looking into the implications of the changes. In October 2016, the Youth Justice Board informed the four case management system suppliers, which cover 158 youth offending teams in England and Wales, of its intention to move towards the revised classification system. It is formalising its business requirements prior to initiating a preliminary impact assessment, which will set out the dependencies with
existing IT systems and identify the feasibility and indicative costs of moving to the revised classification system.

On an issue raised by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston, the Government agree in principle with the use of the 18+1 system. We opposed the amendments that Baroness Brinton tabled to the Policing and Crime Bill for two main reasons: first, because further work was required to consider the cost and feasibility; and, secondly, because enshrining its use in legislation would create issues in the event that the Office for National Statistics decided to change the 18+1 system and introduce a new system of ethnicity classification in the future.

Although there is much work to do, the Government are committed to accurate monitoring of ethnicity across the youth justice system.

Question put and agreed to.

11.26 am

Sitting suspended.

Prevent Strategy

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY in the Chair]

2.30 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered implementation of the Prevent Strategy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Sir David. I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise this important issue. The statutory Prevent duty introduced in 2015 has given rise to increasing levels of concern in different parts of our communities and of the House. There is now a level of disquiet, which it would be wrong to ignore, about how the Prevent duty is working in practice and its impact on community cohesion.

The Prevent duty requires those in a position of trust, such as teachers or doctors, to report people who they perceive might be a risk—

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): I am sorry to intervene on my hon. Friend so early, but I am afraid that she has repeated the same line she said at the beginning of the debate on her private Member’s Bill on Friday. There is no requirement to report; there is a requirement to put in place safeguards and risk assessment for children. She may look at the guidance, at paragraphs 67 and 68 on page 11. It does not include a requirement to report. I ask her to change that line, because it is part of peddling a myth of what Prevent is about.

Lucy Allan: I thank the Minister for correcting me on that point. I am opening a debate on issues of concern to many people, and I would not want to fall inadvertently into any traps of myth-peddling.

The people referred to Prevent are those perceived to be at risk of being drawn into terrorism and those deemed possibly to be susceptible to extremism, including non-violent extremism. Today I want to highlight the difficulties that the Prevent duty is creating. I want to set out why, despite individual examples of good practice, Prevent as a concept or strategy to draw people away from terrorism is not working. I also want to draw attention to the way such concerns are being dismissed, rather than listened to, and the way those who express them are being depicted as seeking to undermine Prevent or even our security.

All of us come to this place with the objective of giving a voice to those who are not being listened to or heard, and of campaigning on something we have seen to be wrong or not working—we want to put it right and highlight where it is happening. That is what I am seeking to do in this debate.

The greatest difficulty with Prevent is that it is driving a wedge between authority and the community. The problem lies in the way the communities most affected by Prevent experience and perceive the strategy. For all its good intentions, if it is perceived by those it affects as punitive or intrusive, it will not be productive or have the desired effect.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I am listening with interest to the point my hon. Friend is making, which reflects the evidence that the Women and Equalities Committee gathered for our report on challenges that
Muslim people face in the workplace. Has she had a chance to look at that report, which backs up some of her points?

Lucy Allan: I thank my right hon. Friend for making that point. Absolutely, Select Committees such as the Home Affairs Committee and the Joint Committee on Human Rights have looked at all of this in some detail, so in preparing for the debate I read the reports of her Committee and those others. The reports reflect several recurring themes, such as how communities perceive Prevent and what they feel about the way it is being operated. That is incredibly important. If the strategy is to succeed and make us safer, people have to consent to it; they have to buy into it and accept that it is helpful, not intrusive or punitive. If we do not deal with the perception and how people are experiencing Prevent, it will not work.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech and is to be commended for bringing this matter before the House. She is saying that communities need to be at the heart of any Prevent strategy. Prevent must not be seen as Whitehall imposing its views on communities, whatever those communities are. The strategy must work in tandem and engage with them in order to find a solution to the problems of terrorism.

Lucy Allan: I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I am delighted that he made that point, and that he made it so eloquently, because he has helped to articulate my argument.

Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, Prevent moved from being a co-operative and voluntary action by the community to being a statutory duty, and therein lies the problem. A failure to meet a statutory duty can have negative consequences, for example for teachers in schools. Ofsted assesses whether the duty has been met and delivers a grading for the achievement of compliance with it. The grading will be reduced if a school has not complied with the duty. As a school governor, I have seen the incentive to make referrals under Prevent. If we do not make them, we might feel that we will get into trouble, or that there will be a negative impact on the school or a teacher’s career.

That approach has led to an exponential increase in the number of referrals since Prevent became a statutory duty. One child a week under the age of 10 is being referred. That is an incredibly worrying statistic. I have been told by teachers that they are being pressured to refer children. That is incredibly concerning.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some good points about concerns in certain communities, particularly the Muslim community. Does she accept that one issue is that of miscommunication? My understanding is that Prevent is not only about the Muslim community, which seems to be the focus for a lot of the discussion; it is also about the real danger from right-wing extremist groups. Prevent is focused on training people to understand the real danger from right-wing extremist groups. A recurring theme that I hear in my constituency is that the Muslim community feels that Prevent is focused on them in order to find a solution to the problems of extremism. The strategy must work in tandem and engage with them in order to find a solution to the problems of extremism.

Lucy Allan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have not so far mentioned, and I think I will not mention at any point, the Muslim community specifically. However, I will mention some use of Prevent to tackle the far right, which is a good point and one we should all take on board.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): My hon. Friend is being most generous in giving way. In the course of her speech, will she tackle an important evil that Prevent is designed to counter and mention how it is used to build up our child safeguarding provisions?

Lucy Allan: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important issue, to which I will devote a whole section of my speech. I have concerns about the conflation of safeguarding and counter-extremism measures, which I will come to in due course.

The Government naturally have a duty to protect the public, and they are seeking to discharge that duty through the Prevent strategy. We all want to see extremism tackled, and the intention of Prevent is, in theory, to stop young people being drawn into terrorism and to protect them from extremist views that might render them more susceptible to radicalisation. We get into more difficult territory, however, when we start to tackle belief ideas and the expression of political and religious views. The whole issue then becomes a great deal more complicated. We could find ourselves in a situation in which the Government decide which views are too extreme and debate can be shut down, so that issues that are better discussed and challenged openly are driven underground.

That is all before anyone has even done anything. Prevent is operating in a pre-crime space, which sounds positively Orwellian. That is at the heart of some of the concerns being expressed about the Prevent duty. Our schools need to be places where young people can discuss any issue at all and develop the ability to see extremist ideologies for what they are. We need to help young people develop the resilience to challenge those ideologies, and if we expose them to only the views that the Government find acceptable, we deny them the opportunity to challenge alternative views and fail to equip them with the ability to think critically and learn how to exercise judgment.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The hon. Lady talks about children. Is she aware of a recent case in Bedfordshire where a school called the police because a seven-year-old child had been given a plastic gun as a present? Neither of the child’s parents was an observant anything; the father was a lapsed Muslim and the mother was a Hindu. If Prevent has reached the stage where people call the police on seven-year-old children, something is wrong.

Lucy Allan: I agree. I am aware of that case, and there have been many similar cases. That is a real concern, because it puts teachers in the position of having to take action that they might feel is inappropriate, because they do not want to damage their school’s credibility and its Ofsted reports. We are suddenly in a cycle where people say, “Let’s report people just in case.” The Minister will say that Prevent is a protective and safeguarding measure. We must be very careful not to use words to describe what is happening that do not necessarily reflect reality.
Mr Wallace: Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). The case that the hon. Lady raised was not a Prevent case; it was not referred to Prevent and it did not involve Prevent officers, either council officers or police officers. It had nothing to do with Prevent. The Guardian sought to report it as if it was a Prevent case, but it did not bother checking the facts. Therein lies part of the issue; people are happy to report things that might have taken place in another part of the education environment and had nothing to do with Prevent.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. I will call the first of the three Front Benchers at 3.30 pm. Several Back Benchers want to speak, and there will be little enough time for them to do so, so I say to the Front Benchers: hold your horses until you get the opportunity to make a speech.

Lucy Allan: I thank the Minister for his intervention. What is important about what he said is that although the incident was not referred under the Prevent mechanism, the same actions were taken. The teachers concerned would have been trained in Prevent and alert to this whole issue. Although they did not formally trigger the Prevent mechanism, they still called the police about an issue that might otherwise have been to do with extremism. It is important to bear that in mind.

From what I have seen, when schools look for signs of extremism, they do not really know what they are looking for. They often come up with suggestions for things that might be grounds for referral that have no possible connection at all to extremism. I have sat in governors’ meetings where teachers who want to comply have openly discussed scenarios such as a child coming into school and saying that he has been on a Fathers 4 Justice march or a march to protest against badger culls. To me, Prevent is certainly not intended to tackle that. There is no indication that that type of activity would lead to extremism, they do not really know what they are looking for. They often come up with suggestions for things that are experienced in families who are becoming radicalised. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies) knows well that criminal activity is very much part of terrorism. I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Telford will talk about those links, which are rightly made.

More and more public sector workers are being trained in how to report under the Prevent duty, but that does not make me feel any more comfortable. I believe that some 600,000 people are now trained to refer people under Prevent for the purposes of re-education and religious guidance. That does not give me confidence at all; it actually makes me feel more concerned. We should not, as a matter of course, have people sitting and saying that he has been on a F athers 4 Justice march or a march to protest against badger culls. To me, Prevent is certainly not intended to tackle that. There is no indication that that type of activity would lead to extremism, they do not really know what they are looking for. They often come up with suggestions for things that are experienced in families who are becoming radicalised. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower knows well that criminal activity is very much part of terrorism. I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Telford will talk about those links, which are rightly made.

Dr Poulter: My hon. Friend might be aware that I am one of those public sector workers when I am not working as an MP. May I reassure her that a lot of work on Prevent goes on, particularly in psychiatry, and we use clinical judgment in exercising our duties? Referrals are rarely made to Prevent through mental health services unless there is a reason for doing so. Referrals are usually made due to the exploitation of an individual by other people, and it is those people who end up being referred and engaged in the Prevent process, not the individual themselves.

Lucy Allan: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Children and young people will always test boundaries, and playground banter and braggling must not be seen as potentially sinister things where children must be watched. That breeds fear, suspicion and mistrust, which concerns me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) raised safeguarding. I want to challenge the way that Prevent is packaged as a safeguarding measure. In effect, we are told, “Prevent must be a good thing, because it is intended to keep us safe.” It is depicted as offering support and advice to ensure that susceptibility to radicalisation is diminished. It is a real concern that is how the Government perceive Prevent, because that perception is out of step with how Prevent is interpreted and perceived by those affected by it. In the context of Prevent, safeguarding is often about forcible state intervention in the private life of an individual when no crime has been committed, and that is inevitably experienced in a negative way.

It is important to understand that families subjected to safeguarding measures will, in any event, experience them as frightening, shaming and stigmatising. Someone in a position of trust—whether a teacher or a doctor—is used to gather and share data, often about young children, without consent, investigations are conducted and the police are involved. That process is anything but supportive and helpful; it destroys trust. A less heavy-handed approach would be far more constructive. Calling that approach safeguarding, and conflating counter-extremism measures and safeguarding, is quite dangerous.

Victoria Prentis: I, too, was one of those public sector workers before being elected. The difficulty is that counter-terrorism is the extreme end of what the Prevent strategy tries to deal with. The other measures—those to do with child safeguarding—are often part and parcel of the journey to countering terrorism and the problems that are experienced in families who are becoming radicalised. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury knows well that criminal activity is very much part of terrorism. I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Telford will talk about those links, which are rightly made.

Lucy Allan: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. I reiterate that we should not present Prevent as simply supportive and helpful; we must be more aware of the way it is perceived by the people to whom it is delivered. If we do not try to put ourselves in the shoes of the people who experience it, Prevent will not achieve what we want it to achieve. It is all very well for the Government to say, “Well, we know best, we want to achieve this,” but I urge the Minister to try to anticipate how he might feel if his children were subjected to a safeguarding procedure. That process is intimidating and frightening, and there is no doubt that people feel ostracised and alienated by it, however well intentioned it is.

That brings me quite neatly to the way the Government are responding to the concerns that have been raised by Members of several parties in this House and in the Lords, and by the Joint Committee on Human Rights,
David Anderson QC and many others. We must listen to people when they raise concerns. It is not enough just to say, “Well, it’s well intended and there are good examples of it working well in practice for individual cases.” This is a much bigger issue of principle; it is about whether our communities will be safer or less safe as a result of Prevent. It is about whether communities feel stigmatised, alienated or marginalised. If people are saying that is how they feel, there is a duty on the Government to listen and not just bat their concerns away by saying, “Well, they don’t understand the level of terrorist threat,” “They are seeking to undermine Prevent,” or “They are doing something that is destructive of our efforts to keep society safe.”

I ask the Minister to listen and to understand that the state can be oppressive and authoritarian when it intervenes and interferes in the lives of individuals. People who are concerned about Prevent should not be dismissed as failing to understand or for not being a criminal barrister or having the right knowledge of such things. That is how they feel, and I urge the Government to listen to that. I do not believe the narrative that people are somehow motivated to undermine Prevent. They are just raising concerns, and it would help community cohesion if there was an overt attempt to hear those concerns and not just plough on regardless.

The terror threat is real and we must take all measures to reduce it. I do not underestimate the difficult job that the Minister and his Department have in doing that—I fully support him in his efforts—but the statutory Prevent duty is not the way to do it. It is too blunt an instrument.

I ask the Minister to consider the Select Committee reports we have talked about and to reflect on their recommendations. Some incredibly important work—research done and evidence taken—has been done on that and it would be helpful if all of that was taken on board. I ask him in particular to consider the views of David Anderson QC and the evidence he gave to those inquiries. He had been out in the communities, talking to the people affected, and his specific recommendation was that there should be an independent review of the Prevent duty. I gently ask the Minister to give that further consideration.

The Government have said in response to concerns that they intend to strengthen Prevent. I urge the Minister to consider whether the desired outcome would be more achievable if we were to use more emotional intelligence and consent, in a collaborative, community-led way at the grassroots, rather than the muscle of continued forced state intervention, which is what is implied by strengthening Prevent, even if that is not the intention.

Our safety and security is too important. We must get this right. It is therefore essential that we reflect on all these issues. I am grateful to the Minister for coming here today and for all the contributions that have been made.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): As I said, I will call the Front-Bench speakers in 35 minutes or so. Seven Members are standing, so if they keep their contributions short, everyone will get in.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing it. I will start with one of her first points: that those who question the use of Prevent are accused of not being concerned with people’s safety. Let me give an example. When the 7 July incident took place near the bus stops in Euston, it happened in an area to which I normally used to travel to go to my chambers in the Temple—it just happened that that day I was out of the country. I therefore think I am well aware of the possible threats to security that people face. When I am accused of not being concerned about people’s security, I find that incredibly insulting because, but for the grace of God, I could have been in that incident.

The Minister intervened on the hon. Lady and said that Prevent is not about reporting but about putting safeguards in place. However, that is effectively reporting. When a person thinks there is someone of concern and they start the safeguarding process, they call on the local authority, social services and various other people—that is effectively nothing but reporting.

The Government have a duty to protect our country, but the rules, laws, programmes and provisions we put in place must be effective. There is no point in having a knee-jerk reaction to a problem and saying, “We will have Prevent. We will put it on a statutory basis, and somehow all the problems of radicalisation will go away”, without realising whether the policy is effective.

Countless studies have been carried out. In October last year I hosted an event for the Open Society Justice Initiative, which had spoken to 80 different sets of experts in the field and many families who had been affected by Prevent. It showed that 80% of the people affected had been referred wrongly—that is 80% of children and families affected completely unnecessarily. The independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, David Anderson, QC, said:

“Prevent has become a more significant source of grievance in affected communities than the police and ministerial powers that are exercised under the Pursue strand of the Contest strategy”.

Again, someone has looked at terrorism legislation and thinks that Prevent is wrong. Unless and until we get the community on board, we will not be able to effect any real changes. All Prevent does is stigmatise people.

Prevent was brought in by the Labour Government, but it was rolled out on a voluntary basis. I have to say I was not keen on it then, but at least it was voluntary. Now it is statutory, which means that doctors, nurses, hospitals and teachers can get into trouble if they do not report something that the Government think they should have done. That puts so much pressure on professionals. They are being asked to make disclosures and breach confidentiality, and families and everyone else are being put under stress for something that is not achieving anything.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Apologies for coming into the debate late, Sir David. I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing it. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) agree that professionals—teachers, clinicians and so on—would
say they already have professional standards that meet the need, and that the additional duty does not add anything?

Yasmin Qureshi: I absolutely agree. Dr Clare Gerada, who spoke at the presentation I held last year, said exactly the same thing: they already have duties to look after vulnerable people. By making Prevent statutory, we are pressurising them, which could lead to them being affected if, for example, they feel that somebody should not be referred in a particular case.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a good case against Prevent. However, she said that it is not achieving anything. Will she set out the evidence for that assertion?

Yasmin Qureshi: All I hear is that the people who are being affected are annoyed by it, and they are getting upset. It is not achieving anything because the communities we need to have on board are not. It is therefore a waste of time, money and resources.

If we want to deal with radicalisation, whether far-right radicalisation or any other fundamentalism, there are ways of doing that. However, we should not use this method, which criminalises people. For example, in schools we could have classes taught to everyone, not to particular groups, about the dangers of the internet. We do not talk enough about the amount of online grooming, pornography on websites, how many young people are being bullied in schools and how much sex texting is going on. All those things are part of safeguarding. We should invest in classes in junior and secondary schools where all the children get together and are taught about all the dangers they could face, so that they can discuss and deal with them together. That would mean we could prevent them from facing such issues, whether far-right, sexual or whatever. We should not do that in the way that has happened since the Prevent programme was rolled out.

I want to make two final points. All of these measures come from the fact that there are security issues. However, we must remember one thing. I know we are talking about the far right, but we must remember that while the measures all came out of so-called Islamic terrorism, 99% of the people who have died as a result of Daesh, al-Qaeda and other such groups have been Muslims, whether in the middle east or the UK. Far-right extremism has killed Muslims in Canada, USA, Norway, the UK and other countries. Yes, there is an issue with people having right-wing or fundamentalist views, and we need to challenge those views, but Prevent is not the way to do so.

We say that Prevent is about British values. I am not making a joke of this, but the President of the USA, through what he has said and his Executive orders, has contravened every single fundamental British value. When he comes to the UK, he should be put in the Prevent programme, along with his adviser, Steve Bannon, who is a right-wing fascist and white supremacist. Both should be put in the Prevent programme when they come to the UK.

3 pm

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a small contribution to the debate under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing the debate and giving us the opportunity to discuss this issue.

It is my belief that Prevent is making a positive difference. The Government are working in partnership with local communities and grassroots organisations to challenge poisonous extremist narratives and safeguard our young people and society. The battle against terrorist recruiters must be fought on several fronts, including online as well as in our communities. Much of the work being done in the UK is world leading, including the first counter-terrorism internet referral unit dedicated to taking down hundreds of pieces of extremist and terrorist content that are referred to it every day, which has now been replicated internationally. However, extremism cannot be defeated by the Government and law enforcement alone: it is vital that everyone plays their part.

The importance of the Prevent strategy was made clear in the other place in 2016. I draw attention to Channel, which is one part of the broader Prevent agenda. It is an intensive, one-to-one mentoring programme that challenges violent views through the de-programming and rewiring of an individual. About 7,500 referrals were made to Prevent in 2015-16—around 20 a day. Of those referred to the scheme, which was set up in 2005 in the wake of the 7/7 bombings, one in 10 were deemed to be vulnerable to terrorism and were referred to Channel, while a quarter were found to be vulnerable but not at risk of involvement in terrorism.

Baroness Williams of Trafford has noted that “since 2012 over 1,000 people have received support through Channel, the voluntary and confidential programme which provides support for people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. The vast majority of those people went on to leave the programme with no further terrorist-related concerns.”—[Official Report, House of Lords, 20 December 2016; Vol. 777, c. 1544.] That shows the important work that Channel and Prevent are undertaking. Every time a person receives support and turns their back on the hatred of extremism is a life saved, a family with renewed hope and a community that is brought closer together, not dragged further apart. Each person who is aided is a story of the struggle to battle extremism, but with each person we move a step closer to defeating the poison of radicalisation and those who would seek to drive us apart.

Lucy Allan: My hon. Friend is making an important speech. Does he agree that the statutory duty in Prevent puts it on to a different level from being just a voluntary and community-based source of support and guidance?

Byron Davies: I understand what my hon. Friend says but, at the end of the day, it is a set of guidelines that we would be floundering without. I accept what she says to a certain extent, but that guidance has so far proven to be of great advantage.

As I was saying, those lives saved shine a light on the positive difference Prevent makes to safeguarding people, particularly children, from the risks of radicalisation—which I think further addresses my hon. Friend’s point. Indeed, Simon Cole, who is the chief constable of Leicestershire and the National Police Chiefs Council’s lead on Prevent, said the scheme is “fundamental” to fighting terrorism. It is clear from intelligence sources, police on the ground and those in the communities that Prevent plays a crucial role in combating terrorism and extreme ideologies.
Furthermore, Prevent protects our young people, who are the future of our society, from the poison of hatred and vitriol from whatever ideology or extremist element it comes from. Indeed, schools play a vital role in protecting pupils from those risks, and it is right and important that these issues are discussed in an open and trusting environment.

Lucy Allan: Does my hon. Friend agree that trust is important in making Prevent work? If people are reported behind their backs without their knowing, does he not think that erodes trust?

Byron Davies: I agree that it is a question of trust, and of communities understanding the principle behind Prevent. The Government certainly have a big part to play in that, and I think we all share a responsibility for that.

It is the essence of our values that we can discuss the risks of a certain ideology or way of thinking in an open and trusting environment that allows full examination of the issue—not behind closed doors or simply ignoring it in the hope that the problem goes away, because it simply never does. If we are to have a healthy society, the most significant and meaningful thing we can do is to ensure that our children grow up with the key values of tolerance, respect for other cultures, creeds and races, a healthy respect for the rule of law and an inquisitive attitude towards those who wield power.

We must therefore continue to support the vital programmes that challenge those ideologies and individuals that seek to undermine our society, and the foundations on which it is built, with poisonous and extremist narratives. That is why I am particularly pleased that Prevent focuses on all forms of terrorism, including the particularly dangerous and disgusting ideology of the extreme right, as I have mentioned, and not only on one community.

I know that the Home Affairs Committee and others have expressed concerns that Prevent is perhaps not quite as community-led as it should be and is treated with suspicion by some. It is not unusual that schemes and programmes are treated with suspicion by certain communities at first; perhaps we must all work a bit harder at it. I witnessed that at first hand while working with communities on numerous issues during my time with the police service. It takes time to build trust and rapport with local communities, but I know the Government and those delivering Prevent work tirelessly to address certain perceptions and beliefs, and that they are more aware than anybody of the importance of working in partnership with communities and grassroots organisations.

We must not forget that the Government cannot do everything alone; communities and individuals need to step forward. We all need to step forward and play our part in fighting extremism and its root causes wherever we find them without fear or favour. Radicalisation devastates the lives of individuals, their families and communities. Prevent does not target anyone—it is about safeguarding those at risk, plain and simple. Prevent is, and must be, fundamentally rooted in and led by communities. Those delivering Prevent travel the length and breadth of the country to engage with community leaders, civil society groups, local authorities and frontline workers.

We must support this vital work to ensure that we safeguard those who are at risk of the terrible toxicity of radicalisation, and to persuade them of a different outlook based on tolerance and respect for other cultures, of which I spoke earlier. With each person, this scheme helps our society to become healthier, which is why I am, and will continue to be, a strong supporter of the scheme.

3.8 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing the debate. She made a thoughtful speech that I agreed with and supported for the most part.

I do not think anybody here doubts that the Government should have a plan and should act to prevent citizens and residents from falling into terrorism. The Government’s good intentions are not in doubt, and I would go as far as to say that some good initiatives are carried out under the Prevent strategy. However, as the hon. Lady said in opening the debate, we must get this right, and we must get the overall strategy right. The way the Government have thought about the strategy’s implementation seems to have caused confusion and alienation, and risks being significantly counter-productive. I agree that there should be a review, including of the statutory duty, and I say that based on the evidence that the Home Affairs Committee received. Other colleagues present today will also talk about that inquiry. From what we heard, there is little doubt that trust in Prevent is at rock bottom in some of our communities. As part of our inquiry, in Bradford we met around 70 young people aged between 16 and 25 representing Muslim communities in Bradford, Leeds and Dewsbury. It was a fantastic initiative from the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), brilliantly organised by the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah).

The message from the young people was pretty clear and damning. They felt picked upon and stigmatised. Many had felt restricted in what they could say and do for fear of attracting attention. They certainly did not feel engaged with or involved positively in Prevent; it was quite the opposite.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Out of interest, can my hon. Friend confirm whether the Committee took evidence from any Scottish-based stakeholders or kids in Scotland that had been subject to the Prevent duty?

Stuart C. McDonald: My hon. Friend has stolen the thunder from the end of my speech: I will come on to that shortly.

Going back to the young people in Bradford, as far as I could glean, their almost unanimous view was that Prevent was irretrievable. Their views were pretty consistent with a lot of what we heard in oral evidence at formal hearings and in the written submissions that we received as well. With that evidence as a background, even on its own terms the Government’s Prevent strategy seems to be falling short. When we look at the 2011 strategy, what was apparently intended sometimes seems to bear little resemblance to what has happened in practice. The strategy pointed out that:

“Prevent depends on a successful integration strategy...the Government will not securitise its integration strategy. This has been a mistake in the past.”
In the eyes of so many of our witnesses, securitisation is exactly what has happened at the expense of broader integration.

The strategy also stated:

“The Government’s commitment to localism will support the Prevent strategy. Communities and local authorities have a key part in this strategy. But as a national security issue, Prevent needs to be developed in very close conjunction with central Departments.”

Again, for many of those giving evidence to the Committee, the emphasis had been much more on central departmental control than it was on empowering communities. That is why our Committee concluded:

“Rather than being seen as the community-led approach Prevent was supposed to be, it is perceived to be a top-down ‘Big Brother’ security operation.”

So there is a need, as the Committee concluded, to build “a real partnership between community groups and the state.”

Before I finish I want to touch briefly on the position in Scotland. National security and “special powers for dealing with terrorism” are reserved under the Scotland Act 1998—but not “extremism”. Many of the key agencies for countering extremism such as education, police, communities and so on are devolved. From that we have a rather different set of guidance documents issued under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 on a joint Scottish and UK Government basis. It is worth comparing those documents—how they work and what works best—because there are always things to learn from each jurisdiction. It will not surprise hon. Members that I am going to stick up for the Scottish version. It is interesting how most of the five or so chapters are the same. However, chapter C in the version for Scotland is entitled “A collaborative approach to the Prevent duty”, whereas the guidance for England and Wales has a chapter entitled, “A risk-based approach to the Prevent duty”. Although good chunks of that chapter overlap, that difference in emphasis is important: collaboration instead of securitisation.

Furthermore, when we look at the 2011 UK-wide Prevent strategy, that document notes:

“The approach to Prevent in Scotland has always made a distinction between preventing terrorism and community cohesion and integration. In Scotland, Prevent has been more closely aligned to those areas of policy that promote community safety, tackle crime and reduce violence...These first principles of Prevent have influenced delivery in Scotland and this has necessarily involved a different style and emphasis.”

Although not scientific—to answer my hon. Friend’s question—those differences in emphasis and implementation were reflected in another visit undertaken as part of the Home Affairs inquiry when the right hon. Member for Leicester East and I visited Shawlands Academy in Glasgow. It is fair to say that that is the most ethnically and religiously diverse school in Scotland. We discussed with senior pupils and staff issues relating to extremism and terrorism. The pupils were all aware of Prevent, but it did not inhibit their discussions or generally have a negative impact on their lives. The teachers did not feel under pressure or that their relationships with pupils had been undermined. Overall, it seemed Prevent was less in your face for those young people than it had been for the young people in Bradford.

It is essential that we look more closely at those features and see what lessons can be learnt. For that, as Sir David Anderson and the hon. Member for Telford have said, we need a review.

3.14 pm

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing this debate.

I recognise that there are concerns about Prevent, and I have heard those concerns from a range of different people. As a member of the Home Affairs Committee and as someone with an interest in this area, I have taken the time to speak to Muslim groups with the Committee, and to members of the Muslim community, police officers and teachers. I have not spoken to any far-right extremists yet, but I am sure we will get some in to the Home Affairs Committee in due course.

There are two polar opposite views. Prevent is viewed as a vital tool in the fight against terrorism and absolutely essential, or it is said to be discredited because it targets Muslims and places unfair obligations on the public sector. It is important to note that Prevent is just one of the four elements of the Contest counter-extremism strategy that aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism or extremism. In answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) about success, it is difficult to measure success when there is no counterfactual, but I am sure that the Minister will tell us about the success that the Prevent programme has had, because I have heard that from some of Britain’s most senior police officers.

It is important to start by asking what we would do tomorrow if we cancelled the Prevent programme today. I asked one of the most senior counter-terrorism officers in the country about this and he was very open-minded. He said, “If we do not like Prevent and we get rid of it, what do we replace it with?” We would surely want a system for identifying people such as the poor young girls from east London—the people who have committed no criminal offence but suddenly slide into radicalism and attempt to go off to somewhere such as Syria. We need a means of identifying them and preventing them from going.

Yasmin Qureshi: On exactly the same point, those young ladies in the school were very bright. The teachers could not see anything wrong with anything they had done, so Prevent did nothing for them and would not have noted them.

James Berry: That is right, but that is certainly not an argument for getting rid of Prevent. There are countless other cases in which the Prevent duty would result in issues being picked up. That is why there have been 1,000 voluntary referrals to Channel, where people have been channelled away from any risks. That is what the Contest strategy does.

This hypothetical was tested when the Home Affairs Committee went on a trip to the USA. Two members of the Committee who went on the trip are in the Chamber today. We asked the Americans what they did about domestic counter-terrorism prevention and whether they had a Prevent type of programme. The answer was no, they did not have such a programme. They recognised that that was a gap in their toolkit and they were actually looking at the British system, although the Committee members did point out some of the deficiencies and gave them some advice. Of course, the trip took place under the Obama regime before Donald Trump became President. If only President Trump were focusing
on domestic terrorism, which is where the threat actually comes from, rather than banning people coming from seven countries with currently no risk of terrorism on American soil. However, the Americans are looking at a strategy because they do not have a system like Prevent on their soil at the moment.

I will turn to the two main objections. The first is that Prevent targets Muslims. It is right that 70% of those who have been directed to Channel for voluntary referrals have been Muslims and 15% have been far right extremists who are not Muslims. That fact does not mean that the Muslim community is being targeted, but I understand why members of the Muslim community, including the young people we met on the trip organised by the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), felt that way. It is right that the Government should do more to publicise the cases of far right extremists who have been dealt with under the policy, because the people we spoke to on that trip simply were not aware of them, even though the cases were well publicised.

Equally, we have to guard against the reality that some groups such as Cage, a disgraceful organisation that gave evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, would make sustained efforts to undermine any replacement of the Prevent programme, just as they have done with Prevent. They have spoken out, criticised and been involved in threats against Muslim groups who stand up and support Prevent or elements of Prevent. They do that because they do not even accept that a problem exists that needs tackling by something such as Prevent in the first place.

Dr Poulter: My hon. Friend is making a very good speech. Does he agree that one of the successes of the Prevent programme has been—for example, in the health service—raising awareness of people who may be vulnerable? People with mental illness are particularly susceptible to adverse influences and potentially susceptible to extremists of all different types exploiting them. The programme has also helped to encourage partnership working between the NHS and the police, because there is often strong clinical judgment exerted and used in such cases.

James Berry: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend said. That brings me to the second main criticism of Prevent—that it puts undue pressure on teachers, doctors and social workers. It is true that they are not policemen and are already under huge pressure—I know that teachers are, because my mother was one—because of all sorts of duties of the kind, besides their core one of teaching. However, they are the people with day-to-day contact with young people and they have the opportunity to notice what others, including the police, may not. That is why they have similar duties to report child abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and the like. We rely on them to pick up things that others might miss or parents would not report.

Kate Green: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that teachers are among those who have regular contact with young people, and it should be part of professional practice to notice when children’s behaviour changes—such as becoming withdrawn or difficult. However, teachers and parents in my constituency tell me that the way the Prevent duty on professionals is perceived is breaking down trust between families, parents and schools. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that must be addressed if the programme is to work effectively?

James Berry: That certainly must be addressed, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) that the Prevent duty has led to much greater awareness among professionals of what to look for and how to help. We need a way to pick up the signs of radicalisation before it is too late and innocent lives are devastated by being drawn into the ideologies in question. Prevent, the current system, certainly has issues that need to be worked through, and the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) raises a good point. There is a need for constant updating, but equally, if we were to replace Prevent it could only be with a similar duty. Whatever we replaced it with would come under sustained attack, and it is our duty in the House to stand up for the Government’s efforts as well as to scrutinise and criticise them as we are doing.

3.21 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing the debate. It is interesting to follow two colleagues from the Home Affairs Committee; we took a lot of evidence on the subject last year and produced a report. I am sure my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) will also give his version of events.

Headlines about Prevent have included “Prevent will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent”; “Oxford University vice-chancellor says Prevent strategy ‘wrong-headed’”; “Instead of fighting terror, Prevent is creating a climate of fear”; and “Human rights group condemns Prevent anti-radicalisation strategy”. It is not a matter of one newspaper article getting things wrong. They are not reports from the Daily Mail, otherwise known as the “Daily Fail”, about radicalisation and the Prevent strategy going wrong. They are reports derived from academics. People have written to the Home Secretary or the Government expressing concern about how the strategy is implemented.

Some 60% of my constituents are of black and minority ethnic heritage, and the majority are Muslims, but we have not got things as wrong in Bradford West as they are nationally. We have a better middle ground, and some really good conversations are happening. However, the overall consensus among Muslim communities nationally is that Prevent stigmatises them. I accept the view of the hon. Member for Gower (Byron Davies) that it is successful, but only in part. I accept that there are instances in which Prevent has prevented radicalisation. For every article against it, there is always one for it. However, it must be acknowledged that its implementation has created a “them and us” situation between the Government and the Muslim community. That is a fact. I can give a list as long as my arm of incidents in which people say they have been stigmatised.

Research evidence shows that Prevent has had a particularly acute effect on children. An average of one child under 10 is referred every day. I accept that the referrals are voluntary, but as for four-year-olds being involved, I am the mother of a five-year-old, and when
he has a tantrum or a paddy it is very extreme, but that does not mean he is on the slippery slope to extremism. Children are children. Yes, we have different ways of running our households, but religious conservatism does not result in extremism. We need to make that point, and it must be acknowledged in the House.

Although I am a critic of the implementation of Prevent, it is clear to me that we need a prevention strategy. When the Home Secretary appeared before the Home Affairs Committee on the previous occasion—not yesterday—she said that we needed to talk Prevent up. Unfortunately I cannot commit to talking it up when it fails to acknowledge the “them and us” that its implementation has created between the Muslim community and the Government. The architect of Prevent, Sir David Omand, observed that the “key issue” was whether most people in the community accepted Prevent “as protective of their rights”. He said:

“If the community sees it as a problem, then you have a problem.”

The Muslim community sees Prevent as a problem.

No one, including the Muslim community, is saying we do not need a Prevent strategy. We absolutely do; we must provide safeguards. I do not know what my now nearly teenage daughter will be doing in her bedroom; the way people are radicalised in the majority of cases is online. However, we need to educate people, including parents, and put safeguarding measures in place.

More than 80% of Channel referrals end in no further action. What does that say about them? The majority of the children referred happen to be Muslim. I met a young boy from Luton who was campaigning on issues to do with Palestine and Gaza. He was referred to Channel just because he was passionate about those issues. We have damped down debate in universities and colleges, where people dare not use the word “terrorism”. A GP I know said in the roundtable referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), “When my child comes home, every day he sees terrorism on the TV”—whether it is the Paris attack, Tunisia or anywhere else in the world, such as Quebec recently. She said, “I dare not have the conversation with him in case he goes back and discusses it in school. If someone does not know how to respond to my child, he might be on the next referral to Channel.” Those are real concerns; they are not made up. I accept that there are organisations that would have issues no matter what the strategy was replaced by, but the young people of Bradford gave evidence to the Home Affairs Committee and said there is a “them and us” situation, and we must respond to that.

I ask the Minister whether the Government will publish their internal review of the Contest counter-terrorism strategy. Will they accept the advice in the independent review of terrorism legislation by David Anderson, QC, and establish an independent inquiry into the operation and effectiveness of the Prevent strategy? By the Government’s own figures 80% of referrals to the Channel programme between 2007 and 2014 were set aside. Will they publish comprehensive data disaggregated by age, gender, location, ethnicity, type of referring authority and type of extremism of the people who have been referred to the Prevent programme, and the outcomes? Without such transparency the Muslim community will rightly continue to view Prevent through a lens of suspicion.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): There is time for a very short speech by Keith Vaz.

3.29 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Thank you, Sir David. May I start by congratulating you warmly on your knighthood and the House authorities on their efficiency in changing your nameplate so quickly? I will be very brief. I can say quite honestly that I agree with every single speech given this afternoon, not because it was a bit like all our yesterdays—the Home Affairs Committee, of which I am a former member, did an inquiry into counter-terrorism—but because each came with particular knowledge of this area. Passion has been shown because we want to keep our country secure, protect our children and ensure that the Government’s strategy works.

The hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) deserves special praise for bringing this matter before the House. We really need more than an hour and a half to discuss it. She says that we need a strategy, but the problem with the strategy we have at the moment is that the people we need to work with feel they are on the outside. The issue is one of trust.

I want briefly to say three things. First, as the hon. Member for Gower (Byron Davies) said, my local chief constable, Simon Cole, who is the national Prevent lead for the National Police Chiefs Council, has said that Prevent is fundamental to the success of our strategy against terrorism. We want the strategy to work, and we have to ensure that it works. We have to ensure that communities are involved with it, and it has to be a partnership. That means listening to what the young people in Bradford said, acknowledging what we found in Glasgow when we went up there and listening to the questions from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) to his local university vice-chancellor when he came before our Select Committee. It is important that we work with communities.

Secondly, our Committee suggested that we should change the name of Prevent and call it Engage, because Prevent sounds very harsh. We need to rebrand this mechanism, so that we can engage with communities. Otherwise, they feel that Whitehall is imposing a certain course of action on them. Finally, the internet was the most important form of radicalisation that we discovered during our inquiry. Unless we tackle that, and unless the internet companies are prepared to work with Government, we will not deal with this issue.

There are problems. The Government should acknowledge them and work to ensure that they are dealt with, but more than anything, the message from this House must be, “Please work with communities. Put them at the forefront of our fight against terrorism.”

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Can I have an even shorter contribution from Imran Hussain?

3.32 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Thank you, Sir David. I did have quite a lot to say on this subject, but I will try to be as brief as possible. Please bear with me for a few minutes at least.

First, I thank all hon. Members who have spoken in this debate and made some very valuable points. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi),
in particular, made a powerful point at the outset of her speech: nobody here is saying that we do not want our streets to be safe. We absolutely want our streets to be safe and to defeat the poison of radicalisation, but we must ask what the best way of doing that is, and the best way is having a strategy that works.

We have heard from hon. Members that the Prevent strategy, in its current format, is not as effective as it could be because there is massive mistrust of it, in particular among the Muslim community. We have heard evidence of that from young people in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah). We have heard how 70% of those who end up in the process belong to that community. It is clear that in its current format, the Prevent strategy is perceived as unfair and is stigmatising communities.

We need a complete rethink of the Prevent strategy. We need a strategy that is as effective as possible, that engages Muslim youth and communities and that comes without stories—although some may be fabricated—of cameras, spying and young children being placed in these programmes. I ask the Minister to use this opportunity to reflect on the genuine concerns that the Muslim community in particular has, which I am sure other communities share. We need an overhaul of the whole Prevent strategy to recognise those concerns.

3.34 pm

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I offer you belated congratulations, Sir David, on your knighthood. I am conscious that we are short on time and that everyone is keen to hear what the Minister has to say, so I will whizz through some of the points that I have found interesting in today’s debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing the debate, to the obvious agitation of the Government Front Benchers, which in my view makes it even more commendable. She was right to mention at the outset that the strategy appears to be driving a wedge between authority and community. She said that perception is very important—a point that other Members have corroborated. Perception may be everything in this instance. I have heard her talk before about her personal experience as a governor of a school. She made the point that there is peer pressure and that people are incentivised and cajoled to make referrals. That is a very dangerous situation.

I was struck by some of the comments of the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), particularly about the accusation that if someone criticises Prevent, they somehow do not care about safety. She made that point well with reference to what happened on 7/7. In response to an intervention on her about the strategy not achieving anything, I will say this: evidence is one thing, but how many communities and people do we marginalise to stop one kid being radicalised? I think that was the point she was making.

The hon. Member for Gower (Byron Davies), who brings a wealth of experience as a former member of the police force, was right to say that this is about taking time to build relationships. Perhaps that is where Prevent has gone wrong; we have put the cart before the horse, and we should have built those relationships before we started asking this community or any community to put people through the referral process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), on whom I made an untimely intervention, was right to recognise that everyone wants to prevent terrorism. That is common ground, and it should be noted by the Minister. My hon. Friend gave a more than adequate summary of the position in Scotland, so he has saved me from detailing that.

I did not agree with much of what the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) said, but there was one point I agreed with. Everybody wants to prevent terrorism, and he asked a valid question: what would we replace Prevent with? Clearly the perception is that things are not working and that something needs to be done, but it is not wise to leave a vacuum.

The hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) corroborated the point about perception. If we are going to prevent communities—I do not single out any particular one—from being radicalised, perception is everything. That is an important point. The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), who of course brings a wealth of knowledge as he led the Select Committee inquiry on this issue, pinpointed trust. That is key. The people we need to influence feel that they are on the outside. I was interested in his idea of rebranding Prevent as Engage. I do not know whether that would work, but I certainly agree with the principle that this is more about engagement than sniping on kids and marginalising them.

Some hon. Members alluded to the distinction between non-violent extremism and violent extremism. I am from the west coast of Scotland. Scotland has a history, unfortunately, of sectarianism. In Scotland, if you ask someone which school they go to, it has nothing to do with education. If you ask someone which team they support, it has nothing to do with football. We understand these dynamics. Perhaps that is why we have a more wide-ranging approach to this issue. We recognise that various communities are susceptible to radicalisation and do not try to single out any particular one.

You are looking at me keenly, Sir David, so I will wind up. In Scotland, this is a reserved matter, with the roll-out of Prevent being undertaken by the Scottish Parliament. We put engagement and fostering relationships with communities at the heart of what we do, which involves simple things like discussions with people before they are put in the referral process and engagement with various communities to ensure that they are on board. If we foster that relationship, perhaps communities will come to us with information before we have to start knocking on doors. If the referral process were from the bottom up, it would work a lot better and would not marginalise the very people who we need to help us prevent terrorism.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): I call Diane Abbott. The Minister looks desperate to get his points in, so could you give him some time?

3.39 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for
Telford (Lucy Allan) on initiating this important debate. I think that the Muslim community can take some reassurance from the fact that MPs of all parties and from all parts of the country are scrutinising how the Prevent strategy works in practice.

Clearly, the first duty of Government is to protect the citizen. As hon. Friends have said, it is nonsense to say that those of us who are asking questions about Prevent are somehow careless of the threat of terrorism. I remember the 1996 IRA bomb at Canary Wharf—I was standing in my kitchen in Hackney when I heard it go off. Do not tell those of us in our great cities, who have sometimes had very close engagement with the after-effects of terrorism, that we do not take it seriously. Of course the Government have to have a counter-terrorism strategy. I have met people from the Metropolitan police’s counter-terrorism command and been very impressed by much of their work.

However, what President Trump shows us is that there is such a thing as an effective counter-terrorism strategy, but there are also ineffective and counterproductive counter-terrorism strategies. It is now very clear to everybody that banning people from seven majority-Muslim countries, plus green card holders, plus Syrian refugees, from coming into the US has been wholly counterproductive.

Keith Vaz: And we have the support of the Home Secretary. Only yesterday she said that the ban was a gift to the propagandists who support ISIL. I am sure that my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary will find lots on which to disagree with the Home Secretary, but they are on the same side on this issue.

Ms Abbott: Exactly. There is such a thing as an anti-terrorism strategy that is misconceived, counterproductive and does not actually make people any safer.

Let me quickly return to the question of the police being called because a child in a Bedfordshire school had a plastic gun. The Minister claimed that nothing had to do with Prevent. All I can say to him is that the Central Bedfordshire Council local education authority admitted that the teachers were attempting to act in accordance with the Government’s Prevent guidance, and they admitted that they would not have called the police if a white child had received a toy gun.

Let me quote the child’s mother, who is probably closer to the situation than the Minister. She said:

“To this day, I cannot fathom why a teacher who has known my family for years would suspect terrorist activities based upon a plastic toy gun. Our only distinguishing feature is the colour of our skin. I was utterly humiliated by this experience—but more importantly my sons were confused and terrified. They had to move schools, lost important friendships and... lost trust in their teachers. They will carry the scars of this experience for some time yet.”

The sole reason why they were singled out was the Prevent programme. An anti-terrorism programme that has that kind of result with innocent families and mothers and children is clearly at risk of being wholly counterproductive.

As other hon. Members have said, the report from the Open Society Justice Initiative analyses the effect of the Prevent strategy on the education system and the NHS. It states that the effect is to erode trust, because it is draconian and therefore counterproductive.

There is a long line of reports critical of the Government’s failing strategy. The National Union of Teachers has mounted a sustained criticism of Prevent and passed a motion opposing it outright, as has the National Union of Students. Other teaching unions—the University and College Union and NASUWT—have also opposed it. Liberty has made strong criticisms. Organisation after organisation is calling for either reform of Prevent or certainly review. None of these organisations has any sympathies with terrorism, or acts as an apologist for it; their members and supporters are the potential victims of any terrorist incidents that are committed here.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights has again called for a review, arguing, as so many hon. Friends have argued this afternoon, that Prevent has the potential to drive a wedge between the authorities and entire communities. It is clearly targeted at one community. The Government’s own report, “The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism: Annual Report for 2015”, stated that 70% of referrals were linked to “Islamist-related extremism”. As hon. Members have said, with a power and an authenticity that I can only hope to match, that is having an alienating effect on a whole community. It worries me that Ministers will not recognise that fact, and I believe that the alienating effect is made worse by some aspects of the Casey review.

Of course the Government have a duty to protect the right to life of all their citizens. That includes, but is not confined to, terrorism. The problem with the Prevent strategy is that it seems to be failing in its stated objective; it is not necessarily preventing the growth of terrorism, because it seems to be counterproductive. It tramples on hard-won rights and demonises whole communities. As the hon. Member for Telford pointed out, it tends towards criminalising ideas, towards saying what people should be allowed to think, which is contrary to British values.

Even with the widespread concern on the ground about Prevent, more than 400 children under 10 have in the past four years been referred to the police’s Channel programme, which is part of Prevent—400 children under 10. Families are terrified that their children will be taken from them, guilty of engaging in playground games, play-acting or childish bragging. The National Police Chiefs Council says that 80% of all referrals require no action at all.

Anti-terrorism is a serious issue, and effective anti-terrorism is always intelligence-led. That must be fully supported and resourced. Prevent is the opposite of an intelligence-led policy. Any counter-terrorism strategy that depends on sending the police to interview seven-year-old children who happen to have a plastic gun is misconceived. It is my view, and that of Opposition Members generally, that it is time for a major review of Prevent and a fundamental rethink by the Government.

3.46 pm

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing the debate. I am a father of three. I am a Lancashire MP, representing many diverse communities in my constituency, and in our communities there are threats from both far-right and Islamic extremism. I am therefore well aware of some of the issues that we face on the ground in trying to keep all of our young people safe in today’s world.
Because we want them to progress further in life. We want to support them, to engage, build that trust and work with communities. I have said to my hon. Friend the Member for Telford, who put it perfectly well, and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) also made the point that we have to strike a delicate balance. The balance is between safety and security and our obligations to society; some of the very extreme threats and individuals who try to peddle that to our young people or people who are vulnerable to exploitation; and ensuring that policing is done by consent and that the relationship between the community and the Government is indeed collaborative and that they are working together for the best.

Of course we could fine-tune Prevent and do more to engage, build that trust and work with communities. I have said to my hon. Friend the Member for Telford that I am very happy to take her to a Prevent provider, or to meet either a provider or some of the local authorities to do that. I make that offer to all colleagues in the Chamber, to ensure that we start down the road of ensuring that people understand both sides of the argument.

One of the most moving things for me was speaking to a number of community groups involved in delivering Prevent. It is sometimes quite hard to argue with their point of view. When one meets people whose children have been involved in going to Syria to fight for Daesh, it is quite hard to say to them that the Prevent strategy does not help, that it has not helped to protect their children or even saved their lives.

As the Minister for Security, I have the privilege of knowing about many of the successes. We do not often advertise the successes, because we want people to move on with their lives. I am thinking of the 15-year-old in Lancashire who was radicalised by the far right and whose headteacher put him in touch with Prevent. He is now not only out of the specialist school he was in, but in mainstream further education, enjoying the prospect of a good life. I cannot advertise who those individuals are or put their names on a leaflet for everyone to see, because we want them to progress further in life.

Keith Vaz: The classic example is the difference between the three Bethnal Green girls and the two young men from Brent. The two young men from Brent had strong relationships with the local police and the leader of the council and were able to come back when they got to Istanbul, whereas we lost the three young girls from Bethnal Green. The key to this is building up that trust and those relationships between the police and the community.

Mr Wallace: I could not agree more. It also means that unfortunately we often know about the failures rather than the successes. The right hon. Gentleman knows from his long period as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee that in the world of policing and security it is nearly always the failures that we hear about when there is an intelligence breakdown or someone slips under the radar. As someone who started in counter-terrorism as a young man in his early 20s, I can tell Members that something always gets through the net. One failure does not justify the scrapping of Prevent. I think that is important.

We all have a duty to do more to make sure that we challenge some of the perceptions that are peddled about Prevent, and to better investigate the stories that are sometimes put in the media. It was also in Lancashire that a child was reported apparently—according to the media—for saying, “I live in a terrorist house.” The child actually said, “I live in a terrorist house and my uncle beats me.” That story is never reported. The referral was a safeguarding referral about abuse of the child, but that was not good enough for some of the media, who chose to leave those details out and report in a lazy manner. We all have a duty to investigate and explore not only those local authorities that deliver Prevent, but the communities—

Yasmin Qureshi: rose—

Mr Wallace: I cannot give way; I must press on as I have only seven or eight minutes.

One of the first things I did as Security Minister, because I come from Lancashire, was to travel the country. My challenge to Contest is that it must not start and stop in central London. It must not be about the big metropolitan centres; it must be about the whole of the United Kingdom. I have been to the north-east, the north-west and around the whole country to meet more people, and I will continue to do so.

It is important that we start to pick up transparency in Prevent. One of the ways to challenge those perceptions is to get more statistics out where we can. We are going to do that and I have asked my officials to collate and publish many of the stats that the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) raised in her questions, because that is one of the best ways to counter the perceptions.

As Security Minister, I have responsibility for countering not only terrorism, but serious organised crime and child sexual exploitation. At the heart of all those—I am afraid I could not disagree more with my hon. Friend the Member for Telford—is safeguarding. What I see across that whole remit is people using the same methods to groom young men and vulnerable people into a course of violent extremism, gangs, crime or sexual exploitation. If we care about the safeguarding of vulnerable young people, Prevent is just one of those strains for delivering that safeguarding. Contrary to what is often reported, safeguarding is delivered not from my office in Whitehall but through the local authorities and the combined safeguarding officers. I met my hon. Friend’s Prevent officer in Telford at the beginning of this week; he is the councillor who deals with safeguarding across the piece, not just in Prevent, which is often how it is delivered. Of course we would like to see Prevent delivered more widely—not only from the police but across the board—which would be a right step in keeping communities on side.

We should challenge some of the main criticisms. There is the issue that there is no trust in Prevent. I recognise that in some communities there is a stigma attached to Prevent and that people do not necessarily trust parts of it, but in other communities some people do. It is partly about the relationship between the victims, or the people who have perhaps been diverted from a more extreme course. I have to say that in the
speeches from the hon. Members for Bradford West (Naz Shah) and for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) there was an element of, “Locally we are delivering some success, but nationally we are worried about it,” or, “In other parts of the community we represent, it does not always work.” Of course we have to ensure that we rebuild that trust, and transparency will go some way towards doing that.

It is not the case that there is a special category for reporting children to Prevent, as opposed to normal safeguarding. Let me put this in perspective. Every year there are 621,000 child safety referrals to authorities. Prevent, which is not included in that figure, is less than 1% of it, if compared alongside it. There are safeguarding referrals from teachers, and from all the duties that doctors and teachers hold for safeguarding our children—they have a plethora of duties that are either implied or statutory—so we need to put that into perspective.

I have referred to the accusation that Prevent is not working. There are case studies and champions of Prevent. It is not the case that everyone is against Prevent and no one is for it. I met a mother of two children who did not go to Syria. She is delighted, funnily enough, that her children were successfully referred through the Prevent programme. People forget that Channel is a voluntary process. Regrettfully, not everyone takes up some of the offers and some go on to do much worse things. However, Channel is voluntary and Big Brother does not force people into it. Some people have tried to imply that, but it is simply not the case.

In 2015, 150 people were prevented from going to Syria. That is a lot of people’s lives that have been saved. Many more people have been diverted from the path of throwing their life away through either violent terrorism and extremism or crime, gangs and the other areas that those same groomers often exploit—the methods they use are the same.

Many hon. Members raised the issue of internet safety and the hon. Member for Bolton South East made the point about education. We do teach cyber-safety in schools; my children had a lesson in cyber-safety at their primary school. We do teach the discourse between political beliefs and religious beliefs. I went to see a school’s Prevent officer in action in Walthamstow, teaching many girls in east London.

Yasmin Qureshi: Everyone would agree that there is nothing wrong with running programmes and working with young people, but one of the problems is the statutory obligation on teachers, schools and doctors, which means there may well face penalties if they do not deal with things. What we are saying is that it is the statutory obligation—the almost criminalising part—that is wrong. Why can it not be voluntary?

Mr Wallace: I have listened to the hon. Lady’s valid points, but statutory duties are writ large through the relationship between the state, children and the community. They are writ large in schools and in the medical profession. We all have a statutory duty. If I was a teacher and a child came to me and reported that they were being interfered with or sexually exploited and I did not report it, I would be in breach of a teaching council duty. We all have a duty and that does not make it wrong. What makes it wrong is for us to fail to safeguard our children or take action to prevent them from being radicalised.

There is this idea that we should throw the baby out with the bathwater by scrapping Prevent. I hear what all Members have said today about those perceptions and making sure we reinforce trust and work with communities to ensure that it is collaborative. That is absolutely important and the direction we must travel in to keep it going. On the idea that Prevent is actually having a massive negative effect, I ask colleagues to look across the channel to Germany, France, Belgium and Holland, where they do not have a Prevent strategy anything like ours. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) rightly pointed out, in America they have almost no Prevent strategy. Why are they now scrabbling to engage with their communities and ensure that they keep back the flow of terrorist attacks? This country, under Labour, started a process; we invested in a Prevent strategy to work with our communities and to safeguard children and vulnerable people.

I absolutely agree that we can always do more, and I am committed, as Security Minister, to doing so. It is not always the Security Minister who must do that; local police forces must recruit the right policemen in the right places to do the right jobs. Ultimately, Prevent is working. I can only tell hon. Members the successes, but we have saved lives, we are preventing the far right from rising in other parts of the country; and we are making sure that young people have a future. That is why I back Prevent. I am passionate about it and I am happy to take colleagues to go and meet providers and hear about it at first hand. It is not the disaster that it is painted to be. The misperceptions that are peddled, often by an irresponsible media, only add fuel to the fire, rather than working with us to ensure we protect people in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered implementation of the Prevent Strategy.
Marriage Week

[MRS MADELEINE MOON in the Chair]

4 pm

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Marriage Week.

It is a privilege to have secured a debate about Marriage Week, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. I pipped it to the post when I celebrated my 21st wedding anniversary last weekend, but the last 12 hours have brought home to my dear wife, Janet, the reality of the vow “in sickness and in health,” because there has been a bit of a bug going round our house. I welcome the aim behind Marriage Week: to draw attention to the importance of marriage for individuals, family life and civil society. All of us can take part in the celebration. It is not exclusive to those who are married; it is for everyone, because we all know that marriage is for the common good.

I welcome the Minister to her place. She has already answered my written question about the Government’s plans to promote Marriage Week, saying that “we cannot afford to overlook the importance of the family as the basic building block upon which we build a successful economy and a stable society.” That is indeed true, but I want to give her the opportunity to explain further the Government’s plans and the value that they place on marriage.

Many of my hon. Friends support the idea of having a dedicated Minister for the family, so perhaps this is an opportunity to make a bid for the Minister’s promotion—she regularly attends Westminster Hall and speaks about lots of issues. We want a dedicated Minister for the family—indeed, a Cabinet Minister—given that the topic covers so many areas and Departments. When I was looking through some old cuttings the other day I was reminded that back in 2004, the current Prime Minister was the shadow Cabinet Minister for the family. She came to my house when she was supporting my campaign to be the Member of Parliament for Enfield, Southgate, and we talked about families. The current Prime Minister got it, and talked about how important that role is, so who knows? Perhaps in time the Minister can follow that path.

The Minister was absolutely correct: we cannot afford to overlook the importance of the family. Family provides social capital to those who have fallen on hard times, as well as to everyone, because we all know that marriage is for the common good.

However, I would like the Minister to go further. It is important to be unapologetic about the social benefits not just of family, but particularly of marriage. It is difficult to celebrate marriage without using the M-word. I am unapologetic about celebrating marriage not only because I am in favour of the family formation, but because of the growing evidence that marriage is socially just.

Marriage must not disappear; in fact, it should be central to Government policy making. I sometimes search Government policy documents on my computer to see where the M-word comes up, but it often does not. There should be family impact statements looking...
at the impact of marriage and the support it provides in a lot of arenas. The life chances strategy or the social reform strategy, or whatever it will be called, will be published shortly, and I will again search to see where the word “marriage” comes up, because it needs to. If we are tackling burning injustices, we need to support marriage.

I want to spell out some social benefits of marriage. Unmarried parents are six times more likely to break up before their first child’s fifth birthday. Children from broken homes are two-and-a-half times more likely to be in long-term poverty, and 44% of children in lone parent families live in relative poverty—almost twice the figure for children in couple families. Cohabiting couples make up just a fifth of couples with dependent children, but nearly half of all family breakdown. There are a lot of reasons to consider, but marriage is socially just and aids social mobility. Children who experience family breakdown perform less well at school, gain fewer qualifications and are more likely to be expelled from school. I therefore encourage the Government to commit more resources to tackling family breakdown by celebrating marriage.

I welcome the marriage tax allowance. We have mentioned the importance of that; it brings us in line with other OECD countries that have recognised family stability by recognising marriage. However, it is also important to build on that good work. The fact that 90% of a married person’s tax allowance remains transferrable means that although we have that recognition in principle, it does not really get to the heart of the problem.

There are many creative ways of celebrating marriage. As hon. Members have mentioned in their interventions, we can do much more. There is the financial element—we have debated whether that is important in the past—but more than that, it is about practical support and how we provide relationship support. I welcome the previous Prime Minister’s absolute commitment to that and the money that was provided for relationship support, which must continue—indeed, it should increase, because it is money well spent. Supporting fathers, which several hon. Members present have championed through the all-party group on fatherhood, is particularly important, as is broadening access to marriage preparation classes and marriage counselling.

I pay tribute to the Marriage Foundation, which is behind next week’s celebration, and to Harry and Kate Benson, whose life as a couple has recently received a lot of publicity. They recognise that marriage is not just a bed of roses. We all experience problems. Marriage Week is about recognising that we must not take our marriages for granted—we all need to work on them, and that applies to me as much as to anyone else—and nor should society or the Government. We should promote and celebrate this vital institution for a good society.

4.10 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) for his tremendous speech, which I strongly support.

The most powerful statistic in this whole area is that, of all the parents who are still together when their children reach the age of 15, 93% are married. That says so much about why marriage matters. As MPs, we are here for all our constituents—we are here for the single mums who do an amazing job, and we are here for people who are not married—but it is right to celebrate marriage as a massively important social institution that builds resilience and is clearly really good for our children.

Three quarters of 20 to 24-year-olds say that they want to marry, so the aspiration for our younger people is very much there. Likewise, three quarters of lone parents and almost nine in 10 step-parents agree that it is appropriate and necessary for the Government to send the message that having two parents is important. That is all worth putting on record.

The Austrian political economist Joseph Schumpeter said that in a modern consumer economy, people might end up living for the present rather than having projects for the future. That involves things like saving less and borrowing more. Critically, he said that there would be less willingness for people to make long-term commitments to one another. Of course, the greatest long-term commitment that we can make is a marriage in which we bring up children.

There is so much more that we can do, including really good marriage preparation and really good marriage MOTs. We all get our cars serviced once a year; we spend time and money on it because we think it is important. But how much more important it is to have a look under the bonnet of our marriages, to make sure that what started off romantically, but might now feel a bit like running a small business with an ex-girlfriend, stays on track.

Mr Burrowes: My hon. Friend has been a great champion of marriage for many years. He also has experience in Bedfordshire with voluntary organisations that try to help couples, particularly those who have just had a child. Some Government funding was coming through for such projects; does he know whether any progress has been made?

Andrew Selous: I am very pleased that the last Prime Minister doubled the amount of spending on relationship support across Government, as my hon. Friend already mentioned, but there are real pressures on the sector and on the Relationships Alliance. I will meet the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions next week to discuss those issues.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Was my hon. Friend as surprised as I was to learn that last year the Government spent more money on repairing cathedrals than on supporting marriage and family relationships? Will he join me in calling on the Government to put more resources into supporting marriage?

Andrew Selous: I am a great supporter of cathedrals, as I am sure my hon. Friend is, but it should not be either/or. We need to take care of the living as well as the buildings in which people celebrate great events.

I will end my short contribution by stating the importance not only of marriage preparation but of really good ongoing marriage support. I am afraid that many churches often provide some of the worst after-sales service of any organisation I know. We all get into bad habits—I put my hand up to that, and my wife would be the first to draw attention to it—but just one evening a year can make a huge difference. We do it for our cars, so why not for our marriages?
Several hon. Members rose—

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): I call Fiona Bruce. I remind her that we still need to hear from the Minister. If she takes interventions, the Minister will have less time.

4.14 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) for securing this debate on a subject that is too infrequently spoken of in this place but that is important to the people we serve. Some 80% of young people aspire to marry, because they recognise the benefits of marriage for the parties, for any children they may have and for wider society. As my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) said, marriage promotes stability in relationships. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate that it is therefore a matter of social justice that the Government support marriage, particularly because it is the least well off who have the least resilience to cope with the consequences of relationship breakdown.

There are many benefits of marriage. The health benefits are powerful for women and men. Marriage is associated with a significant reduction in depression and marital status affects the progress of Alzheimer’s disease in later life—singles have twice the risk of developing it. Married people are more likely to survive cancer, and they have a lower risk of suicide. The longevity effect of marriage can even offset the consequences of smoking.

We are all rightly concerned about the cost and scarcity of social care, but the social care burden is significantly greater if elderly people are not being looked after by their spouse. Those living with a spouse are least likely to go into an institution after the age of 60. A European study of 20,000 older people found that men and women living with a spouse were more likely to be satisfied with life. Older people living with a spouse are also the most healthy group.

Obviously, many people in couples find themselves alone in later life, and single people may find themselves bringing up children. As we have said many times when discussing this issue, there is no condemnation of any individual when we speak about marriage. We know and recognise that single parents work valiantly and often very successfully to bring up children, but statistics show that marriage is good for people and for their children. Studies consistently indicate that children raised by two happily and continuously married parents have the best chance of developing into competent and successful adults. During early parenthood, the single biggest predictor of stability—even when controlling for age, income, education, benefits and ethnic group—is whether the parents are married. That challenges the assumption that factors other than marriage—so-called selection effects—are at play. As we have heard, 93% of all couples that are still intact by the time their child is 15 are married. Indeed, 9% of married parents split before their child’s fifth birthday, but 35% of unmarried parents split.

There is a huge level of interest at the moment in young people’s wellbeing and mental health, but family structure is very rarely considered to be the important factor it is. I am patron of a children’s mental health wellbeing charity in my constituency; the chief executive has told me that it is having to care for children at a younger and younger age, and in nearly every case family relationship difficulties are one of the chief causes of their mental health problems.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): My hon. Friend is right to mention the benefits of raising children in a stable family home. Does she agree that the Government have a real opportunity and responsibility to promote marriage because of what it is and what it does for children?

Fiona Bruce: Absolutely, particularly with respect to mental health. Teenage boys who live with continuously married parents have the highest self-esteem among teenagers, while teenage girls who live with continuously cohabiting parents have the lowest. I could cite a plethora of other research and statistics, but I am out of time. Marriage is indispensable to a flourishing society. We need to stop fighting that fact and start supporting it.

4.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon, and to be able to respond to this very important debate today.

I do not intend to start by being facetious, but the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) have left me fearing for my own future good health. Nevertheless, I welcome the comments that many Members have made about the importance of lone parents in our society and the very, very hard work that they put in to bringing up their children.

Of course, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) on securing this important debate on Marriage Week, although not quite during Marriage Week, which I understand runs from 7 February to 14 February, coinciding very nicely with St Valentine’s day, which is coming up very soon indeed. I acknowledge his keen interest in social justice issues and that of the many other Members who have spoken. It demonstrates the importance that the House places on the subject that so many Members, from all parties, are here today for what is just a 30-minute debate, and have sought to make their contributions.

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) on securing this debate. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that the fact that marriage is now open to all helps to embed social justice in our society?

Caroline Nokes: I very much thank my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) for that comment. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate on his 21 years of marriage to Janet, but I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green has recently also celebrated his wedding anniversary. Although he has only been married for two years, he has actually been with his husband for a quarter of a century. That is something that we can all be very impressed by and I extend my congratulations to them.

Of course, Marriage Week provides us with a very good opportunity to celebrate the commitment and connectedness that a stable relationship brings to a
family. The Government view the role of families as fundamental in shaping individuals, and in having an overwhelmingly positive effect on wider society. We know that growing up in families where parents are collaborative and communicative gives children the skills they need to develop into happy and successful adults, and the vital institution of marriage is a strong symbol of wider society’s desire to celebrate commitment between partners.

The institution of marriage can indeed be the basis of a successful family life and many people make this very important commitment every year. As we have heard, marriage can lay the foundations for parenthood, and is emblematic of the love and security that parents need to give their children.

A stable family that provides a nurturing environment for children is something that the Government will continue to champion and encourage. That is why we are focused on helping families and children, to enhance the educational and employment opportunities available to the young, and to reinforce the benefits that parental collaboration undoubtedly has.

Catherine McKinnell: Since 2015, Marriage Care in Tyneside has provided counselling services to 54 couples and 48 couples have received relationship education, undoubtedly helping those couples to form healthier marriages and stronger family units. Does the Minister agree that the Department for Work and Pensions should continue to fund face-to-face marriage and relationship counselling services?

Caroline Nokes: I thank the hon. Lady for that comment, and I have written the name of her constituency on my speech so I remember to mention specifically the point she has made about Newcastle upon Tyne.

The importance of marriage is reflected in the Government’s introduction of the marriage tax allowance. Furthermore, our commitment to supporting different types of family means that we have extended that tax allowance to include civil partnerships and, of course, same-sex marriages, which were introduced in 2014 and have been taking place since.

Jim Shannon: I understand that the take-up of the marriage tax allowance has not been as great as the Government had hoped. May I gently suggest to the Minister that the take-up would increase dramatically if she and her Department were able to make it a more serious allowance? Perhaps that is something the Government can consider.

Caroline Nokes: I am sure that is also a matter for Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, and recently it has been a subject that my own constituents have raised with me, following some publicity about take-up of the marriage tax allowance.

This debate is an opportunity for us to celebrate the diversity and vibrancy of marriage as the basis for family life across the United Kingdom, and we recognise that supportive families can come in many different shapes and sizes.

When it comes to the critical issue of improving children’s outcomes, the evidence shows that it is not the structure of a family that is important but the quality of the relationship between the parents. Recent research by the Early Intervention Foundation has shown that children exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved inter-parental conflict have poorer outcomes in later life. We also know that an improvement in parenting skills does not mitigate the worst effects if relationship issues are not addressed.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that marriages can and do break down, but the Government have been clear that, even when a family has separated, both parents still have a positive role to play in the lives of their children. Evidence shows that parental collaboration has a direct and positive impact on child outcomes. As we have heard, children tend to have better health, emotional wellbeing and higher academic attainment if they grow up with parents who have a good relationship and who are able to manage conflict well. That is why we are committed to supporting healthy relationships between parents—whether married or cohabiting, together or separated—in the best interests of children.

Andrew Selous: I just wonder whether the Minister could reflect on the statistic that 93% of couples who are still together when their children reach the age of 15 are married. Does that not speak very powerfully, notwithstanding what she said about the recent research by the Early Intervention Foundation?

Caroline Nokes: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment and I will shortly make some very specific points about marriage that I know will make everybody very happy.

Over 48,000 couples have participated in counselling and more than 17,000 practitioners have been trained to help families in difficulty in the last four years, during which we have invested more than £30 million in services offering support to couples, to reduce parental conflict. In total, 160,000 people have been given access to support, to reduce that conflict. Alongside that, our ongoing child maintenance reforms are delivering a new programme designed to increase collaboration and reduce conflict between separated parents.

Our current programme was designed without the benefit of the latest evidence about the importance of good inter-parental relationships, while a focus on national commissioning of services makes it hard to establish effective referral mechanisms from local services. This means that, in some areas, take-up remains low, despite the prevalence of relationship distress. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) made an important intervention earlier and we will soon announce plans to procure new services to help disadvantaged parents, and others, to address parental conflict.

Catherine McKinnell: Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Nokes: I am really sorry, but I am now left with only three and a half minutes and I still have quite a lot that I would like to say.

The importance of both parents to children’s future outcomes is well known to all of us. Only around half of children in separated families see their non-resident parent every fortnight or more. Through both our programme to reduce parental conflict and our child maintenance reforms, we are specifically supporting fathers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield,
Southgate mentioned, in both intact and separated families, to form more collaborative co-parenting relationships and hence improve their children’s outcomes. We know that some fathers feel that they are not recognised by public services as having responsibilities for their children and we want to explore how to give them the same chance to engage in their children’s lives as mothers.

Of course, we are aware that different organisations offer classes specifically aimed at preparing a couple for marriage, and those classes can offer very real benefits to people in those circumstances. We want to support programmes that have the biggest impact possible, which is why our new programme will offer support to all family types.

I acknowledge the great work of the community of organisations that advise my Department on family and parental conflict issues. I recognise the great breadth and depth of experience they have in this area. In seeking to draw on their valuable experience, on 23 January I met members of the Relationships Alliance—Relate, Marriage Care, OnePlusOne and Tavistock Relationships. We enjoyed a really productive and informative discussion about the challenges involved in addressing parental conflict, including in the most disadvantaged families, and the new national development of this important work.

The Relationships Alliance is an important organisation that plays a key role in promoting the many benefits of healthy adult relationships, and our objectives are very closely aligned. Members of the alliance have been long-standing partners of the Department, both in their capacity as subject matter experts, and as contract-holders for our current and past delivery programmes. They have given their time and expertise to policy development, and I thank them for that support. In particular, they have supported our efforts to create a new programme targeted at reducing parental conflict. We will continue to engage with the Relationships Alliance, and a wide range of stakeholders, in the future.

The Green Paper that we will bring forward shortly is a listening exercise as much as a tool to express our policy intentions. It will provide an excellent opportunity to hear from stakeholders to garner their views and expertise, and I look forward to exploring the outcomes in more depth. Disadvantaged children are a priority for Government support, and as such will also be a priority for our parental conflict contracts.

In conclusion, let me assure hon. Members that this Government are clear on the importance of the family and of marriage, in all the different forms that it can take, and we are continuing to work to drive up outcomes for children by increasing collaboration between parents, which we know is so crucially important.

I reiterate my thanks to all Members who have expressed their views and their particular enthusiasm and support for marriage. I welcome that, I acknowledge that and I reassure them that the Department intends to continue to work very hard to ensure that marriage gets the support it needs to continue being a strong bedrock for the families and the children for whom we want to secure the best possible outcomes in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered ultra-low emission vehicles.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I am grateful to have been granted this debate. Before I begin, I should say that in a conversation I had earlier today with the Minister’s colleague, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes)—I understand that this is his policy area—he agreed to have a meeting with me shortly on this issue, and I am grateful for that.

It is nearly five years since I initiated a debate on ultra low emissions vehicles in the Chamber. I have strongly championed the new technology throughout that time. In my debate in May 2011, I said that the issue mattered for four main reasons: first, because it is part of the answer in tackling climate change; secondly, because it is at the heart of creating the new industries of the future; thirdly, because it helps the United Kingdom respond to the challenge of energy security; and fourthly, because it helps our constituents reduce the cost of driving. In that debate, no one, including me, mentioned the important contribution that ultra low emissions vehicles can make in improving air quality, which is an issue that is rapidly rising up the political agenda, not least because 40% of local authorities are currently breaching air quality guidelines. A quarter of children in London are breathing illegally polluted air, meaning that their lung capacity may never recover. The air quality in London last week was worse than that in Beijing.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): One of my local schools is in an area that breaches the limit. In fact, my constituents, particularly those living off the North Circular Road, are breathing some of the worst air in London, if not the country. Does my hon. Friend recognise that the highest cost to the health of Londoners and those across the country is paid by those in our most deprived communities, who on average are exposed to 25% higher levels of air pollution than people elsewhere?

Andrew Selous: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. It is often the most disadvantaged communities that suffer the worst air quality. That is another reason why the issue is so important.

In May 2011, there were 57,000 ultra low emissions vehicles on our roads. Nearly five years later, that figure has increased to 87,000. The Government’s central projection of 5% of all cars in the UK being ultra low emissions vehicles by 2020 means that we need to have 1.6 million such vehicles on our roads by then. The Committee on Climate Change recommends that 9% of the cars on our roads should be ultra low emissions by 2020. That equates to 2.8 million cars. Even 9% is unambitious compared with Japan, which has a target for 20% of all its cars to be ultra low emissions vehicles by 2020. While I am very happy to give the Government due and proper credit for what they have done in this area, my purpose in holding the debate is to challenge them to lay out a much clearer road map as to how we are to get to at least 1.6 million ultra low emissions vehicles on our roads by 2020.
In response to a parliamentary question I asked recently, the Department for Transport declined to indicate how many ultra low emissions vehicles it expects to be on our roads by the end of this year, in 2018 or in 2019. I think it would be helpful to have a more detailed road map of how we will achieve the 2020 target.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the correct approach is a balanced one? Encouraging the greater use of low emissions vehicles should not mean that we should ban historic vehicles from our roads. I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group on historic vehicles.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He has a long record of campaigning on this issue. We should help people transition to the new, cleaner vehicles that we see on our roads, and his point is well made.

Sir Greg Knight: Will my hon. Friend give way again?

Andrew Selous: If my right hon. Friend will forgive me, there are quite a few other Members who wish to speak.

Sir Greg Knight: I will be brief. Can I place on the record the fact that historic vehicles comprise 0.7% of all licensed vehicles, so their impact on the environment is negligible?

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He has done a service by putting that figure on the record.

Do the Government intend to influence the choice of public sector vehicles that taxpayers pay for, such as local authority school buses, police cars, ambulances and so on? Installing many more charging points, both for home charging and for charging en route, is critical to the increase in ultra low emissions vehicles. The modern transport Bill will enable the UK to make further progress. Issues that should be addressed include the standardisation of sockets and plugs for charging, and the ease of payment among different charging providers. Only last week, a Central Bedfordshire councillor who has an electric car shared his frustration with me at not being able to plug it in to charge in some locations and not being able to pay for the charge in others. The Government need to take a lead.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I am glad my hon. Friend has mentioned councillors. Does he agree that local authorities have a vital role to play? What they can do can magnificently help low emissions vehicles.

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Convenience store representatives have asked whether any charging point investments they may be required to make can be offset against their business rates. While we must have more charging points, we must act fairly towards small businesses. What steps are the Government taking to expand electric vehicle car sharing services, which have been introduced in Paris, Indianapolis and Singapore? Have they given any thought to the steps that need to be taken to establish a healthy second-hand ultra low emissions vehicle market, the lack of which is currently holding back growth?

Sir Greg Knight: (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the correct approach is a balanced one? Encouraging the greater use of low emissions vehicles should not mean that we should ban historic vehicles from our roads. I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group on historic vehicles.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He has a long record of campaigning on this issue. We should help people transition to the new, cleaner vehicles that we see on our roads, and his point is well made.

Sir Greg Knight: Will my hon. Friend give way again?

Andrew Selous: If my right hon. Friend will forgive me, there are quite a few other Members who wish to speak.

Sir Greg Knight: I will be brief. Can I place on the record the fact that historic vehicles comprise 0.7% of all licensed vehicles, so their impact on the environment is negligible?

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He has done a service by putting that figure on the record.

Do the Government intend to influence the choice of public sector vehicles that taxpayers pay for, such as local authority school buses, police cars, ambulances and so on? Installing many more charging points, both for home charging and for charging en route, is critical to the increase in ultra low emissions vehicles. The modern transport Bill will enable the UK to make further progress. Issues that should be addressed include the standardisation of sockets and plugs for charging, and the ease of payment among different charging providers. Only last week, a Central Bedfordshire councillor who has an electric car shared his frustration with me at not being able to plug it in to charge in some locations and not being able to pay for the charge in others. The Government need to take a lead.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I am glad my hon. Friend has mentioned councillors. Does he agree that local authorities have a vital role to play? What they can do can magnificently help low emissions vehicles.

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Convenience store representatives have asked whether any charging point investments they may be required to make can be offset against their business rates. While we must have more charging points, we must act fairly towards small businesses. What steps are the Government taking to expand electric vehicle car sharing services, which have been introduced in Paris, Indianapolis and Singapore? Have they given any thought to the steps that need to be taken to establish a healthy second-hand ultra low emissions vehicle market, the lack of which is currently holding back growth?

Is there anything the Minister can say to reassure Guide Dogs, which is concerned about increased injuries to pedestrians as a result of ultra low emissions vehicles’ quietness? Volkswagen, BMW and Ford plan to set up a European network for the speedy charging of electric vehicles. Their technology will apparently be significantly faster than the current arrangements. Will the United Kingdom benefit from similar private sector investment in the latest and fastest technology?

The United Kingdom has the largest market in the European Union for ultra low emissions vehicles, which is something that we should all celebrate, but I note that a quarter of all the vehicles in Norway are already electric or hybrid electric. The Netherlands, along with Norway, plans to completely phase out diesel vehicles by 2025. Last year, China produced 517,000 new energy vehicles, as it calls them, and it expects to quadruple its new energy vehicle output to 2,000,000 vehicles by 2020. This year, it will also install another 800,000 public charging stations. I appreciate that China is a much larger country than the United Kingdom, but a smaller country can still aim for the same trajectory of growth, and that is what I would like to see the United Kingdom do to become and remain a world leader.

It is important that when we refer to ultra low emissions vehicles, we do not just refer to what comes out of the exhaust. There are, I understand, estimated to be 84,000 transport refrigeration units powered by highly polluting diesel engines that are not yet regulated. That is a significant omission in the urgent battle that the Government need to fight to significantly improve the United Kingdom’s air quality. What action will the Government take on transport refrigeration units?

When we refer to emissions, we should include nitrogen oxide and particulate matter. It is important to realise that particulate matter comes not only from exhausts, but from tyres and brakes. What research are the Government commissioning to reduce emissions from tyres and brakes? For the industry to continue to invest, there needs to be long-term commitment from the Government. The plug-in car grant is a critical lever to developing that market and continuing commitment to it is important, as is continued investment in charging infrastructure. Taxation is a matter for Her Majesty’s Treasury, but can the Minister say anything about representations made to Treasury Ministers on the research and development tax credit? That needs to be internationally competitive to demonstrate ongoing commitment to the industry over the next decade. Can the Minister say anything about changes to vehicle excise duty and company car tax to reflect the amount of nitrogen oxide and particulate matter emitted in addition to the levels of carbon emitted?

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Has the hon. Gentleman seen last week’s air quality audits from the Mayor of London’s office? Does he welcome the recommendation to move school entrances and play areas away from areas with idling vehicles, and the idea of “no engine idling” schemes to reduce harmful emissions during school time? Perhaps the Minister could take those points on board too.

Andrew Selous: I referred to last week’s very bad
If the Government are to meet their legal air quality obligations, change is necessary. We need to make sure that there are affordable, cleaner alternatives for people on low incomes to switch to. What estimate have the Government made of the ability of compression engines to mix diesel and hydrogen in vans and lorries to reduce emissions? It is excellent to see the Liverpool-based technology firm ULEMCo working with the University of Liverpool and Huazhong University’s Wuhan New Energy Institute to do exactly that. It is also good to see the Scottish company Alexander Dennis partnering with Chinese vehicle manufacturer BYD—it stands for “Build Your Dreams”—to put electric buses on our roads and Zhejiang Geely making electric taxis in Rugby for the streets of London.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): Would the hon. Gentleman perhaps like to add to his ask list the issue of local authorities that are grappling with air quality issues? Five local authorities are under infractions and, with the Department, are dealing with a plan for low-carbon development to counter poor air quality caused by transport. The Department’s response may well be to provide funding to, for example, convert taxi fleets, local authority vehicles and public vehicles to low-carbon usage. Would he encourage the Department responsible to make sure that grants go to those local authorities?

Andrew Selous: What is happening in London with taxis for the future is excellent, and I am sure we would all like to see more cities across the United Kingdom making progress. The hon. Gentleman has a long record of interest in this area, and I thank him for putting that point on the record.

What discussions are the Government having with local authorities to roll out ultra low emissions buses and taxis more widely across the United Kingdom? As the UK seeks new markets and trading arrangements, I want to see this country excelling in that area, with high take-up in our home market and massive exports around the world. I am extremely grateful to colleagues who have come along to take an interest in this important matter today.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. There are some people standing to indicate that they wish to speak who did not submit their names for the debate. I warn all those who would like to speak that I intend to go to the Front-Bench spokespeople at 10 past five.

4.43 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) for bringing forward this debate and for his work championing this issue, which began long before I got to this place. I will split my speech into two parts—first, why we need to encourage more electric and hybrid vehicles on to the road and, secondly, the framework that we need to enable that to happen.

It is really obvious now why we need to make the switch to electric nationally and with all speed. It is because of the shocking air quality statistics that we have all highlighted recently. Only last week, the levels of air pollution in London overtook those in Beijing. One would hardly credit that that could be possible in this nation, but it is true. I have taken part in two air quality inquiries. The first was as part of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and the second as part of the Environmental Audit Committee. The statistics that we were presented with were quite shocking. We have failed our nitrogen oxide and particulate matter targets miserably, and the impact has been a terrible knock-on effect on health. We are told that something like 40,000 to 50,000 people die every year as a result of air pollution. I believe that the statistics could be higher, and that is a shocking indictment of how we are running our society.

Mr Burrows: We should consider the impact on children. Bowes Primary School in my patch is 66% over the legal limit. The issue is whether an ultra low emissions zone, which could be extended by the Mayor, would help on the north and south circular routes. It may lead to further congestion and other problems. Has the hon. Lady looked at ultra low emissions zones to see whether they are a good solution to the problem?

Rebecca Pow: I will say a bit about those zones later, but I think all local authorities will have to consider them. I hope the Minister will have some guidance on that later.

Even in Taunton Deane, which people might consider a beautiful rural area with a few urban centres, there are two pollution hotspots. One is on East Street, which is a busy road going right into the centre of Taunton. The other is on the famous A358—I have spoken about getting an upgrade for that road ever since I arrived in this place—where there is a pollution hotspot in a village called Henlade. We need to tackle that and, although I believe local authorities have the powers to tackle such issues—I have questioned Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Ministers about that—they do not have the know-how on how to put measures in place. More particularly, they do not have the funds to tackle the issue even if they would like to.

I welcome the fact that the Government will produce their consultation on air quality fairly soon, and we look forward to seeing what is in it. I urge the Government—this is particularly a point for DEFRA—to adopt World Health Organisation rules on air quality, as they are far more stringent than the European rules that we have nevertheless shockingly contravened.

I come on to the real reason for today’s debate, which is encouraging the use of electric cars to help tackle air quality. As we have heard, the electric car market is growing substantially. There are many models available on the market now. Some are extremely well designed and are built to last. Many could be built not exactly as kit cars but on a much more local basis. Perhaps that might spawn new industries in our constituencies that could manufacture those cars. I would welcome the Minister’s views on whether we should have some sort of incentive to kick-start those industries.

There are already some world leaders in the industry. Formula 1, which is largely based in this country, has already been driving electric racing cars—there is a new league called Formula E, where they are raced at venues around the world. If we increased productivity and
innovation in an industry that we already invest in, we could become world leaders. There would be spin-offs for our industrial strategy, and for technology and innovation, as we leave the EU, and it would work to improve our environment and help to build an environment that works for everyone—a point that the Government have to address. There will be spin-offs all round.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful argument. I entirely agree that we have to improve air quality. The 9% target—I think it was provided by the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change—is one that we really need to aim for. Is one of the biggest barriers to the growth of low emissions vehicles not the high depreciation costs that are incurred at the moment? Does my hon. Friend have any ideas about how the Government could help overcome that?

Rebecca Pow: I will leave the Minister to come up with some answers on that.

I have been having discussions with a company called EV Hub Global, which has a 21st century idea: a hub—a filling station—for electric cars, run on a membership basis. We cannot increase our use of electric cars by the numbers that have been predicted unless we have the right infrastructure in place to refuel them. At the moment, there are 1,000 rapid chargers available in the UK and approximately 100,000 electric vehicles, and 50,000 taxis have got to be off the road by 2020. If they are all going to go electric, and if we are all going to buy electric cars, we have to have a framework in place to recharge them. Those hubs can help.

People I have talked to in the industry suggest that we should focus on fleet vehicles first—buses, taxis, vans and lorries—and then the domestic car market will follow. I appreciate that we have to be very careful not to create economic difficulties for businesses that use vans; it is a very fine line.

Networks are important, and ideas for incentivising fleet businesses to convert to electric vehicles are crucial. Our electric charging facilities have to get faster. People do not want to spend an hour charging up—they want to spend 30 minutes or less—so we need innovation to help that. Equally, we need storage for the charging facilities so that they do not have an adverse impact on or disrupt the grid. Charging hubs or extra facilities need to be where we most need them, so we should focus on cities and airports first. There will be a new runway at Heathrow, so it will be important to focus on that. We must plan how we will work these ideas into towns such as Taunton, which has just been given green town status, to reduce high-emission cars. There are some big opportunities here.

I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire for bringing this subject to our attention and for giving us the opportunity to speak. There are huge opportunities, so we should be positive about the world of hybrid and electric cars, but the framework has to be in place. I very much welcome the Minister’s view on how he will enable that. Over and above everything else, we have to tackle this dreadful air pollution.

4.52 pm

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on securing the debate.

I agree with all that has been said about the need to promote ultra low emissions vehicles. It is clear that we have to do so to meet the carbon targets that we have committed to and because air quality is increasingly a feature in the public conscience. Court cases about air quality may force the Government’s hand more quickly than the requirement to meet our carbon plans.

Our plans to reduce transport emissions by 2020 are already quite challenging. The Energy and Climate Change Committee, on which I previously served, produced a report that looked at how the Government are progressing towards meeting those targets. It was apparent that hitting the targets we set for 2020 will be very difficult indeed. The transition to biofuels will help, of course, but there are real challenges to achieving that transition, given the capability of some of the cars currently on the road. Obviously the quickest way to meet those targets, both for 2020 and beyond, is to adopt ultra low emissions vehicles.

The technology is hugely exciting. When the Select Committee visited California just before we finished compiling our last report, we visited Tesla. Seeing the vehicles there, I came to understand that they are no longer golf carts or milk floats; they are proper cars that will really excite people the world over and will achieve significant saturation, even if the market is left to its own devices. A small plug: I am delighted that Tesla is going to come and speak to the all-party parliamentary group for Globe UK, which I chair, in a few weeks’ time to explain its vision to colleagues in Parliament. Of course, other manufacturers are doing great things, too—it is not just Tesla—but I have seen that factory, and what it is doing really is very impressive.

The argument for such cars is compelling. They are not milk floats. They have all the gadgets and oomph—I think that is the technical term—that cars need to turn the heads of proper petrolheads. They are also amazingly cheap to run. Of course, they now accelerate like proper cars and have all the gadgets inside like proper cars, but it is the fact that they can run for hundreds and hundreds of miles for pence that makes the real difference.

I agree with colleagues that the existence of a second-hand market is important. As my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane rightly said, the Government should focus their attention on really screwing down on the heads of proper petrolheads. They are also amazingly cheap to run. Of course, they now accelerate like proper cars and have all the gadgets inside like proper cars, but it is the fact that they can run for hundreds and hundreds of miles for pence that makes the real difference.

The Government need to address three barriers to the roll-out of electric vehicles, which the Minister has heard me talk about previously. First, we need to get the charging network right. The challenge is not the charging network at service stations on motorways and trunk routes, because service stations all over the country now have electric charging points. Nor is it the charging network on driveways at people’s homes, because the Government’s excellent grant scheme ensures that when someone buys an electric vehicle they can install a charging point on their private land. It is residential curbside charging, particularly in areas of high population density. If someone goes out in any direction from here,
it will not be long before they find high concentrations of people living with no private parking. Having a curbside charging network—probably buried in the curb stone—would be an extraordinary infrastructure project.

Rebecca Pow: My hon. Friend is making a serious point. Is that not where the hubs that I talked about could be useful? We could have hubs in various areas in cities so that people do not need to park and charge on the curbside; they can go to the hub, which they join on a membership basis.

James Heappey: I, too, had the pleasure of meeting EV Hub, and its initial model focuses on commercial fleets. The reality is that, if every vehicle has to go via one of those hubs when it leaves its parking spot each morning, the scale of the demand will be unworkable. We have to find a solution to curbside charging for those who do not have off-road parking of their own.

We also need to find a way of incentivising businesses to install electric vehicle charging points in their work car parks. When we visited California, a number of businesses made a great virtue of that and let people charge their cars for free while they were working. It would be worthwhile to find a way of encouraging businesses to do that.

The second barrier is the preparedness of the energy system itself: quite simply, do we have the generation capacity to meet the likely increase in electricity need? Is the energy system—the wires and switches—capable of dealing with the clusters in demand when a lot of EVs are charged in one street or neighbourhood at the same time? Is the system smart enough yet? Has it been digitised so that we can mitigate that clustering in both time and space by load-shifting, so that cars are charged when the energy is available at the cheapest possible point? We risk exacerbating the peak energy price in the evening if we do not have that digitised load-shifting capability in place. If everybody comes home and lazily plugs in their car before they go inside, alongside switching on the kettle, cooking supper and all the other things that go on in homes when people first get home at night, demand will increase massively.

Thirdly, people will need certainty about the future tax regime for how we charge people to drive cars. It is blatantly obvious that Her Majesty's Treasury is not going to give up the receipts it currently gets for fuel duty without a compensating tax in place, and I suspect that that will be very pricey. If we are really going to encourage people to go for electric vehicles, we need to be very clear—perhaps in a Green Paper alongside the modern transport Bill—about what we are thinking of for an alternative way of raising tax from motoring once people transition and we lose the fuel duty.

We can work through all that, but the Government need to be clear about their role in encouraging the transition. The grants that are in place are doing an excellent job and, as a result, people are being encouraged to look at EVs in particular. The more EVs come down in price and, crucially, the more they increase their range, the more people will see them as a viable option and be incentivised by the grants. The size of the grants will be the indicator of how serious the Government are about facilitating the transition.

My plea, however, is that we do not penalise the drivers of diesel cars. I declare an interest as the driver of a diesel car, who thought I was doing the right thing by buying one, because it produced low emissions and was efficient. We have our diesel cars now and, if we are to be incentivised to transition away from them, the Government need to recognise that we did not do the wrong thing by buying them—quite the contrary, we thought we were doing the right thing.

The transition is happening, the technology is compelling and Government intervention is the throttle in the process. To meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, however, we surely require the Government to put their foot down fully on the accelerator.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. I have 10 minutes before I need to call the Front Benchers, so I will ask the three gentlemen standing to be very circumspect with their time. I can allow them a little more than three minutes each.

5.1 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mrs Moon. It is a pleasure to speak in the debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on initiating it.

In my younger days—and, probably, those of everyone in the Chamber—we walked to school, the shop and church, and we took the bus anywhere else. Time has moved on, and families may have one, two or more cars, which has led to the many problems with pollution and effects on the environment.

The Volkswagen transmission issue is still an ongoing problem. The week before last I met some of my constituents who informed me that after the new software had been installed the cars did not go well. Has the Minister had the opportunity to find out exactly where we are? Also, I understand the Government's initiative to reduce road tax for newer and more eco-friendly cars, but what is being done to encourage young people to take up such opportunities?

Without fear of contradiction, I hope, I can say that I live in the most beautiful constituency in the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We want to keep Strangford that way and have corrected environmental damage caused to beautiful old buildings, for example. The council has also designated car-charging points. Those are all steps in the right direction.

Some information and stats on ULEVs have already been given, such as the numbers registered recently. To put the figure into perspective, however, some 43,000 ULEVs have been registered for the first time in Great Britain, compared with some 3.4 million cars registered overall. There is still a long, long way to go. The Minister has stated:

“Plug-in vehicle registrations reached a record high in 2015...more than the past 5 years’ totals rolled into one”.

Some 29 models are now available, which gives a lot of variety and choice for those who wish to go that way.

We need to have plug-in points available for people to charge their cars so that the fear of running out of power is not valid. The Government have a role in providing grants for businesses, such as shopping centres, or in
ensuring that all council facilities, wherever they may be, have at least one power point. Will the Minister outline any such initiatives or plans for initiatives? Also, what discussions have taken place with the Assemblies and devolved Administrations?

I am conscious of the time, Mrs Moon, given the challenge you set us. These days, people want to travel further and we try to provide a good public transport system at a cost. We also have an opportunity to outlay funds for the benefit of all. I support any measures that will incentivise those who wish to be more environmentally sound to be able to make that choice financially. I also take the opportunity to caution the Government about enforcing such a choice or removing choice for others. We may all want new cars to be ultra low emission, but those who wish to choose standard cars must be allowed to do so and not be financially penalised. Whatever the Minister’s response, I urge him to be aware of the difference between incentivising and penalising.

5.4 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who introduced the debate, for the opportunity to talk about something apart from Brexit for once.

When we talk about this subject in Transport questions, I often intervene. I do not know whether the Minister has noticed, but I sound a slightly sceptical note, simply because I am not wholly convinced of the case for electric cars. The roll-out is slow, the product is expensive and there are a lot of long-term uncertainties, including maintenance—when a car is no longer to be seen by the franchise dealer but goes to the local garage—and supply issues. The hon. Member for Wells (James Heappey) alluded to the difficulty of getting the grid and supply of electricity right and ensuring that not everyone in London goes home at 6 o’clock and plugs in electric cars at the same time.

There is also the issue of exactly how the electricity is generated. The Chinese are indeed making lots of electric cars, but they are building a lot of coal-fired power stations as well. Furthermore, a degree of optimism bias exists in the business with regard to where battery technology will take us, so the absence of much consumer confidence means that most people prefer a hybrid car to an electric-only one. There is also a lack of clarity about what success would look like when we are all driving electric cars. The vision was partly sketched by the hon. Member for Wells, but I do not think that we are all clear.

The one point that I want to make is that at one time the Department used to express itself as being technology-neutral, but—probably under the influence of Liberal Democrat Transport Ministers as much as anything else—we started to talk almost exclusively about electric cars. Many other viable alternatives are around, such as hydrogen cars, which are being developed by Honda and Toyota. I believe that the Metropolitan police are thinking of ordering some, and I have driven in one. Hydrogen cars fuel up much more quickly than electric cars, a charging-point structure is not needed and the costs have been coming down. They are a very viable alternative.

Other alternatives are already around, and they are what I might describe as under-supported—for example, liquefied petroleum gas. I do not want to be a spokesman for petrolheads, but the LPG infrastructure is already there. Manufacturing capacity is already in place at Ellesmere Port, where we make LPG for export. We rarely incentivise it appropriately—someone will get £10 off in tax each year, which is a minimal incentive. There is little benefit to drivers from converting, unless they hang on to the car for a very long time. The duty on LPG, as opposed to straightforward petrol, is uncertain.

There is one big problem with electric cars that fuel cells, or even hydrogen fuel cells, will not cut into effectively. At the moment, if we put a battery big enough into a lorry to drive it and let it do what it has to do, that is basically the payload of the lorry. Lorry drivers will not be driving electric vehicles any time soon, so we need to incentivise them to use the cleanest possible fuel—and that is not diesel.

5.7 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), on securing the debate, on keeping a spotlight very much on air quality and on bringing in ultra low emission vehicles.

We have to remember that, in hotspots in this city and throughout the country, 80% of the nitric oxide that turns into nitric dioxide is produced by transport. We really have to deal with that. At issue is private cars, and we have to put in place the right systems of grants and encouragement for the public to buy. For example, charging points must not be only available, but very fast, so people do not have to wait all day for their car to charge up if they are going long distances.

I agree with the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) that lorries will be difficult to turn electric. Delivery vans, taxis and buses can reduce their emissions dramatically, not just through electricity but other fuels. Unless we target such high areas of pollution, we will not be doing enough for air quality. The lives of thousands of people out there in our inner cities are being shortened by air quality.

Yes, electric vehicles carry great incentives now—we are talking about 4p a mile in running costs—and I congratulate the Government on the initiatives in place, but only 1% of vehicles in electric and ultra low emission, while in Norway the figure is 25%. The key now is to ensure that people have alternative vehicles, not only purely electric ones, but hybrid vehicles, which allow drivers to use petrol or diesel over long distances and the batteries when they get to the inner cities. That could perhaps also be done with hybrid lorries, so that lorries’ engines charge on the journey into London and they are able to make deliveries in central London using their electric motors.

We must stop these vehicles—from taxis to buses and delivery vans. Given our lifestyles, we all like to order our shopping online with a click from Tesco, Sainsbury’s or wherever, but all that has to be delivered by a van, which again means emissions in our inner cities. We must tackle the issue head-on, and tackle the hotspots in particular, by incentivising people to ensure that we take diesel polluters out of our city centres, and I am confident that the Minister can do that.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. The Minister has been asked a large number of questions. I would like to give him as much time as possible to respond, so will the Front-Bench spokesmen also be very tight with their time? I call Alan Brown.
5.10 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I congratulate the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on bringing forward this debate and sticking to a theme that he has raised before—it is obviously close to his heart.

We have heard much about air quality and the need for action. Just today, I read in the newspapers that according to the United Nations special rapporteur on hazardous substance and waste, air pollution is a crisis that plagues the UK, particularly for children, and urgent Government action is required. In November 2016, for the second time in 18 months, the Government lost a court case on their proposals to tackle air pollution. ClientEarth, which took the Government to court, states that over-optimistic modelling of diesel car fumes was used rather than actual road emissions. The Government clearly need to take proper action. It has also been widely reported that up to 40,000 deaths per year arise from air pollution. Air pollution is a killer, and we need to tackle it head-on.

Transport alone accounts for 23% of CO₂ emissions; transport and electricity generation are the joint largest net contributors to those emissions. That highlights the scale of the problem that needs to be tackled. Over the years, Governments of different colours have introduced a series of initiatives to encourage low emissions vehicles. Many of those initiatives seemed logical at the time, but Governments and their initiatives change, and that has hindered progress in people purchasing low emissions vehicles and the roll-out of the infrastructure that is required to support them.

In January last year, the Minister said he reckoned that the sale of ultra low emissions vehicles had reached a tipping point, and in September 2016 the Department for Transport issued a triumphal press release that said there had been a 49% increase in registrations of ULEVs compared with the previous year. That sounds great, but 805,000 new vehicles were registered and fewer than 10,000 of those were ULEVs, so they actually account for only 1.2% of new vehicles. As the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire said earlier, we need a massive increase in the sale and registration of ultra-low emissions vehicles; the market share needs to increase and throughout the supply chains. If we are to sustain those numbers, we must strive for further growth and support our ULEV market must be a priority for this Government.

The Scottish Government have spent £13 million in the last five years to support bus operators, and Aberdeen actually has Europe’s largest fleet of hydrogen-powered buses. Some 15% of charge points in the UK are in Scotland, which shows that Scotland is ahead in providing that infrastructure.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend also recognise that Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government did a lot of work during the Commonwealth games to install lots of charging points in sports venues around the city where people may want to go?

Alan Brown: Yes, and I welcome that work, although, ironically, I was contacted by a constituent who is concerned that Glasgow City Council will charge people for using parking bays while they charge their cars, which is actually a disincentive. The council needs to take that on board.

As we have heard, we need to get diesel vehicles off the road. Similarly to the example that the hon. Member for Wells (James Heappey) gave, I have been contacted by constituents who are concerned that they will be penalised for having purchased diesel vehicles in good faith. Will the Government look at compensation or other ways to fully incentivise those people to move to ultra low emissions vehicles? We must find a way to disincentivise people from buying diesel cars. There were good proposals in the Government’s consultation on the modern transport Bill, but the Bill has been delayed. When will it come forward, and will it contain proper measures, as we have discussed?

5.15 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I congratulate the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who has campaigned for a clear road map for ultra low emissions vehicles for some time, on securing the debate.

Ultra low emissions, electric and alternative fuel vehicles and technologies offer huge opportunities for UK plc. The UK automotive sector added £18.9 billion in value to the UK economy last year, supporting 169,000 people in manufacturing directly and 814,000 across the industry and throughout the supply chains. If we are to sustain those numbers, we must strive for further growth and investment in more high-skilled design and engineering jobs. Supporting our ULEV market must be a priority for this Government.

A strategic approach to ULEVs must be a priority not just for growth’s sake but for the sake of public health and the environment. However, the Government have presided over nothing other than an air quality crisis that is poisoning our towns. We know about the 40,000 deaths in the UK every year. Brixton Road in London breached its annual pollution limit for 2017 after just five days, and the Government are legally required to produce a strategy for improving air quality by 24 April, following a judicial review in which a High Court judge described their two previous plans of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as “woefully inadequate”.

Sadly, the Government are failing on the environment. Yes, new registrations for electric, hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles are increasing year on year, but the Government...
Labour believes that clean air is a right, not a privilege. I will address some of the barriers, but we must consider all the levers for change. It is imperative that the Government recognise that the transition towards a low-carbon sustainable future is a journey in itself. The future vehicles market is still young and emerging, and we need a properly structured pathway. That means focusing not on purely electric cars but on all cleaner cars, including hybrids, and thinking about how taxation and grants can effectively incentivise uptake.

It is clear that the Chancellor’s changes to vehicle excise duty lacked any consultation, and the industry is calling for the changes that are due to take place in April to be delayed. Will the Minister review those concerns with his counterparts in the Treasury and consider whether focusing on CO₂ alone remains rational? There are also concerns that cuts of £500 and £2,500 to plug-in grants for electric and hybrid cars and home charge points may not be allocated as effectively as they could be. Will the Minister outline how those cuts help to encourage motorists to shift to lower-emissions vehicles?

The prominence and accessibility of the wider infrastructure is also key to shaping consumer choices. We recognise some of the Government’s work towards that and welcome their broad aims for the imminent modern transport Bill. It is essential that we have a good network of smart and easy-to-use charging points, and it is key that charging stations offer common standards and appropriately accommodate drivers. We must be wary that, at least initially, even rapid charging might take much longer than filling up a petrol car. Preparing for the wider impacts of a surge in use of low emissions electric vehicles is also key. Will the Minister therefore outline what the modern transport Bill will include and when it will be published?

Does the Minister have a plan to address the concerns of the Institute of the Motor Industry, which warns of the huge skills gap in licensed technicians—just 1,000 of 250,000 are currently trained to fix such vehicles? We must ensure that all small garages and mechanics have an opportunity to upskill and are not left behind. Without action, insurance premiums and waiting times for maintenance will be higher, not lower. Will he also update the House on developing operation restrictions through the clear air zones plan and his Government’s third attempt at an air quality plan?

The key for the industry is uniformity; a patchwork of different plans would be troublesome. Given the size and weight of heavy goods vehicles, the technology is far more problematic for such vehicles, but their impact is huge—they contribute between 20% and 30% of emissions. The Minister will know the importance of the Automotive Council, introduced by the previous Labour Government to get things moving. Hopefully he can work with it.

Labour is pleased that the Government are taking seriously the transition to ultra low emissions vehicles, which will be the single biggest incremental change in transport for a century. However, we need effective consumer incentives and a customer-centred approach to upskilling and infrastructure as well as making full use of the public sector’s procurement power. Only then can we hope to reap the full benefits of the migration to ULEVs.

5.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): I will go at some pace and not take any interventions, because I have many points to make and an astonishing number of questions to answer. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on securing the debate. He has a long and distinguished record of campaigning on this issue. In terms of health and carbon emissions, and from balancing our grid and the move to renewables to ensuring that our automotive sector, which has been so powerful, is busy building the vehicles of the future, not of the past, we can all see the benefits of this fantastic new technology.

How will we achieve our objectives? We are investing a significant amount of money to support the ultra low emissions vehicle market. In 2015 the Chancellor committed more than £600 million to the market, and in the 2016 autumn statement that was boosted by a further £270 million.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire mentioned the requirement for a plan. We have a plan, called “Driving the future today”, which was set out in 2013, and we are on track. Significant progress has been made: we have supported the purchase of more than 80,000 plug-in cars through the plug-in car grant, and we expect that figure to reach 100,000 soon. That is a strong start, but I have no doubt that the scale of the challenge ahead is quite big. We will continue to support other vehicle types as well, through the plug-in van and plug-in motorcycle grant schemes. Last month we announced the winners of £20 million of funding for a low emissions freight and logistics trial.

To start on the questions, my hon. Friend raised the issue of transport refrigeration. Air Liquide was one of the winners, which will trial five refrigeration units that will use a prototype liquid nitrogen system. I confirm that the Government have been actively involved in developing new legislation at a European level, and a new regulation was recently agreed that will mean that any new transport refrigeration unit powered by a combustion engine will be subject to strict new emissions limits from 2019.

Colleagues have highlighted the importance of tackling air pollution, particularly in our larger cities and towns. To make some progress there we need to see change in the bus and taxi markets. We will continue our support for buses through the low emission bus scheme. We have seen £30 million invested there to convert 325 buses in a clean, new infrastructure. For taxis, we have the £20 million taxi infrastructure scheme. The TX5 from the London Taxi Company and the Metrocab from Frazer-Nash are being built here in the UK, which is a very positive story. We therefore have progress to build on.

In the 2016 autumn statement the Chancellor announced a further £150 million of new funding to help local authorities introduce more clean buses and taxis to our roads. Indeed, as was suggested, we are going to launch a contest with authorities all over the country. We will make announcements—hopefully quite shortly—on how that money will be invested, and I encourage all authorities
to seize the opportunity to transform their public transport fleets. We are already supporting some cities through the Go Ultra Low City scheme, which we wish to become global exemplars in the deployment of ultra low emissions vehicles.

Many colleagues highlighted the importance of having the right type of infrastructure. Our evidence suggests that the majority of drivers will want to charge their vehicles at home overnight, but that is not what everyone needs—there is also range anxiety—so we need more publicly accessible charge points. Through a mixture of public and private funding we have created more than 11,000 charge points across the country and more than 900 of those are rapid charge points—that is the largest network in Europe. I reassure my hon. Friend that the current plans of vehicle manufacturers to build a Europe-wide fast charging network do indeed include the UK, as one of Europe’s leading markets. Regulation is clearly a part of this issue. A modern transport Bill is coming shortly, which will include many points raised by colleagues.

I will now move on to the questions. Do the Government seek to influence the choice of public sector vehicles? Yes. We are currently reviewing the Government buying standards for new vehicles, and the new standards will encourage the purchase of ultra low emissions vehicles in the public sector. On convenience stores and charge points, we have been carefully considering all the responses in the consultation on the modern transport Bill, and that will be sensitive to the potential costs as well as the benefits for any business, so that will be picked up.

On the expansion of electric vehicle car sharing schemes, as we have seen in other parts of the world, we have supported through funding the development and expansion of car clubs in England and to date we have helped to launch, expand or develop 24 car clubs across the country.

My hon. Friend asked whether the Government have considered the second-hand market. Yes, we have. When electric vehicles first went on sale there were concerns about the durability of the technology. As that has become much less of a concern the market has stabilised. However, my officials are watching that carefully and will continue to do so.

On electric vehicle noise, an EU regulation will require sound generators on new types of electric and hybrid vehicles from 2019, but of course manufacturers can choose to fit sound generators at any point if they so wish before that—that is the last date, not the first date.

On VWs and the corrections, well, I have a VW with my VW corrected only a few days ago. I am interested to hear that the process might not be working quite as smoothly as was hoped. I will pick up that point with my ministerial colleagues to take forward.

We certainly are taking a cross-UK view. My officials regularly speak with colleagues from all the devolved authorities and Governments and local authorities. The key thing is that we want to make progress as the UK, and progress can only be made when everyone is involved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) mentioned EV Hub. We are in contact with many charge point providers, including EV Hub, and we are funding rapid charging hubs through the Go Ultra Low City scheme.

In response to the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), the Government are indeed technology-neutral. We are backing ultra low and zero emissions vehicles however that is best achieved, and that does include hydrogen. I have opened a hydrogen fuelling station in south-west London and saw the benefits of that technology.

That was a real scamper across the debate. There were many other points that I was unable to make or answer in this speech, but we are very busy promoting an exciting agenda. We have many more initiatives but there is clearly a long way to go. The debate has shown that we share a common goal: to make our country a global leader in ultra low emissions vehicles.

5.29 pm

Andrew Selous: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister, who I know cares passionately about and is a genuine enthusiast for this area. I am grateful to him for answering all the questions he did. May I ask him to have his officials go through the contributions so that if any were unanswered he can kindly write to me and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House so that interested colleagues can pick it up?

Andrew Jones: I am happy to do so.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful. I was reassured by much of what the Minister said. However, the one issue I would bring him back to is the interim targets. It is great to hear that he thinks we are on track, but will he provide us with the detail to ensure that we really are, to scrutinise—

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).
Westminster Hall

Thursday 2 February 2017

[Robert Flello in the Chair]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Alcohol Harm

1.30 pm

Fiona Bruce (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered tackling alcohol harm.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Flello, and to speak on the importance of tackling alcohol harm. It is a measure of the concern across the House that there are not one but three all-party parliamentary groups concerned with alcohol harm. It was the three chairs of those APPGs who applied for the debate: myself, as chair of the APPG on alcohol harm; the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who chairs the APPG on children of alcoholics; and the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), who chairs the APPG on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I will leave it to those Members to speak of the harm caused to children and unborn children through alcohol consumption, but as vice-chair of those two APPGs, may I commend and say how much I fully support their work?

We are all here to express, with one voice, our gravest concerns about the harm caused by alcohol consumption to individuals, their families and wider society. As we will hear, one thing is clear: the Government’s alcohol strategy, which is now five years old, must be reviewed. That this House has considered tackling alcohol harm.

That this House has considered tackling alcohol harm.

The Minister will doubtless point to a few improvements since 1970, and this trend is in stark contrast to much of Western Europe. In England, the average age at death of those who die from an alcohol-specific cause is 54.3 years. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Flello, and to speak on the importance of tackling alcohol harm.

The Institute of Alcohol Studies in England—an executive agency of the Department of Health—exists to protect and improve the nation’s health and wellbeing. The report paints a bleak picture. Paragraph 1 states that “there are currently over 10 million people drinking at levels which increase their risk of health harm. Among those aged 15 to 49 in England, alcohol is now the leading risk factor for ill-health, early mortality and disability and the fifth leading risk factor for ill health across all age groups.” It continues:

“In recent years, many indicators of alcohol-related harm have increased. There are now over 1 million hospital admissions relating to alcohol each year, half of which occur in the lowest three socioeconomic deciles. Alcohol-related mortality has also increased, particularly for liver disease which has seen a 400% increase since 1970, and this trend is in stark contrast to much of Western Europe. In England, the average age at death of those dying from an alcohol-specific cause is 54.3 years… More working years of life are lost in England as a result of alcohol-related deaths than from cancer of—there are many of these—“the lung, bronchus, trachea, colon, rectum, brain, pancreas, skin, ovary, kidney, stomach, bladder and prostate, combined.” I deliberately read that out as I wanted it recorded in Hansard.

The Institute of Alcohol Studies quotes Public Health England, stating that “167,000 years of working life were lost to alcohol in 2015”. That is because alcohol is more likely to kill people during their working lives than many other causes of death—that is, it causes premature deaths. In fact, there were 23,000 alcohol-related deaths in England each year. Alcohol accounts for 10% of the UK’s burden of disease and death, and in the past three decades there has been a threefold rise in alcohol-related deaths.

Kelvin Hopkins (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on everything that she has said. In the mid-1970s, a Home Office report showed that Britain had the second lowest level of alcohol consumption in the whole of Europe; we have risen rapidly while the rest of Europe has been coming down. They have learned from their previous mistakes, and we ought to as well.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, which reflects his long commitment to tackling the issue. I also thank him for his involvement with our all-party parliamentary group.
[Fiona Bruce]

The NHS incurs an estimated £3.5 billion a year in alcohol harm costs. Treating liver disease alone now costs £2.1bn a year, for example. However, that is just the financial cost, which I rather suspect is an underestimate. Many other costs are incurred as a result. The all-party parliamentary group on alcohol harm recently produced a report called “The Frontline Battle”, which described the impact on the emergency services—the police, fire services, A&E departments, doctors and so on—of treating or helping people who are inebriated or suffering as a result of excessive alcohol consumption. It found that, on a Saturday night, 70% to 80% of all A&E attendances are alcohol-related.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): My hon. Friend paints a graphic picture—some cities and towns are like warzones on a Friday and Saturday night. I am the president of the all-party parliamentary group on beer. Does she agree that the Government could work with the industry? For instance, AB InBev is looking to work on lower alcohol-by-volume beers. At the moment, anything below 2.8% ABV is incentivised, yet that is less than 0.5% of the market. If the incentivised ABV rate is increased to about 3.5%, it would introduce far more choice, could lead to people drinking lower strength beer and could hopefully attract people away from some of the higher ABV beers that cause so much harm, as she has so beautifully demonstrated.

Fiona Bruce: My hon. Friend represents Ribble Valley, which I know contains many beautiful public houses, some of which I have enjoyed visiting. I would not want any Member here to think that we in any way wish to denigrate community pubs, which we consider to be community assets. He makes a vital point and has saved me from going into detail on that, which I was going to, having been briefed by AB InBev, which has a base in his constituency.

AB InBev UK and Ireland says that the introduction of a reduced rate of duty on beers produced at an alcoholic strength of 2.8% has not had the intended impact. In fact, it is providing only 0.15% of duty receipts. The impact could be achieved if 3.5% beer was included. I very much support what my hon. Friend said. Apparently, the Treasury has said that there is an EU structures directive that might cause a problem regarding that. It is fortuitous that, following yesterday’s vote, we should not be at all put off introducing a pro-health measure, for risk of upsetting our European partners.

Mr Evans: Apparently there is legal advice that this can be done within the current rules. If it is for the health of UK citizens, surely the British Government ought to press on and do it now.

Fiona Bruce: I absolutely agree. I am aware of that legal advice. I hope that the Government will do so and that the Minister will take note of that.

In preparing our report, the all-party parliamentary group discovered shocking harm, particularly to people working in our emergency services. I would like to refer to evidence we obtained from an emergency services doctor, Zul Mirza, whom I commend for his work in this area. He talked about how patients coming into his wards inebriated not only can be violent towards staff, but on many occasions damage valuable equipment needed by other patients. Our report also found that over 80% of police officers have been assaulted by people who are drinking. I was deeply concerned to hear one police officer tell us this:

“There is one thing that is specific to female officers and that is sexual assault. I can take my team through a licensed premise, and by the time I take them out the other end, they will have been felt up several times.”

That is shocking.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing this extremely important debate to the Chamber. Given the figures she describes, does she agree that alcohol-related aggression needs to be addressed in terms of treatment? Having worked in the criminal justice system, I agree on the wide-scale aggression that is found in A&E departments at weekends and that the police face mainly at weekends, but also on many days of the week. Given that a low number of Members have turned up to this debate, does the hon. Lady agree that politicians should be taking the issue more seriously? More politicians could probably be found in the bars of Westminster today than here in this debate. We should be addressing this problem.

Fiona Bruce: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. It is tragic that only 6% of dependent drinkers in this country access treatment, despite it being very effective. We need to do much more to make treatment available to them.

A concerning finding of our all-party parliamentary group’s report was that many of those in the emergency services themselves are suffering from depression or are even thinking of leaving the services simply because coping with this kind of pressure day in, day out is proving too much for them. We must tackle that.

After reflecting on the many and varied aspects of alcohol harm in this country, the Public Health England report goes on to say:

“This should provide impetus for governments to implement effective policies to reduce the public health impact of alcohol, not only because it is an intrinsically desirable societal goal, but because it is an important aspect of economic growth and competitiveness.”

What does this Department of Health review recommend? It talks about tackling three things: affordability, availability and acceptability. Affordability means price; availability means the ease of purchase—in other words, the number of outlets and the times at which alcohol can be bought; and acceptability means tackling our drinking culture. I want to give other Members time to speak, so I will not talk in detail about all those things, but I will touch in particular on affordability.

I had the privilege of asking Public Health England’s senior alcohol adviser this week what his top recommendation to Government would be to tackle alcohol harm, in the light of this substantial report. Without hesitation, he replied that it would be tackling affordability and putting in place policies that increase price. The report is absolutely clear:

“Policies that reduce the affordability of alcohol are the most effective, and cost-effective, approaches to prevention and health improvement. For example, an increase in taxation leads to an increase in government revenue and substantial health and social returns.”
However, since 2012 the Government have done the opposite: they cut the alcohol duty escalator. The report states:

"According to Treasury forecasts, cuts in alcohol duty since 2013 are projected to have reduced income to the Exchequer by £5 billion over five years."

The very first recommendation in the 2012 strategy was to implement minimum unit pricing. Indeed, the most recent review states that minimum unit pricing is "a highly targeted measure which ensures tax increases are passed on to the consumer and improves the health of the heaviest drinkers. These people are experiencing the greatest amount of harm."

In the foreword to the 2012 strategy, the then Prime Minister said:

"We can't go on like this... So we are going to introduce a new minimum unit price."

Five years on, that has still not been done, while the alcohol duty escalator has been cut, even though the No. 1 policy recommendation to tackle alcohol harm in the Government's own review is to address affordability. Will the Minister, who I know is a good woman, now take a lead on this and make it happen?

The Government introduced a ban on the sale of alcohol below the cost of duty plus taxation, but the review states:

"Bans on the sale of alcohol below the cost of taxation do not impact on public health in their current form, and restrictions on price promotions can be easily circumvented."

Let us consider for a moment white cider products such as Frosty Jacks, which are almost exclusively drunk by the vulnerable, the young, the homeless and dependent drinkers. Just £3.50 buys the equivalent of 22 shots of vodka. The price of a cinema ticket can buy 53 shots of vodka. The availability of cheap alcohol, bought because of its high strength, perpetuates deprivation and health inequalities. Homeless hostels say that time and again the people staying with them drink these products, and many are drinking it to death.

Ciders of 7.5% ABV attract the lowest duty per unit of any product, at 5p, compared with 18p per unit for a beer of equivalent strength. There simply is no reason not to increase the duty on white cider, and 66% of the public support higher taxes on white cider. It is a matter of social justice that the Government should do that, and do it quickly. It need not impact on small, local brewing companies, which could have an exception, and it will not impact on pub sales. Tackling it would benefit the youngest and most vulnerable and save lives.

As I mentioned, the ban on below-cost sales has had no impact on sales of strong white cider. The current floor price of white cider, at 5p to 6p per unit—that is duty plus VAT—is so low that it can be sold for 13p a unit. Will the Minister ask our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to increase the duty on white cider in the spring Budget on 8 March? This is not the first time that has been asking. Three hon. Members—my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and I, and no less a person than the Chair of the Health Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston)—tabled an amendment to the Finance Bill last September, asking for the duty regime for white cider to be reviewed. I urge the Minister to read the excellent speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate on 6 September. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who responded, said that the matter needed to be looked into.

Will the Minister press the Chancellor not only to work with her on that, but to introduce the promised minimum unit price and reintroduce the abandoned alcohol duty escalator, so that the tax system not only tackles alcohol harm, but incentivises the development of lower strength products and provides much-needed funding to help with treatment? Looking at all the evidence, we see affordability come out again and again as the most important driver of consumption and harm. Increasing the price of alcohol would save lives without penalising moderate drinkers.

Apart from tackling price, there are of course many other recommendations, both in the Public Health England report and in the APPG report, which came out a week before, that I would be grateful if the Minister would consider. I am grateful that she has already agreed to meet the APPG to discuss our report. Our chief recommendation is that the Government develop a cross-departmental national strategy to tackle excessive drinking and alcohol-related harm. Will the Minister take a lead on that?

Another key recommendation in the APPG report, which again is supported by the PHE report, is the implementation of training and delivery of identification and brief advice programmes and investment in alcohol liaison teams. I remember hearing one suggestion for brief advice to be given whenever anyone is having their blood pressure tested. Just in those few moments, it would be effective for whoever is doing the test just to ask the individual, "How is your alcohol consumption? Do we need to discuss that?" That kind of brief intervention can make people stop and think.

We must pursue earlier diagnosis of those with alcohol problems or potential alcohol problems. There are 1.5 million dependent drinkers, only 6% of whom access treatment. Many people are just drinking in excess of the chief medical officer's low-risk unit guidelines. In fact, Drinkaware's research shows that 39% of men and 20% of women are drinking in excess of those guidelines. It says that nearly one in five adults drink at hazardous levels or above. Many people need help through early intervention programmes, as well as more comprehensive treatment and support. Why are we not providing that when we know that it works?

Implementing such interventions is cost-effective for the NHS. I will give a powerful example that was drawn to my attention by Alcohol Concern. St Mary's hospital in London has trained staff to give brief advice to patients presenting at A&E. It has designed the one-minute Paddington alcohol test to identify and educate patients who might have an alcohol-related problem. That is called the teachable moment and it has resulted in a tenfold increase in referrals to the alcohol health worker, who then carries out further brief interventions, resulting in a reported 43% reduction in alcohol consumption by the people referred. That is a very effective intervention.

It is interesting to note that the Public Health England report confirms that health interventions aimed at drinkers already at risk and specialist treatment for people with harmful drinking patterns are effective approaches to reducing consumption and harm and

“show favourable returns on investment.”
However, it points out that their success depends on large-scale implementation and funding. Will the Minister look at how her Department can give a national lead to share and implement best practice in this field, such as that which I have described?

I would like to say much more on the subject, but I will turn now to the issue of drink-driving. Unpopular as it might be to talk about this in policy terms today, the Public Health England report is clear. It states:

“Enforced legislative measures to prevent drink-driving are effective and cost-effective. Policies which specify lower legal alcohol limits for young drivers are effective at reducing casualties and fatalities in this group and are cost-saving. Reducing drink-driving is an intrinsically desirable societal goal and is a complementary component to a wider strategy that aims to influence drinkers to adopt less risky patterns of alcohol consumption.”

That could not be clearer. The UK is out of line with almost all of the rest of Europe when it comes to drink-driving alcohol limits.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The hon. Lady might have seen the statistical release from the Department for Transport, which I think came out this morning, that says there has been a statistically significant increase in the number of drivers and riders who are killed or injured while driving over the limit in the last year.

Fiona Bruce: I have not seen that release, but I am very interested to hear of it. I hope that the Department of Health will look at that and work with the Department for Transport to review the policy. The APPG would like to see a reduction in the drink-drive limit in England and Wales from 80 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood to 50 mg. As we have heard, there is a direct link between increased alcohol consumption by drivers and an increased risk of accidents resulting in injuries or fatalities. The Government need to consider lowering the legal limit and possibly a further lower limit for young drivers. They also need to ensure proper enforcement and strong penalties. If we are taking stronger action against the use of mobile phones at the wheel because we know that such action will help to save lives, surely we should do that to reduce the damage from drink-driving. The signal that that would send out to reduce our drinking culture would be major.

I will close with this. During the first world war, the Government introduced controls on alcohol to help the war effort. The crisis of the war offered the opportunity to develop a national alcohol strategy. We have reached our own crisis today, and the Government must take action.

1.57 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Flello, and it is an extreme pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who made a superb speech. She takes a very strong lead on all the serious matters relating to alcohol, and we are grateful to her. She has also taken the lead by securing this debate, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson). Friday night is one of my lowest points, so I am pleased to take part in this important debate. I admired the eloquence of the hon. Lady’s speech. Some of what I say may overlap with what she said, but I hope that that will just reinforce what she said rather than causing difficulty.

Many serious problems arise from inappropriate alcohol consumption. Alcohol is a subject about which I have been concerned since I first entered the House in 1997, shortly after which I was elected chair of the all-party parliamentary group on alcohol misuse, now the APPG on alcohol harm. Over many years I have spoken and asked questions in on the subject in the House, and I have tabled a number of early-day motions during the past 17 years, expressing concern and asking for action on the damage to people’s lives and to society as a whole that is caused by alcohol. Several of my early-day motions have referred to foetal alcohol spectrum disorders—the lifetime damage to babies caused by alcohol consumption in pregnancy. I shall speak more about that later.

Just two weeks ago, I raised concerns about alcohol in my oral question to the Prime Minister, and a little earlier I put another oral question to Ministers about Britain’s high drink-drive alcohol limits. It was disappointing that I received a most unsatisfactory, perfunctory answer to the latter question, which was little more than a brush-off. The Institute of Alcohol Studies had briefed me before that question and has again provided compelling statistics about the costs, in lives, injuries and money, of drink-driving. Indeed, it has provided today the statistics that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill referred to. The total number of drink-drive accidents rose by 2% to 5,740 in 2015; there was a 3% rise in overall drink-drive casualties to 8,480 in 2014, and about 220 people are killed in drink-drive accidents each year. Going back, there were 240 deaths and 8,000 casualties just in 2013.

Our drink-driving limit is sadly higher than that in every other country in Europe except Malta. A lower limit would prevent a minimum of 25 deaths and 95 serious casualties a year—I suspect it would actually prevent a lot more. When the lower limit is imposed, as I am sure it will be at some point, rather than people perhaps having a couple of pints and thinking they are probably under the limit, the limit will be low enough to deter people from drinking at all before they drive in case they get too close to the limit. Reducing the limit to European levels would have a disproportionately beneficial effect. There is also wide popular support for a lower limit: 77% of the population, rising to 79% in towns. The limit must be reduced. In 2013, the death toll from drink-drive accidents rose by 25% in just one year.

Another serious component of Britain’s alcohol problem—especially England’s alcohol problem—is the burden on the health service, as the hon. Member for Congleton mentioned. That is another matter I have raised with the Prime Minister. According to statistics provided by the Alcohol Health Alliance UK, the NHS’s costs related to alcohol are £3.5 billion a year—the hon. Lady was absolutely right in suggesting that is probably a significant underestimate—and one in five hospital admissions are alcohol-related. In the nine years to 2013, hospital admissions related to alcohol rose by a staggering 51%.

To bring us up to date, 70% to 80% of all A&E attendances on Friday and Saturday nights are alcohol-related, resulting in a massive burden on hospital staff
and resources as well as assaults on staff. I also understand from the report the hon. Lady mentioned that other patients, particularly children and elderly people, are often frightened by violent drunks on Friday and Saturday nights in A&E. Some 80% of police officers have been assaulted by people who have been drinking. As I said in my question to the Prime Minister, alcohol is heavily implicated in domestic violence and attacks on women. After that question, I was contacted by people concerned about child abuse, who again said that many cases of such abuse involved alcohol.

By far the most tragic of all the problems caused by alcohol, in my view—this view is probably shared more widely—are foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. Estimates suggest that each year some 6,000 babies are born damaged for life by alcohol consumed in pregnancy. It causes misery for those children and their families and costs the state vast sums of public money every year. In Canada, the lifetime cost to the state has been calculated as up to $3 million dollars for every child suffering from FASD. The children concerned are referred to, somewhat unkindly, as “$1 million-dollar babies”. I have a good friend who lives in Canada—a former school friend—and he tells me about the situation there.

FASD also causes learning difficulties and behavioural problems. A high proportion of people convicted of crimes and in our prisons are victims of FASD. Research by the Medical Research Council has concluded that even moderate drinking in pregnancy has an impact on IQ and learning abilities. There is no safe level, and that must be communicated to all women planning and we have two delightful and very healthy granddaughters and resources as well as assaults on staff. I also understand from the report the hon. Lady mentioned that other patients, particularly children and elderly people, are often frightened by violent drunks on Friday and Saturday nights in A&E. Some 80% of police officers have been assaulted by people who have been drinking. As I said in my question to the Prime Minister, alcohol is heavily implicated in domestic violence and attacks on women. After that question, I was contacted by people concerned about child abuse, who again said that many cases of such abuse involved alcohol.

By far the most tragic of all the problems caused by alcohol, in my view—this view is probably shared more widely—are foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. Estimates suggest that each year some 6,000 babies are born damaged for life by alcohol consumed in pregnancy. It causes misery for those children and their families and costs the state vast sums of public money every year. In Canada, the lifetime cost to the state has been calculated as up to $3 million dollars for every child suffering from FASD. The children concerned are referred to, somewhat unkindly, as “$1 million-dollar babies”. I have a good friend who lives in Canada—a former school friend—and he tells me about the situation there.

FASD also causes learning difficulties and behavioural problems. A high proportion of people convicted of crimes and in our prisons are victims of FASD. Research by the Medical Research Council has concluded that even moderate drinking in pregnancy has an impact on IQ and learning abilities. There is no safe level, and that must be communicated to all women planning and they all say, “Alcohol.” They know about the problem. If they do not drink when they have a baby in their tummy, and they all say, “Alcohol.” They know about the problem. If they do not drink when they have a baby in their tummy, and both primary school. They are asked in class what they must seriously that girls are made aware of the problem in primary school. They are asked in class what they must not drink when they have a baby in their tummy, and they all say, “Alcohol.” They know about the problem. In the US and elsewhere, alcoholic drinks containers are required to have warning labels—not just a small symbol of a pregnant woman, and not on a voluntary basis. The Government warning in the US states: “According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects.”

If every woman was aware of that, I am sure that the levels of drinking in pregnancy would drop like a stone. However, women are not aware of that—even women I know have not been aware of it. I should say that my daughter-in-law did not drink at all during her pregnancies, and we have two delightful and very healthy granddaughters as a result.

Such a warning should be compulsory on all UK alcoholic drinks containers and should also be displayed in all NHS medical facilities—GP surgeries, clinics and hospitals—as well as all establishments selling alcohol. Women cannot be blamed for not knowing about the dangers, but the Government must be responsible for ensuring that in the future all women are alcohol-aware and know the dangers of drinking during pregnancy.

Tackling FASD must be the priority for the Government’s alcohol policy.

Finally, we must do something to help prevent the consumption by young people in particular of strong, cheap alcohol, which the hon. Member for Congleton mentioned. It can, and does, quickly lead to addiction. In recent decades we have seen people as young as 30 dying of cirrhosis of the liver, which is quite appalling. That used to be a disease of older people, but now it is a disease of young people who are drinking vast quantities of cheap, strong alcohol.

As the hon. Lady said, minimum pricing is absolutely essential for reducing alcohol abuse and addiction. I emphasise addiction again because so many people talk about this as though it were a matter of choice. If any of us drank to excess over a prolonged period, we could become addicted. It is a serious danger. A 50p unit price would have no effect on pub prices—I am a lover of the great institution of the British pub and drink wine—but would stop the selling of vast quantities of cheap alcohol by supermarkets. In some cases, as has been reported many times, alcohol is actually cheaper than bottled water.

In recent decades Britain has had a dangerous love affair with excessive and damaging alcohol consumption. That must be stopped. Moderate and sensible consumption—as I have said, I drink myself—would not be affected. What I am suggesting would actually put a brake on the booze bandwagon, which has been out of control for some years now and has to be stopped.

2.7 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Fiddler. I congratulate the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on leading the charge to secure this debate, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) on the work he does on this subject.

If we all knew that every year in this country 35,000 children were born with brain damage that could be prevented completely, we would of course do everything in our power to prevent it. Yet worrying evidence is emerging that that may be what is happening every year, and that the figures may be going up rather than down. I want to speak about the incidence of foetal alcohol spectrum disorders, which my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) just spoke so well about, among other things. I chair the all-party group on the subject and we produced an excellent report on it just over a year ago.

The worrying sign is that the numbers of people drinking in this country in general are increasing, as we have heard, including the numbers of women. That is especially worrying. It was the culture in the 1970s that few young people, especially young women, drank alcohol at all. That changed from the 1980s onwards and we now see an increase in the numbers. It was very unusual to come across children with foetal alcohol spectrum disorders or, as a recent report in The Lancet put it, “prenatal alcohol exposure”—I will come back to that report, but these days it is increasingly evident. I became interested in this subject because as an adoptive parent,
I discovered how common it is among children who are adopted, including my own two children; I should declare that interest.

Fiona Bruce: If the hon. Gentleman recalls, when the all-party group received evidence about the impact of foetal alcohol syndrome on adopted and fostered children, one survey indicated that up to 70% of the cohort of adopted and fostered children assessed were affected.

Bill Esterson: Yes. I thank the hon. Lady for being the vice-chair of that group, and for the immense support that she has given to everybody in it. She is right; we took evidence from professionals in the children in care sector that as many as three quarters of children in care could be affected by alcohol damage during pregnancy. It is one of the major factors contributing to them ending up in care in the first place. I am glad that she raised that point. We also heard a suggestion that many children put up for adoption are damaged in that way, and we heard adoption described by one adoptive parent as a family-finding service for children with foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. It is a family-finding service with inadequate support; I will come to that shortly.

In our report, to which the hon. Lady rightly brings me, we identified that increasing prevalence, as well as the impact on children for life—not just while they are children—of irreversible brain damage and the impact on carers, parents, schools, health professionals and society of so many people with brain damage being unable to function fully in society, and all that that brings with it. As The Lancet reported on 12 January, the most extreme end of the spectrum, which is generally referred to as foetal alcohol syndrome, includes “intellectual disability, birth defects and developmental disorders”. The article goes on to list “secondary disabilities including academic failure, substance misuse, mental ill-health and contact with the law due to illegal behaviours, with huge resultant costs to our health, education, and justice sectors.”

In our inquiry, we heard that 40% of people in prison exhibit symptoms of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. High numbers of care leavers and people with mental illness end up in prison. Given the evidence that I have heard, it would come as no surprise to me, once we start to explore the root cause—I hope that such work can be carried out—to find that alcohol during pregnancy is a primary contributory factor.

Our inquiry took evidence from professionals who made the case that action must be taken. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North spelled out how those in north America have managed to calculate the economic costs; the same will be true here. The societal costs are fairly obvious, from what I have described, but there is also an impact on families. If they must care for a child with the kind of disability that we are describing—I think that the issue is directly related and a similar concern and challenge. Poverty and inequality are clearly linked to the damage done by misuse of alcohol, and I am afraid that the group on which I am concentrating is one of the most affected in our society.

We heard in our inquiry about the lack of support. There is only one specialist clinic in this country to diagnose FASD—it is in Surrey, and is led brilliantly by Dr Raja Mukherjee, who gave evidence to our inquiry—but that simply is not good enough. If 35,000 children are affected every year, we need a lot more than one clinic to help diagnose them, because diagnosis is needed in order to ensure that support is available.

Kelvin Hopkins: I applaud everything that my hon. Friend is saying in his speech. It was reported at one stage during our deliberations on the report that some medical staff literally do not know about FASD, even now. That is appalling.

Bill Esterson: That is right. The symptoms are misunderstood and significantly misdiagnosed, and too many professionals dismiss them. I have seen entirely contradictory diagnoses—doctors have described FASD symptoms perfectly well and then said that the child does not have it, due to the kind of misunderstanding that my hon. Friend just mentioned. We must improve understanding among health professionals. We must improve awareness, information and education among professionals, not just in health but in education.

In our inquiry, we also heard that children often cope at nursery, reception and key stage 1, and well into key stage 2, and it is only much later—from about year 6 onwards, as the expectation of independence grows in the school system—that the real problems start to emerge.

Bill Esterson: Yes, that is right. My right hon. Friend has described his experience before, and I am sure that he will say more later. Many people are affected by being children of alcoholics; I think that the issue is directly related and a similar concern and challenge. Poverty and inequality are clearly linked to the damage done by misuse of alcohol, and I am afraid that the group on which I am concentrating is one of the most affected in our society.

What is needed? The Government should consider the following objectives. One objective should be to reduce the number of children exposed to alcohol during pregnancy. The Lancet’s report goes into great depth: international research suggests that just under 10% of the world’s population of women drink during pregnancy, but in this country, the figure is 41%, more than four times the international average. A similar figure was presented last year in the evidence of the FASD Trust, which serves as the secretariat for the all-party group and for which I am very grateful. That level of drinking during pregnancy suggests that the incidence of FASD may be four times higher in the UK than in the rest of the world. If we follow that logic, the World Health Organisation’s international figure is 1%, so in this country it may be 4% or 5%—that is where the figure of 35,000 babies comes from.

Bill Esterson: Yes, that is right. My right hon. Friend has described his experience before, and I am sure that he will say more later. Many people are affected by being children of alcoholics; I think that the issue is directly related and a similar concern and challenge. Poverty and inequality are clearly linked to the damage done by misuse of alcohol, and I am afraid that the group on which I am concentrating is one of the most affected in our society.

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As well as an objective to reduce exposure to alcohol during pregnancy, the Government should introduce an objective to increase support and understanding in schools, in the health and care sector, in criminal justice and in wider society. How should they go about that? During our inquiry, we heard that the phrase should be used is “no alcohol in pregnancy is best for baby and you”. That fits the description of the strategy that we should adopt in this country. I welcome the fact that the chief medical officer revised the guidelines after we published our report—perhaps not entirely because of it, but I am sure we contributed. That was a big step forward. The guidelines now say that women who are pregnant or are trying to conceive should not drink alcohol at all. That is right, but by no means does it go far enough, because people do not know the guidelines—I am afraid that the increase in alcohol consumption suggests that, sadly, that is all too true.

As part of our strategy, we have to increase awareness, not only among professionals but among the wider population, of the support needed for women before pregnancy. In north America, which my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North mentioned, information is displayed in all the health facilities, education facilities and even airports—I have seen big signs in Canadian airports that say “Don’t drink if you’re pregnant or trying to conceive”.

Kelvin Hopkins: Another factor in America that I did not mention, because people draw back from it, is that people who are under the age of 21 cannot drink alcohol, and anyone who supplies alcohol to somebody under 21 can be sent to prison. That actually happened to a young Englishwoman who was on holiday in Florida: she provided alcohol to her younger sister and was sent to prison for corrupting a minor. It is taken very seriously indeed.

Bill Esterson: I am sure that the Minister has heard my hon. Friend’s comments. I agree that we must raise awareness among girls—and among boys too, because it is really important that boys and men play their part in influencing their partners in abstaining from drinking.

Awareness among professionals of how to prevent drinking during pregnancy has to be part of our strategy, but so does the support that is needed afterwards. Drinking during pregnancy will still happen, however much we are able to reduce it. Very sadly, some of the worst damage happens straight after conception; if someone has a drink before they know they are pregnant, it is too late to do anything about that drink. Support is essential throughout society, and it begins with awareness.

I was really disappointed that the briefing note for this debate did not make reference to foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It made some really good points about other issues that we have discussed today, but it did not mention FASD. Given that FASD was one of the topics clearly indicated in the bid for the debate, that was really unfortunate—I shall not say anything stronger.

Fiona Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. I share his concern about this matter. I also share his concern that the chief medical officer’s guidelines on this issue have not been sufficiently promoted by the Department of Health. I know that some of the chief medical officer’s other guidelines were contentious, but the clear advice that women who are pregnant—or are considering pregnancy, I should add—should not drink has been received and accepted by everyone throughout the drinks industry and by all the organisations that seek to tackle alcohol harm. I join the hon. Gentleman in asking the Minister what her Department will do to ensure that that much needed guideline is much more adequately promoted throughout the country. It is shameful that that has not happened.

Bill Esterson: The hon. Lady’s comments are so good that I cannot really add anything to them. However, they bring me to the 2012 alcohol strategy, which makes the risks very clear and which refers to lifelong conditions that can have a severe impact on individuals and their families. Those conditions are caused entirely by drinking during pregnancy, so they are completely preventable. It is all already there in the strategy, which leads to the question of why the Government have not done more to promote awareness and reduce the incidence of this terrible problem. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point.

Let me cite some evidence from elsewhere. In Denmark, improved education and awareness led to an increase from 69% to 83% in the proportion of women abstaining completely from drinking during pregnancy. It did not eradicate the problem completely, but that is a significant improvement and a significant reduction in the number of children affected. It worked in Denmark and it can work here.

In 2015, I presented a ten-minute rule Bill on labelling—I am grateful to hon. Members present who supported it. Labels are just not adequate. They are so small and insignificant that they are ignored or are not noticed, and they are not enough anyway. Again, in north America, such information is displayed in big letters on the walls of pubs, bars and so many other places. That is another suggestion for the Minister: more awareness in places where people are drinking and more information on the bottles themselves.

It is crucial that we get the point across, because many women think that it is okay to have one or two drinks. But define “one or two drinks”! How much is one unit or two units? Most people have very little understanding of or insight into how much alcohol they are drinking—and anyway the evidence is that we just do not know whether there is a minimum level, which is why the only safe advice is abstinence.

Fiona Bruce: I apologise for intervening again, but I want to remind the hon. Gentleman of evidence that we have received. The reason that the recommendation has to be not to drink alcohol is that women’s individual alcohol tolerance levels during pregnancy are simply not known. I remember that he once mentioned a dramatic piece of evidence that showed—he will correct me if I have got it wrong—that a single drop of alcohol on an embryo resulted in that embryo becoming completely insentient for two hours. That is a startling piece of information.

Bill Esterson: I am pleased that the hon. Lady reminded me of that piece of evidence. Perhaps we should tour the country as a double act, because this is turning into one: she can remind me of all the bits I forget.
Bill Esterson: The hon. Lady is right about how important this is. It is not just about individual tolerance; tolerance changes as women get older and as they have more children. In families in which, sadly, more than one child is affected by exposure to alcohol during pregnancy, it is invariably younger children who are damaged most.

We all know about the dangers of smoking—now, nobody would dream of saying anything other than, “Don’t smoke during pregnancy”—but we have not got to that point with alcohol. FASD was first diagnosed in 1973. It has been known about since then, so why has so little been done about it in this country? Much more has been done in other countries; they have approached FASD far more effectively. We had good progress from the chief medical officer, but we need so much more.

What do we need to do? We need to have a prevalence study to understand the situation in this country fully, including why women are still drinking during pregnancy. Some of it is about awareness, but there are some other findings from Sweden that I will draw to people’s attention. In a Swedish study, women mentioned societal factors such as peer pressure, not wanting others to suspect that they were pregnant, and insufficient education, as some thought that drinking small amounts during pregnancy was harmless, and we have just heard about the problems that causes. Personal factors were also important, for example not wanting to miss the enjoyment of alcohol. Those were reasons that women in Sweden gave to explain why they felt that abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy was so difficult for them. We must understand those factors in order to do something about them.

That is why it is so long overdue for the Government to go so much further than they have already. We need a prevalence study to understand whether the 35,000 figure that I have cited is correct, and to understand why women are drinking during pregnancy to the extent that they are. Then we can start to make progress in reducing the incidence of problems and providing the support that is needed, because the cost to those children who are affected by alcohol and their families is catastrophic, and it is hugely expensive for us as a society and economy. The situation cannot be allowed to continue.

I urge the Minister to act. I think this is the first time that she has been involved in a debate on this particular issue—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood) indicated assent.
nine months old, not least because of his heavy drinking. My husband’s father was an alcoholic, which led to his early death. In Glasgow, where both my husband and I grew up, such deaths were not unusual in the past, and even today alcohol-related deaths are still more common in our communities across Scotland than many people would think.

Here is the main point: I am extremely proud of the fact that against much opposition—some of it, unfortunately, on tribal grounds—the Scottish National party Government in Scotland took a very bold decision. They decided that the damage that alcohol was doing to our population, our families and our communities could no longer simply be measured and talked about and that action was needed. What else could kill 22 people each week in Scotland, cause 670 hospital admissions each week in Scotland, cost Scotland £3.6 billion each year and not require bold action?

Such action came in the form of minimum unit pricing. In our supermarkets and similar outlets, alcohol can cost less than bottled water; in some cases, it sells for as little as 18p per unit, which is disgraceful. There is clear evidence from research that shows there is a direct link between changes in minimum pricing, and changes in alcohol harm and consumption. Estimates show that a 10% increase in the minimum price of alcohol is associated with a 32% reduction in the number of deaths that are wholly attributable to alcohol. Work undertaken by the University of Sheffield shows that a minimum unit price of 50p is estimated to result in 121 fewer deaths a year, a fall in hospital admissions of just over 2,000 a year, and a fall in hospital admissions of just over 2,000 a year by year 20 of the policy.

Minimum unit pricing is more effective than taxation, because it is better able to target the cheap, high-strength alcohol favoured by the heaviest drinkers. Such a public health measure is supported by Ireland, Norway, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands. I know that England is looking at this measure and I urge everybody in this Chamber to support its introduction. It is bold, but it needs to be bold to help deal with the blight that alcohol has cast over too many of our communities.

Global corporations in the alcohol industry fought a hard legal battle against Scotland’s introduction of minimum unit pricing, but the measure was passed with overwhelming support in the Scottish Parliament. It has been tested in the European courts. The appeal against it in the Supreme Court, following victory for the Scottish Government when the measure was tested at the Court of Session, is the final stumbling block to the introduction of the policy. I hope and believe that it will be resolved by the summer at the latest and introduced in short order thereafter.

Responding to the points made by the hon. Members for Congleton and for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), in Scotland we have already reduced the drink-driving limit to 50 mg per 100 ml of blood. That means that the rest of the UK—this is a cause for great alarm—has the highest limit in the EU, alongside Malta. I urge the Minister to follow the lead of Scotland and the rest of our EU partners. Reducing the blood alcohol level for drivers saves lives.

Fiona Bruce: I am interested to know from the hon. Lady directly how that change has not only saved lives, but changed the drinking culture. How have people changed their attitude towards drinking? One of the points that has been made to us about the Scottish experience is, “Well, it’s only a very few lives that have been saved,” but there is a bigger picture, is there not?

Patricia Gibson: There is indeed a bigger picture. Laws do not necessarily change attitudes, but what they do over time is change a culture. They send out a clear signal. The point was made earlier that when people are out and using a car, they tend not to drink. They are more likely not to drink at all due to the reduction in the drink-driving limit. It has also been a great educator for people who are out drinking and not driving, but who might be driving the following day. They decide, “I had better not drink tonight, because I might still be over the limit tomorrow when I get in my car.” We know that many of the people who have been pulled over, had their blood alcohol level tested and been found to be over the drink-driving limit were simply not aware of it, because it was from the previous evening. They had not considered that they might still be over the limit.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): On that point, does my hon. Friend agree that the lower drink-driving limit has been particularly effective with younger drivers?

Patricia Gibson: Indeed. Our younger drivers are the most likely to be inexperienced. They are therefore not willing to risk it, after all the blood, sweat and tears to pass their test. The limit is helping to reduce the alcohol intake of young people for a whole variety of reasons.

Alcohol is killing too many people in our communities prematurely—I do not think anyone in the Chamber would dispute that. It is splitting up too many families. Its pervasive, insidious influence is the context in which too many of our children grow up. It is costing our NHS billions. It is exacerbating mental health challenges for too many people. It is rendering too many people economically inactive.

Alcoholism is a disease and, as with any disease, we need to find the cure. One silver bullet will not cure the disease. We need minimum unit pricing. We need all our high streets and neighbourhoods to look at how they can support and contribute to good health. There must be a presumption against an over-concentration of outlets selling alcohol, preying on our socially disadvantaged communities. All those things combined can make a difference, because they tackle price, availability and consumption. A serious problem and disease such as alcohol addiction or misuse requires a serious, bold solution. I urge the UK and Welsh Governments to look at the measures and the determination of the SNP Government in Scotland to tackle the issue head-on. It is one of the most serious health challenges of our time.

2.44 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Fjello. I offer my thanks and congratulations to the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) for bringing this debate to the Chamber.

I am here this afternoon to speak on behalf of Britain’s 2.5 million innocent victims of drink. They are the children of hard-drinking parents, and I start my
reminds this afternoon with heartfelt thanks to such charities as the National Association for Children of Alcoholics, Childline, Turning Point, Aquarius in my home city of Birmingham and many, many others for all the difference they have made to hundreds of thousands of children. For every child they have helped, for every life they have saved and for every life they have changed, I want to say on behalf of us all, “Thank you.”

I am here because I, too, am the child of an alcoholic. My father, Dermot, was an extraordinary man, and I would not be in politics—I certainly would not be in this place—had it not been for his inspiration. He was the son of Irish immigrants who came to Britain before the second world war. He was one of that generation of radicals in the 1960s. He was the first in his family to go to university. The first speech that really inspired him was Kennedy’s inauguration, with that immortal line, “ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

That inspired him and my mum to go into public service. It was that ethos of public service that he handed down to me.

My father loved new towns. He was a practical idealist, and that is how I ended up growing up in Harlow. The reality was that as he rose up the ranks of Harlow Council to eventually become its general manager, his dependence on alcohol became deeper. When my mum died of cancer of the pancreas when she was just 52, it knocked him over the edge. He moved from being what I guess would be called a functioning alcoholic to becoming a non-functioning alcoholic.

For much of my life, I have grown up with that gnawing insecurity that is all too common for children of alcoholics—that constant feeling of guilt, constantly asking yourself whether you are doing enough. Why can you not do more to stop your mum or dad from drinking? I know what it is like to feel that cold nausea when you find the empty bottles hidden around the house. I know what it is like to feel sick when you hear your parent being sick first thing in the morning because they have drunk too much. I know what those feelings are like, and I know what the psychological reactions are like. I know all about the drive for perfectionism as you try to make the world perfect and impose some kind of order on it. I know what it is like to build up that kind of armour-plating so that nothing can ever hurt you, and I know all about the insecurity and the shame.

I know what it is like to have your parent on the front page of a paper because he has been caught driving four times over the limit. In fact, it was my little brother who was delivering those papers on his paper round. I know what that insecurity and shame feel like, and I know how it lasts a lifetime. I know what it is like to spend lots and lots of time in A&E. I know what it is like to spend lots of time in intensive care units. In my case, I was holding my dad’s hand as he suffered multiple organ failure, only to see him pull through and start drinking again. I know what it is like to spend the final days of your parent’s life in a hospital. It was almost two years ago, just before the last general election, that I was called to my home town of Harlow to be told that my dad only had days to live. I will remember for ever the compassion and care of the staff of the Princess Alexandra hospital in Harlow. I will remember for ever that cold dawn on St Joseph’s day nearly two years ago when the staff of the hospital folded down my dad’s blanket so that we could hold his hand as he breathed his last. I will never forget the compassion of those national health service staff and the way that they cared for us.

I know what those things feel like. I know how deeply they have affected me, and I know how deeply they have affected my brothers, but in a way I count myself as lucky, because since I first took the difficult decision to speak out on this a year and a half ago, I have been inundated with stories from colleagues here, whether they are in the House of Lords, staff or fellow right hon. and hon. Members. I have been inundated with stories from the public. I suppose I learned that like all children of alcoholics, we cannot change things for our parents, but we can change things for our children. What I want to do with others who are here is help use the experiences of the children of alcoholics in this country to change the policy of Her Majesty’s Government. That is why I am glad to see the Minister in her place today.

The stories I have heard are terrible, and I want to bring some of the voices of children of alcoholics to this place this afternoon. One person wrote to me to talk about their experience, saying: “I felt alone, confused, guilty and second best.”

Another person said: “Growing up with an alcoholic parent was not great. You feel like a failure, you feel like it’s your fault, you feel second best to the bottle. You never know what state you’re going to find your parent in.”

Another talked about the feelings of helplessness, hate, devastation, frustration and denial. Some felt worthless. Some were carers. Some had behavioural problems. I have teachers write to me about children they look after who are in that position.

Another person wrote and said: “I am 36 and grew up in an alcoholic home. My mother drank heavily until she died in 2010. She was a lovely person until she drank when she became hateful and emotionally abusive...She was in and out of rehab, detox centres and mental health units for all of her life.”

Another said that they felt awful, that there was little love shown and that they felt alone the majority of the time, although luckily they had grandparents who were supportive until they passed away. Another described their childhood growing up with an alcoholic as “horrible. I used to come home from school and see my mum drunk/passed out on the floor. I could never concentrate on school work because I’d constantly worry about her. Is she okay? Was she still alive for when I got home? It was a constant worry.”

Another person talked about their feelings of loneliness and how much they hated the signs that their dad had been drinking or in their mother’s speech. Another wrote: “I wanted to die at 14. I tried but lived sadly.”

One person described their experience as “losing my childhood, and becoming a parent to my younger sister and trying to shield her as much as possible. I was quiet and withdrawn, not wanting any attention and associating all attention with the embarrassment I felt when my mum was drinking.”

Another wrote about her experience of living in a household where “don’t mention Daddy’s drinking” was the byword. The year that he died, she got sober.
too. I could go on and on and on. These are not the experiences of a few people; these are the experiences of 2.5 million children in our country—that is one in five children.

From a public policy point of view, should we care? Of course we should, because the evidence is that those children will be twice as likely to develop difficulties at school, three times as likely to consider suicide, five times as likely to develop eating disorders and four times as likely to become alcoholics themselves. This great epidemic of agony is cascading down the generations. The cost of alcohol abuse that the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) spoke about—that £21 billion, although some say it is £50 billion—is cascading down the generations. In this House, we have to stand together and break the silence and the cycle of this terrible disease.

Given the scale of the problem, we would expect that the Government, local authorities and the national health service would be all over it and on top of it, making sure there was action, yet the opposite is true. In a series of freedom of information requests that I conducted at the end of last year, we discovered that none of the 138 local authorities that responded have a specific strategy to help the children of alcoholics. Almost no local authority is increasing its drug and alcohol substance abuse budget, even though many of them are seeing rises in A&E admissions due to alcohol harm. Just 9% of the local authorities where A&E admissions are going up are increasing treatment budgets. A third are cutting the budgets.

In some parts of the country, referrals for alcohol treatment represent 0.4% of dependent drinkers. In other parts of the country, that figure is 11%. That is a wide variation. In some parts of the country, an average of £6.61 is spent per hazardous drinker. In other parts of the country, it is £419—that is in Sefton.

There is no uniformity in the data used to collect statistics across the system. What is clear is that children of alcoholics fall through the cracks because they sit at the junction and on the borders of three different systems: the adult social care system, the children's social care system and the public health system. Not one of those systems has explicit defined responsibility for helping children of alcoholics. So what happens? Children of alcoholics just slide through the gaps.

That is why charities such as the National Association for Children of Alcoholics are so important. When I was in an agony of public shame after the last election, it was Hilary Henriques, whose son is here this afternoon, who got me back on my feet. I had the prospect of the Prime Minister wandering around the country waving the leaving note that I left back in 2010, and that brought me immense public shame. What I could not describe at the time was the private shame that I felt, having just lost my father to alcohol. I was at my lowest ebb after the last election. It was Hilary who helped me see that there was something constructive and productive that I could do to aid this particular cause.

NACOA has had 1 million contacts in the last 15 years by phone, email or through the website. The demand for its services is going up and up. What I find most troubling is that a third of people who contact NACOA have not told anybody else about their issues. These poor children are suffering in silence. They feel a profound sense of shame and insecurity. They feel that it is their fault. They curse themselves for not being able to do anything about it, and not only do they suffer in silence, but they feel like they are on their own. No wonder so many go on to suffer difficulties in the future.

On 13 February, we will mark international Children of Alcoholics Week, which is when we get the chance, around the globe, to stand up and speak for the children of alcoholics. Thanks to the concerted effort of the all-party parliamentary group on children of alcoholics, we will be able to launch on 15 February, the day after Valentine's day, the first ever manifesto of children of alcoholics. It has not been written by me, NACOA or by charities, but by children of alcoholics, many of whose stories I read out earlier. I want to give the Minister some highlights.

First, the clear message is that the Government have to take responsibility for children of alcoholics—no one else is going to help these children. Their parents are not going to help. They cannot tell their neighbours. The Government have got to step into the breach.

We need a national strategy for children of alcoholics. We talk about children's mental health and we talk about alcoholism, but, again, children of alcoholics are in the middle. They need a national strategy of support.

We have to properly fund support for children of alcoholics. Helplines such as those from Childline or NACOA are run on a shoestring, yet they make a world of difference. They need a little bit of extra help from the Government.

We need to increase the availability of support for families. There is clear evidence now that family therapy can make an extraordinary difference. We should be boosting education and awareness among children and for those who have responsibility for working with children. I cannot count the number of times that I was involved in talking to the national health service about my dad’s condition. Even when I spent five days sitting on the ward of an intensive care unit, not once did anyone ever say to me or my dad, “Is there a conversation about alcohol that we need to have? And, by the way, are you okay?” We need to transform education and awareness among those who look after our country’s children.

As the hon. Member for Congleton said, we need to develop a plan to change public attitudes, and we need to revise the national strategy to focus on price and availability. The evidence from Canada and Ireland—and I hope soon from Scotland—is very clear that price makes an important difference.

We need to curtail the promotion of alcohol, particularly to students. When kids put up posters of football teams with alcohol brands plastered across their strips, alcohol is being advertised in their bedrooms. We have to think anew and afresh about how alcohol is promoted in this country.

I say in support of the hon. Lady that the Government should take responsibility for reducing the rate of alcoholism. This is a public health question, pure and simple.

Fiona Bruce: The right hon. Gentleman gives me the opportunity to point out that the Public Health England report says that the evidence is sufficient to support policies to reduce children’s exposure to marketing. They are needed, and that is what the report says.
Liam Byrne: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. There are a million and one ways in which we can do this. Someone called Gemma contributed to the report and said:

“Going down any street with a pub on it in the UK and there will be a sign outside with a quote such as ‘Drinking at 9 am doesn’t make you an alcoholic’. Well, to be honest, it probably does.”

There are common-sense restrictions that I think we should be debating.

Kelvin Hopkins: My right hon. Friend is making a very good point about the opening of pubs at all times of the day. I am one of those who opposed the relaxing of licensing hours. Sadly, it was our party’s Government who did that, and I think that was a mistake. I hope that one day we shall get into power and reverse that, if it is not done before then by the present Government.

Liam Byrne: Let us hope it changes even before then.

The Prime Minister has put great store on two things: first, restoring social mobility in this country, and, secondly, children’s mental health. I understand that it will not be too long before the social mobility strategy, or the social justice strategy, is produced. I do not mind or particularly care what it is called, but I look to the Minister for a cast-iron commitment that children of alcoholics will be discussed at the Cabinet Committee next week, and that we will insert into the strategy that is published in the weeks to come a commitment to develop some of the ideas I have talked about this afternoon.

The Government are well aware of our ambitions. We have written to all and sundry about them, including the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister is in any doubt about the importance and urgency of this debate, I will close with a word from His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, who said:

“We all know that having a parent who abuses alcohol is one of the most disruptive experiences for any child and leads frequently to long-term effects in one’s self-confidence, one’s capacity to relate, and even for some people in their own relation to alcohol itself. My experience, whether easier or more difficult than that of others, was fairly difficult...One of the things I most missed was the company of others who understood the issue.”

He concluded in the most powerful of ways:

“We are never ourselves when we are solitary, but in all of human history and community it has invariably been the case that it is in relationship that we become most fully what we are called to be, provided that relationship is healthy.”

3.3 pm

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I applaud the right hon. and hon. Members who secured this debate with the hope of influencing the Government to update the alcohol strategy, which is absolutely necessary. In particular, the all-party parliamentary group for foetal alcohol spectrum disorder would like an update on action on point 5.15 of the strategy. It reads:

“Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders...result from mothers drinking alcohol during pregnancy. They are lifelong conditions that can have a severe impact on individuals and their families—leading to a wide range of difficulties including low IQ, memory disorders”—such as forgetting how to swim, “attention disorders”, such as when people detach themselves from family members and adoptive parents—“speech and language disorders, visual and hearing defects, epilepsy and heart defects. They are caused entirely by drinking during pregnancy, and so are completely preventable. We do not have good information about the incidence of FASD...FASD can be caused by mothers drinking even before they know they are pregnant; so preventing them is strongly linked to reducing the levels of heavy drinking in the population as a whole, and especially among women.”

The rate of alcohol consumption is much higher among women in my constituency than in many others. The alcohol strategy says that we need to reduce consumption in the population as a whole, especially among young women, “including by increasing the awareness of health professionals.” There is a lack of understanding and awareness about this problem.

Let me give a general overview. Some 10.8 million people in England drink at levels that pose a risk to their health. Most of us have a drink, which is why we do not recognise the problem—we say, “They are just having an extra one. They might have had a bit more than me, but they have not really got a problem.” Overall, alcohol costs the UK £21 billion every year. It affects millions of lives and places a huge burden on public services. The Government cannot afford not to do something about alcohol, because of the drain on the national health service, social services and children’s social care, and because of the number of children who have been placed in care or are up for adoption because of alcohol.

I have seen younger relatives die from alcohol. A great friend of mine died from alcohol—he was head hunted to work in this place some years ago. That professional, skilled person was lost to alcohol, and nobody recognised or faced the problem.

Alcohol is 54% more affordable now than in 1980, which has helped to drive the historically high levels of alcohol consumption. I could not believe, and could not convince my colleagues on the council, how much cheaper alcohol is than bottles of water. I took them round two local supermarkets where alcohol was cheaper than water—cheaper than milk, even. Supermarkets frequently use heavy discounts to sell alcohol more cheaply. The evidence is still around us today.

The figures suggest a modest drop in overall consumption in recent years, but we are still drinking at historically high levels. It is the culture where I come from. St Helens was born of Irish immigrants; it was as far as people could walk from the docks of Liverpool when they landed there after escaping the potato famine. They worked very hard in the pits and in glass and chemicals manufacturing, so it was normal to have a drink at night. But what has gone wrong is that many of the pubs and clubs where the working men could enjoy good company with their pals on a night out have closed down, largely because supermarkets are selling drinks so cheaply. People buy alcohol and drink it at home, where they do not get the company and other people do not see how much they are drinking—it is just their families, who are least able to cope with the problem.

Some 2.1 million children in England are negatively affected by other people’s drinking every year, and the Government have to do more for them. Children do not ask to be born. Young people in the UK tend to drink more and start drinking earlier than young people in other European countries because they see drinking in
the house more. Children exposed to a lot of alcohol advertising are more likely to drink heavily and start drinking in the early age—10 to 15-year-olds in the UK view more alcohol ads on TV than adults over the age of 25. By the age of 15, 44% of girls and 39% of boys in the UK have been drunk at least twice.

In England, 100 children end up in hospital each week due to alcohol. I could go on and on with the facts, but I would like to give a general overview. More than anything, I want to focus on children. As a member of the all-party group for FASD, I was driven to this issue. I was alarmed by the number of cases coming up at my surgery, many raised by parents seeking to adopt children. It was heartbreaking. I want to talk about one family in my constituency that came to see me. They were a couple with two children in their late teens and they were on the road to adopting a young child aged eight. They had fostered her and had been given no information at all on health issues, but it soon became obvious that the child was a victim of FASD. She had detachment disorder and had forgotten how to swim.

A dreadful battle ensued to get a diagnosis and a care package from the local authority. It was difficult because the child was not from the local authority area that the family were living in. They were advised that if the child was not from the local authority area that the adoption was not completed in a certain timescale, the child would be removed from them. The adoptive family were living in. They were advised that if the child was allowed to stay with the family. It was only through my intervention that the necessary diagnosis, care and support was provided. The parents were absolutely heartbroken. Silent tears rolled down the cheeks of this professional couple. The child was a victim of FASD; she had a medical history of pre-natal alcohol exposure. More than half of the children from alcohol-related problem families are being raised in families with alcohol-related problems. How can the Government not look at that drain on services, but—more importantly—the damage to those children's lives? What will they grow up to be? What quality of life will they have? They do not ask to be born. The Government must do more than they are doing now.

I commend the hon. and right hon. Members who secured this debate. So many people and families are distraught at the damage caused by alcohol. More must be done and I plead with the Minister to act accordingly.

Bill Esterson: My hon. Friend is speaking incredibly well. I pay tribute to her for the work she has done as a constituency MP and for the support she has given the all-party group as well. The point she is making demonstrates the need for support for adoptive parents. All too often there is no post-adoption support, particularly with this condition of FASD. It is even more important than it was in the past, so perhaps I can make that point via my hon. Friend to the Minister to pass on to colleagues in the Department for Education.

Marie Rimmer: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. My constituents needed diagnosis and a care package. They were at risk of losing their home—that is how much they loved that child.

More than 7,000 children affected by FASD are born in the UK each year. As a member of the FASD all-party group, I have raised the issue with officers at St Helens Council, where statistics show that alcohol-specific hospital admissions of females were the fourth worst in the country. It is a cultural thing. We see drinking in the family: it goes on, becomes the norm and then leads to an extra drink. Where I come from, we never used to see alcohol in supermarket baskets. There was certainly never any alcohol in our homes. Unfortunately, alcohol is in most homes now. That is where families and children see it being drunk and then becoming part of the culture. It becomes the norm and it is much harder to tackle.

In Peterborough, 75% of children referred for adoption have a medical history of pre-natal alcohol exposure. Most of the looked-after children in St Helens come from alcohol-related problem families. I have met officers at St Helens Council who have given me a principled commitment to progress matters. I am delighted that a training programme with all appropriate staff took place last year. It is estimated that 1% of babies born each year in Knowsley have FASD—that could mean 19 babies in the two wards in my constituency that are in that authority.

I am delighted that action is being taken locally by St Helens Council, but without a national response from the Government, FASD as an issue will continue to be overlooked by the population as a whole. As a local MP, I have done my best, but it is certainly not enough. I have supported the awareness strategy and campaign at Whiston Hospital maternity unit. A recent survey found that 72% of people in Merseyside believe the Government have a responsibility to reduce alcohol-related harm, which is a drain on services.

My understanding of where I live in the north-west—not just in the Merseyside authorities but outside—is that well over 50% of the children on looked-after registers and going forward for adoption are damaged by alcohol and are being raised in families with alcohol-related problems. How can the Government not look at that drain on services, but—more importantly—the damage to those children's lives? What will they grow up to be? What quality of life will they have? They do not ask to be born. The Government must do more than they are doing now.

I commend the hon. and right hon. Members who secured this debate. So many people and families are distraught at the damage caused by alcohol. More must be done and I plead with the Minister to act accordingly.

3.17 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck, and to take part in this important debate. I congratulate the Backbench Business Committee on securing it and I praise the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) for leading it. She mentioned that we have as many as three all-party parliamentary groups relating to alcohol. I had not realised that, but it reminded me of a lyric from an old country and western song:

“One drink is one too many and a thousand not enough”,

which highlights the problem that many have—apologies for the corny remarks.

I am grateful for the hon. Lady's points. Although they relate to the English and Welsh alcohol strategy, they will strike a chord north of the border in Scotland.
Many of the points are totally applicable and I agree with much of what she said, particularly with regard to minimum unit pricing and drink-driving limits.

It will come as no surprise to anyone that Scotland has a long-standing and problematic relationship with alcohol. The damage that misuse causes is indeed stark. It causes harm to individuals’ health, employment and relationships, as well as to community wellbeing and public safety. Then we have the financial burden on the economy through costs to the NHS, police and emergency services, and lost productivity to businesses. Many points that illustrate that have been highlighted today by various speakers.

The hon. Member for Congleton advised us that 70% to 80% of accident and emergency admissions at weekends are alcohol-related, and that 80% of police officers have been assaulted by drinkers, which is absolutely shocking. The hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) gave us a wonderful summary of the lifetime damage to babies and the costs that obviously creates through foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. He also highlighted the drink-driving statistics, which paint a totally concerning scenario.

The hon. Member for Salford Central (Bill Esterson) included the risks to young women who drink. He highlighted the 40% of the prison population with FASD and the 41% of women who drink during pregnancy. Again, that is truly shocking in this day and age, given the knowledge we now have. My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) reminded us that not every cost can be measured, which is entirely true. I am an ex-banker and I always think in terms of numbers and statistics, but it is the human tragedy that is more important. The problem falls disproportionately on the sections of society with the fewest benefits, and the most disadvantaged are at the greatest risk. In fact, the simple horror story is that alcohol is 60% less expensive than it was in the 1980s. Some things have not kept pace.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) gave a powerful personal account that dealt with the psychology of the issue. One of the inspirational points that he made was that we can change things for the next generation. That is a message we must all take away from the debate. The hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer) highlighted the many avoidable conditions related to alcohol—they could so easily be prevented—and the need to improve health professionals’ knowledge. I fully agree on that; there is great consensus in the Chamber today.

You will have noticed, Ms Buck, that I am male, Scottish and a Member of Parliament, which must be three of the worst demographics for alcohol harm, so perhaps I should confess that I finished a bottle of whisky last night, and when it comes to enjoying occasional refreshment I am certainly not teetotal. However, perhaps I should clarify that I opened the bottle in June 2015—I hope that I will be seen as an example of moderation, not excess. Sadly, not everyone’s experience with alcohol is moderate. Excessive consumption has been responsible for many issues in society, including, at worst, the rates of alcohol-related deaths. Scotland’s figures have shown higher death rates for males over the past 20 years than the other UK nations. The 2014 figures put that at 31.2 deaths per 100,000 compared with the English rate of 18.1.

[Martyn Day]  

**Martyn Day:** Thank you, the hon. Gentleman for making that point.

There is sufficient evidence to show a clear link between levels of consumption and harm. My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran has already given several examples. It is particularly worrying that retail sales data show that sales in Scotland are higher than in England and Wales—they were 20% higher in 2014—particularly for low-cost spirits. It might surprise Members to hear that since 2008 vodka has outsold blended whisky by about 20% in Scotland. In 2015, 10.8 litres of pure alcohol was sold per adult in Scotland, which is equivalent to 41 bottles of vodka, 116 bottles of wine or 476 pints of beer. When I consider my consumption rates, or those of my friends and family, many of whom take less than I do, the average means that there are people out there consuming a phenomenal amount of drink. On average, alcohol misuse causes about 670 hospital admissions and 22 deaths a week, and it is costing Scotland £3.6 billion each year, or £900 for every adult in the country. How much better that would be spent on other aspects of the NHS.

I served for 13 years on the West Lothian licensing board and in that role learned a lot about the licensed trade and alcohol issues within many of the communities that I now represent in Parliament. One of the more encouraging developments that I saw during those years was the Best Bar None award scheme, which is a great example of partnership working. It has operated in West Lothian since 2008 and has 20 accredited venues, with the Glenmavis Tavern in Bathgate nationally winning overall best bar at the awards in 2015. Best Bar None is administered by the Scottish Business Resilience Centre, whose remit is to create a secure Scotland for business to flourish in. It promotes responsibly managed licensed premises in Scotland, with the aim of partner agencies working together with licensed premises to create safer and more welcoming city and town centre environments. The crux is that it is also about changing Scotland’s relationship with alcohol—something that I believe can be achieved only by working together as a society.

The Scottish alcohol strategy, published in 2009, recognises that a whole-population approach is needed to reduce alcohol harm. Harry Burns, who was the chief medical officer of the Scottish Government at the time, said:

“Every one of us must ask frankly, whether we are part of the problem and whether we are going to be part of the solution.”

I wholeheartedly agree with that comment. The approach is correct, and indeed we have encouraging signs that it is working. Scotland had the steepest fall in alcohol-related deaths between 2004 and 2014. The rate fell from a staggering 47.7 per 100,000 to the current 31.2. Significantly, the fall in death rates over the period was greatest among the most disadvantaged, with much of what she said, particularly with regard to minimum unit pricing and drink-driving limits.
In December 2014 the drink-drive limit was reduced from 80 mg to 50 mg, bringing Scotland into line with the majority of European and Commonwealth countries. There is international evidence that lower limits are effective in preventing alcohol-related road accidents.

Controlling availability through licensing has also been a feature of the Scottish strategy. There is a presumption against granting 24-hour licences to on-trade premises, and off-sales are allowed only between 10 am and 10 pm. There are also strict controls for displays and marketing materials, which are limited to single designated areas in supermarkets and shops. I agree with the point made by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill about sports advertising, and the UK Government should take that on board. We have seen the effectiveness of limiting marketing in supermarkets; cutting it out of people’s bedrooms would have a massive effect. Scottish licensing legislation puts the objective of protecting and improving public health into the mix, and licensing boards may consider that when making decisions. My understanding is that there is no such public health objective in England and Wales. That is something that UK Ministers might want to consider.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the fact that pricing to reduce affordability is a key component of tackling alcohol harm. I believe that taxation is a means of doing that, but it does not deal with the reality that the availability and relative affordability of the cheapest and strongest drinks is at the heart of the problem.

Minimum unit pricing is a more effective tool in targeting those cheap, high-strength products that are excessively consumed by heavy drinkers.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran informed us, evidence from Canada suggests that there is a direct link between changes in minimum price and changes in consumption. It is estimated that a 10% increase in minimum price might be associated with a 32% reduction in wholly alcohol-attributable deaths. That is significant, and it is an approach worth taking. As we heard, using updated modelling from the University of Sheffield, it was estimated that a minimum unit price of 50p would result in 121 fewer deaths and a fall in hospital admissions of about 2,000 per annum in Scotland. Significantly, 51% of off-sales are sold for less than 50p per unit—some for as little as 18p.

The Scottish Government will ensure that a minimum price policy is implemented as soon as possible. The policy had overwhelming support in the Scottish Parliament and it has twice been approved by the Scottish courts. The Court of Session’s Inner House granted the Scotch Whisky Association and its partners permission to appeal to the United Kingdom Supreme Court in December 2016. The appeal will be heard in 2017.

In conclusion, our nations have a long history with alcohol, and somewhere along the way things have got out of hand for many in our society—often those from the most disadvantaged areas. There is much that can be done, and we must all take responsibility. There are many reasons why we need to take action, including the impact on police workloads and the weekend A&E admissions, all fuelled by alcohol. Perhaps the most important reason is premature death—20 years earlier than the average for a heavy drinker—and its impact on families and communities. Tackling that issue alone would greatly help reduce inequality in society.

3.28 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate everyone who has contributed to a well-informed and powerful debate. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who opened the debate with a comprehensive overview of the issues related to alcohol harm. I cannot do her speech justice—she was superb—but a couple of points struck me. Her point about attacks on emergency services workers was well made. I do not know whether she is aware, but there is currently a campaign to make such attacks a specific criminal offence, which I would support. I believe that other nations in the UK currently have, or are looking at, such measures. Perhaps the Minister would reflect on that. It was a superb speech, and I congratulate the hon. Lady on the way she made her remarks.

Other right hon. and hon. Members also gave impressive speeches. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) for his personal speech about working with children with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, including his own story about his adopted children. The detail he went into shows how deeply he has thought about it. He will campaign on alcohol harm for the weeks, months and years ahead.

I hope that through the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central and of other hon. Members, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) and for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer), who raised similar issues, we can see a change of public policy on such matters. I hope that the Minister will respond to some of what has been said today. If she cannot give us reassurance today, perhaps she will take the subject away, put it through the various policy-making machines behind the scenes in Government and get back to us with some proposals, because the points that have been made today, in particular by my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central, were very powerful.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) brought us the Scottish perspective. I sensed that she might be suggesting or hinting that my colleagues in the Scottish Labour party are not entirely supportive of some of the policies that the Scottish Government are pursuing. Her argument, however, was well considered. As Labour’s shadow Health Secretary in Westminster, I will look into what she was talking about. I enjoy political argument as much as anyone else, but we must learn from best practice, even if it comes from our political rivals.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) delivered an incredible, powerful and staggering speech, for which I pay full tribute to him. The way in which he put his personal experiences on the record was incredibly courageous. For most of my speech I will focus on the children of alcoholics, but we must learn from best practice, even if it comes from our political rivals.

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the figure—some have suggested £21 billion, while others say it could be as high as £50 billion. The cost to our society is not only to our health, to the emergency services and through crime and antisocial behaviour; there is also the drag on our economy and economic growth, because of the drag on workplace productivity.

Alcohol abuse and harm is the third biggest health problem after smoking and obesity. Ultimately, it can have devastating consequences. About 307,000 admissions are attributed to alcohol and 65% of those are male. It is estimated that about 35% of all A&E attendances at peak times at weekends are alcohol-related. The number of hospital admissions with a primary diagnosis for alcohol-related diseases has increased about 100% in the past 13 years. Alcoholic liver disease is the most common cause of death, according to recent statistics. The number of deaths related to alcohol has fallen since it was in the mid-1990s. I therefore join the call that others have made for the Government to come forward with a renewed alcohol strategy. I hope that the Minister will tell us whether that is in the offing.

In recent weeks in my own Leicester constituency I have had the privilege of seeing specialist GP services supporting people with alcohol and other dependency issues, and to visit and learn about the Anchor Centre, which is dedicated to supporting people with alcohol problems. However, they tell me that they are worried about the future commissioning of those services, because decisions are made locally and they might not be able to be made in future because of tight budgets. Will the Minister therefore assure us that adequate resources will be put in place to ensure that such specialised alcohol treatment services are at least maintained, or even built on in future? We also heard about the Scottish experience of minimum unit pricing, so will the Minister update us on the Government’s position on that at the moment?

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had not only an alcohol problem but a problem with violence, and anything that they said or did might cause their parent to turn because of alcohol.

When we read all those stories and study the research, it is clear that something has to be done. My right hon. Friend used a brilliant phrase. He said that children of alcoholics sit at a junction, where it is not obvious which public service should step in to support them—and too often they fall between the cracks. Is it the school’s responsibility? Is it the local GP’s responsibility? Is it the responsibility of children’s social services? That is why I agree that we need a national strategy, and I ask the Minister to consider including in that strategy a statutory duty on local authorities to put in place local strategies, both to deal with alcoholism and to support children of alcoholics.

The arguments that have been made about collecting data are so important. We have heard that an estimated 2.5 million children are affected, but we are not entirely sure—some suggest it is 3.5 million—so please will the Government look at putting in place a way of collecting statistics so that we know the scale of the problem across the country?

I do not want to be partisan—this is not the place for that—but in a lot of communities across the country school nurses are being cut back. It strikes me that if we want to put in place an effective strategy to help children of alcoholics, school nurses would be a good place to start. I appreciate that such services are now commissioned locally, but will the Minister consider whether the Government can offer any more support to our school nurse and community health visitor networks? I also entirely endorse the comments that were made about labelling and support for mothers in pregnancy.

I am perhaps going off my portfolio as the shadow Health Secretary, but when the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran mentioned the high density of shops and so on in more deprived areas, I wondered whether a community’s health needs should be taken into account in local authorities’ licensing decisions. Perhaps the Minister could reflect on that, although I appreciate that she is not a local government Minister.

My biggest regret in life is that my dad moved away to Thailand when he was about 59. He literally said to me one day, at Christmas, “I’m going to Thailand.” I said, “What?” He said, “I’m going.” I did not believe him, but he went, and that was that. He just went. Six months later, I got married. He promised me that he would come to the wedding. The day before, he phoned me and said, “What?” He said, “I’m going.” I did not believe him, but he went, and that was that. He just went. Six months later, I got married. He promised me that he would come to the wedding. The day before, he phoned me and said, “What?” He said, “I’m going.” I did not believe him, but he went, and that was that. He just went. Six months later, I got married. He promised me that he would come to the wedding. The day before, he phoned me and said, “What?” He said, “I’m going.” I did not believe him, but he went, and that was that. He just went.
to the NHS is around £3.5 billion. Harms can also be indirect, including the loss of productivity due to absenteeism or unemployment, and they can be intangible and difficult to cost, such as the poor quality of life or emotional distress caused by living with a heavy drinker.

Much of that burden of disease and deaths is preventable, so it is right that the matter is given our full attention. Of particular interest to the Government is the strong inequalities profile of alcohol harms, which fall disproportionately on more deprived communities. We estimate that if all local authorities had a mortality rate that matched the most affluent areas, about 4,000 alcohol-related deaths would be avoided each year.

Though I note my hon. Friend’s calls for caution, there are some promising trends that give us cause for optimism. People under 18 are drinking less, attitudes are beginning to change and there has been a steady reduction in alcohol-related road traffic accidents. We have also seen real progress in Government working in partnership with industry. The industry removed 1.3 billion units of alcohol from the market through improving consumer choice of lower-alcohol products, and nearly 80% of bottles and cans now display unit content and pregnancy warnings on their labels.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton—and my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), who is no longer in his place—rightly said, partnership continues to play an important role in tackling alcohol misuse, and the Government are committed to that principle. In the report produced by the APPG that my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton, recommendation 9 is to educate the public about the harms of alcohol and do a better job in prevention. We are taking a number of actions to try to help people manage their alcohol consumption, because we believe that the most sustainable long-term solution to alcohol misuse is informed and empowered citizens and consumers. To ensure that that is possible, we have a responsibility to provide the most up-to-date and clear information to enable people to make informed choices about their drinking. That includes publishing the low-risk drinking guidelines, as we did last year, which a number of colleagues mentioned. Those guidelines provide the public with the latest information from the four UK chief medical officers about the health risks of different levels and patterns of drinking.

Officials are now working with partners in industry to update the advice provided on packaging and labelling to reflect the latest evidence. That is to ensure, as the hon. Member for Sefton Central mentioned, that awareness is raised and people understand exactly what those low-risk drinking guidelines mean.

**Nicola Blackwood:** My hon. Friend is right that that is not enough in and of itself, but it was an important step, because we did need to review the latest evidence and provide updated risk guidelines. That is also why we remain committed to high-impact public education campaigns. Last year, PHE launched its “One You” campaign, which she may be aware of, which aims to motivate people to take steps to improve their health through action on the main risk factors, including alcohol consumption. “One You” has been used by more than 1.6 million people so far. It includes a drinks tracker app, which helps drinkers to identify risky behaviour and lower their alcohol consumption. PHE will launch a new “Days Off” app on 7 February to encourage people not to drink alcohol for a number of days a week, which is in line with the CMO’s guidelines. Evidence supports that as an effective way to reduce drinking and a good, effective and manageable way in which to use the guidelines.

**Bill Esterson:** I am pleased that the Minister is making practical suggestions to address some of the problems that have been raised. I hope that she will take up the shadow Health Secretary’s offer to work together on this. As an initial step, perhaps she could sit down individually with the three of us who initiated the debate to take things further, because we have said a lot today but there is a lot more to the debate that may be of assistance to her.

**Fiona Bruce:** The Minister talks about increasing knowledge and awareness, but her Department’s own report says:

“Although playing an important role in increasing knowledge and awareness, there is little evidence to suggest that providing information, education...is sufficient to lead to substantial and lasting reductions in alcohol-related harm.”

I support that action, but, without the type of policies I addressed in my speech, I do not believe we will see the difference we need to make.
The hon. Gentleman raised the problem of professionals dismissing foetal alcohol spectrum, which sounds familiar. One problem I have been made aware of is the lack of research in this particular field and the need to increase it. Although the World Health Organisation has started a global prevalence study, which he called for, it recognises that information is lacking in many countries, including the United Kingdom. That creates a number of challenges, because the feasibility of estimating prevalence is difficult given the ethical challenges associated with research in that area.

Public Health England recently published the most comprehensive and up-to-date review of current harms of alcohols and the evidence on the effectiveness of alcohol control policies. We are currently engaged in further work to understand the impact of parental drinking on children; we discovered during the initial work that we did not have sufficient evidence on that, so we are going forward with that work. Public Health England is also developing prevalence figures at local authority level, as well a toolkit to support local authorities to respond to the issue of parental drinking. That is due to be published later next year, and I hope it will be of assistance to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill in the work of his all-party parliamentary group as well.

One challenge we face is insufficient evidence, which is why we are trying to build the evidence base up so that we can assist medical professionals and local authorities as they try to make decisions; if they do not have the evidence, it is very difficult to make proper policy decisions in this area. I hope that reassures the hon. Member for Sefton Central, and I am happy to come back to him on any of the other points that he made.

We have also put several measures in place to ensure that children are provided with the information and tools they need, including through the Frank drug information and advice service. Family nurse partnerships help parents in vulnerable families to develop their parenting capacity, while tailored and co-ordinated support is offered via the troubled families programme. A lot of that needs to be delivered through local authorities; one of the recommendations in the report by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton was to promote increased partnership through local communities. We believe it is right that local authorities should lead on that work as they are best placed to understand the different challenges in their areas; what is perhaps a challenge in Birmingham may be slightly differently represented in Bournemouth. However, we must make sure that local authorities are properly held to account when they lead on that, which is why we are keeping a close eye on whether they are delivering on these investments in the first place.

Our data show an increase in local authority spending on alcohol services for adults—from approximately £200 million in 2014-15 to £230 million in 2015-16—which we think demonstrates their understanding of the need for a commitment to invest in those treatment services. Our data also show that 85,000 individuals were treated in 2015, of whom 39% successfully completed treatment. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill quoted different figures. I have not seen his freedom of information request or the response, so I am not sure why that is, but I am happy to investigate the variation between our figures and to discuss it with him to try to get to the bottom of exactly what is going on.
I am also happy to discuss the issues the right hon. Gentleman and the shadow Health Secretary raised regarding children of alcoholics; both made important and moving speeches about that. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his leadership on this issue. I know it is not easy to speak out in this place about personal trauma and loss, and I know that we too often feel it will weaken us and expose us to personal attacks. I hope that by his standing up in that way, more people—not only in this building but across the country—will feel that they can be open about their personal experiences of addiction and of being in families with those with addiction, and will be able to seek help.

This is an incredibly important step in tackling addiction and the stigma that still exists around it. I thank both Members for the steps they have taken in progressing what is a very challenging cultural area in the UK, and I hope they will accept my commitment to working with them to try to progress it as well. I want to put it on the record that we are trying to take steps, through the troubled families programme, to improve the situation for children of alcoholics. The troubled families programme has a responsibility to tackle problem drinking and to commission appropriate prevention and treatment services—including to support the children of those families.

Liam Byrne: I pay tribute to the Minister and welcome her commitment to working together across the aisle, so to speak, to put a new strategy in place. The troubled families programme is very important, not least because there is a lot of money in it. That money is often focused on families in the most chaotic of circumstances, but our evidence shows that many families with alcoholic parents do not look troubled or chaotic to the outside eye—they are often functioning alcoholics. Our definition of what constitutes a troubled family may therefore need to be stretched a little in order to help those children.

Nicola Blackwood: The right hon. Gentleman is obviously an expert on the issue, but understanding how to identify those at risk is not specific to this area of public health; it occurs in other areas and is familiar to me from my mental health brief as well. This will be something that we need to sit down and discuss to understand more accurately.

It may be that we need to look at the troubled families programme to see how that could be addressed in order to work more effectively to target those in need of assistance. The key message today is that children of alcoholics in the United Kingdom should not feel as though they are alone—they should feel as though support is there, and they should know that they will find help when they seek it. I must go on to talk about some of the other issues that were raised; I hope I am not taking too much time.

The NHS remains critical to the prevention of alcohol harms. We must incentivise NHS providers to invest in interventions to reduce risky behaviours and prevent ill health from alcohol consumption. NHS England and Public Health England have worked together to develop a national commissioning for quality and innovation—CQUIN—payments framework, which is an important intervention. For those less familiar with the CQUIN payments framework, it was set up to encourage service providers to continually improve the quality of care provided to patients. CQUIN payments enable commissioners to reward innovation by linking a proportion of service providers' income to the achievement of national and local quality improvement goals. In this case, it means that every in-patient in community, mental health and acute hospitals will be asked about their alcohol consumption. Where appropriate, they will receive an evidence-based brief intervention or a referral to specialist services, which should improve the treatment of children in the care of alcoholics, as in cases like those raised by the shadow Health Secretary. That is something we should be pleased about.

More than 80% of hospitals offer some form of specialist alcohol service, and investment in similar alcohol care teams in every hospital would potentially provide the NHS with an opportunity to maximise its delivery of identification and brief advice interventions to patients. As I said, that has been identified as one of the most important interventions to change behaviours.

Hon. Members will be aware that the NHS and local authorities have been developing sustainability and transformation plans—STPs. Those are now published on NHS England's website, and the vast majority include actions to reduce the harms from alcohol, including through investment in brief advice, which was one of the recommendations from my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton, and expanding the approaches for those with more problematic alcohol use. That is an encouraging sign. Underpinning all of our work is the expertise of Public Health England, as we have seen from its report. PHE staff work closely with local authorities and the NHS to try to tackle alcohol harms. Building on its recent review, we must ensure that it gives the right data analysis, so that local authorities know how to effectively target their policies.

One issue raised by a number of colleagues is the call for a review of the licensing legislation to include a health objective, as in Scotland. I have some questions about how effective that would be. Although it is easy to link a criminal justice problem to a specific location, it is much more difficult to link a health challenge to an individual establishment. It is quite hard to prove that buying a drink in an individual establishment has caused someone's liver disease.

PHE is leading our engagement with the Home Office's second phase of the local alcohol action areas programme and offering support and advice to participating areas that have identified improving the public health response to alcohol-related harms as a key focus of their approach. Successful applicants were announced by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), on 27 January, with 18 of the 33 successful areas looking at how they can improve the health of their residents. That is one way in which this is being done.

The House of Lords Select Committee on the Licensing Act 2003 is looking at that Act and is due to publish its report in March. We will, of course, carefully consider its recommendations. I gave evidence to the Committee, which is looking at health as part of that issue.

Fiona Bruce: On the issue of availability, the Minister's Department's own report indicates that reducing the number of hours during which alcohol is available and...
looking at density—the number of outlets where alcohol is sold—can help to reduce alcohol harm. I hope she will look at that as she proceeds. The local licensing objective could have real teeth if those issues were introduced into it.

Nicola Blackwood: My hon. Friend is passionate about this issue. I understand the argument for introducing the health objective. The problem is proving the risk posed by the individual establishment. However, we will consider the evidence that comes forward.

I will briefly turn to taxation, which was raised by a number of colleagues, including Scottish National party Members. I have to say at the outset that making changes to taxation is a matter for the Chancellor and slightly above my pay grade. We also have to note that the UK currently has the fourth highest duty on spirits compared with other EU member states, and higher strength beer and cider are already taxed more than equivalent lower strength products. We are considering the introduction of minimum unit pricing in England and Wales but are waiting for the outcome of the court case in Scotland. Until we hear the Supreme Court’s decision, which is still unknown—we are supporting the process of that case—we cannot proceed with any policy decision in the United Kingdom. It is a little unfair to berate us for not introducing a policy that cannot yet be enforced in Scotland.

On targeted changes in taxation, I am advised that current legislation on alcohol duties requires that duty on wines and ciders is paid at a flat rate within defined bands of alcoholic strength. I understand that my hon. Friends the Members for Congleton and for Ribble Valley have advice that it is possible to do something else, which I would be pleased to see, although that is a Treasury matter. At the moment, my understanding is that the EU directive sets bands for alcohol products in relation to strength and that while we have some flexibility to set rates within the structure of those bands, we are not able to link a duty absolutely to alcohol strength. Obviously, with our vote just yesterday, there is an opportunity with Brexit to consider these issues more specifically going forward, but that is my understanding of EU legislation as it stands and the advice I have received on this specific point.

Fiona Bruce: The information I have received is that the Government could just split the general rate into two separate brackets, therefore achieving their goal without the need to go through the EU. If the Minister will permit me, I will pass to her the opinion we have received on that.

Nicola Blackwood: My hon. Friend is very kind; I would be happy to see it.

I will close now, as I have cantered through a large number of issues and am sure hon. Members are tired of hearing my voice. I thank colleagues from both sides of the House for taking part. This has been an important debate. There have been very moving speeches, especially from the hon. Members for Sefton Central and for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill and the shadow Minister. They all illustrated powerfully the devastating impact that addiction and alcohol misuse have on not only people’s own health but, as we heard so eloquently, their families, children and local communities, not to mention the health and social care systems and wider society.

We have to give credit where it is due. We have to thank the many NHS workers, local authority staff, charities such as Childline and Aquarius and volunteers who are making such a difference in this area already. They are saving lives. We must recognise progress where it is being made, especially in the changing attitudes among young people. We must not despair.

However, as we have heard from today’s debate, stories and statistics, we cannot be satisfied with this. There is much more we can and must do, and I hope I have reassured colleagues today of my personal commitment to ensure we strengthen the information, support and, if necessary, treatment we give people to reduce the harms of alcohol misuse. With a health challenge as culturally entrenched as this, it can sometimes feel as though it is a mountain we will never successfully climb, but I take courage from today’s debate. Great social change requires three things: long-term political will, non-partisan partnership and bravery. I have heard all three of those today. I hope that each Member who has spoken here today will continue to work with me as we fight on to tackle this social injustice.

4.16 pm

Fiona Bruce: I would like to thank the Minister for her response, which showed that she has been as moved as everyone in the Chamber by the speeches we have heard. I not only welcome but deeply thank her for the commitment she has given to continue to work with colleagues who are concerned about the impact of alcohol harm.

I remember a debate in the main Chamber a few years ago about mental health, when many Members spoke for the first time of their personal experiences of mental health issues. That debate was something of a tipping point. Since then, the issue has been discussed again and again in the House, and the Government have taken action to address it. I hope that today will prove something of a tipping point with regard to the impact of alcohol harm.

I thank the hon. Members for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer), and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), for their well informed and, in all cases, deeply moving speeches. Although it is probably not normal procedure, I would also like to thank the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), for his equally moving and eloquent speech.

In my speech, I used many statistics on the wide-ranging harm caused by alcohol and its health, social and economic consequences, but I believe that what will really have stirred hearts and minds today—and, I hope, stirred the Minister and her officials into action—is the deeply moving personal accounts from Members of how alcohol has in many cases touched their lives and those of their families devastatingly.

This is not a minor issue. The harm can not only be devastatingly deep for the individuals but touches many more people right across the country than has been acknowledged to date. I have heard it said that there is
barely a family in the land not affected by alcohol harm today. Having heard today’s speeches, I doubt anyone could argue against it. I certainly believe it. I have just four members of staff working for me as a Member of Parliament, and of those four, tragically, one lost her husband to alcohol while she was in her 50s, just a short time ago, and another lost her father to alcohol when she was not yet one year old. I thank them for allowing me to relate that. The impact of alcohol harm on our nation is far wider and deeper than we have acknowledged in the House to date.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting a three-hour debate—I believe that was justified. I also thank the Minister not only for her reply but for her willingness to meet us in the future. I look forward to working with her, and across parties, on this issue. If there is any point that she did not manage to address in her very detailed response, we would appreciate it if she were good enough to write to colleagues.

As the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran said, there is no one silver bullet that will solve this issue. But one thing is for sure: we need the Government to take a lead on tackling alcohol harm, which is one of the most serious health challenges of our time, and to do so urgently. We need action—enough reviews have taken place. Public Health England’s report clearly says there are policies that have significant potential to curb alcohol-related harm, but we need action to be taken urgently. Successive Governments have completely underestimated the challenge. I appreciate what the Government are doing now, but we need more to be done.

As I have said, this is not some moral crusade, it is a matter of social justice. Taking effective action will help literally all of our society, but disproportionately the poorest, the most vulnerable and the youngest. We have heard today about the financial costs of excessive alcohol consumption, but the cost in the loss of life chances and potential, for children in particular, and the sheer heartache that people have suffered and continue to suffer are incalculable. I am pleased that the Minister is determined to look particularly at how we can help the children of alcoholics who are suffering now—how we can help to protect them and prevent that from happening in the future—and, I hope, unborn children, too. Those are real priorities, and I am delighted that she has committed to emphasising that work in particular.

I will close with the following quotes, which are all from David Cameron, the former Prime Minister, in the Government’s own 2012 strategy. He said that “the responsibility of being in government isn’t always about doing the popular thing. It’s about doing the right thing.” He also said:

“My message is simple. We can’t go on like this...fast, immediate action...is needed”

and

“we have to do it now.”

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered tackling alcohol harm.
Written Statements

Monday 23 January 2017

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Industrial Strategy Consultation

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): The Government are today publishing a Green Paper: “Building our Industrial Strategy”.

This signals a new and collaborative approach to industrial strategy in the United Kingdom, helping to deliver an economy that works for everyone.

We are working from a position of strength. We have built an open, dynamic and competitive economy since the financial crisis, with a record number of people in work. We have more businesses than ever, industry sectors that are world leading, a strong science and research base, and have seen significant growth.

But there are challenges that the United Kingdom must face up to now and in the years ahead. Specifically we must:

- Build on our strengths and extend excellence into the future;
- Close the gap between the UK’s most productive companies, industries, places and people and the rest; and
- Make the UK one of the most competitive places in the world to start or grow a business.

“Building our Industrial Strategy” sets out our approach to addressing these challenges in order to attain our objective: to improve living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country.

In order to endure, our strategy should reflect the considerable contribution of a wide group of people and bodies who share our ambitions. That is why this is a Green Paper—a set of proposals for discussion and consideration, and an invitation to others to contribute collaboratively to their development. I have placed copies of the document in the Libraries of the House.

[HCWS429]

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Growth Fund

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): In the last Parliament, £7.3 billion of the Local Growth Fund was awarded to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through the first two rounds of Growth Deals. At Autumn Statement, the Chancellor announced the regional breakdown of a further £1.8 billion of the Local Growth Fund. Today I am pleased to announce the individual awards that LEPs in the Northern Powerhouse will receive.

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<th>LEP</th>
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<td>North Eastern</td>
<td>49.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td>12.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tees Valley</td>
<td>21.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>York, North Yorkshire and East Riding</td>
<td>23.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lancashire</td>
<td>69.76</td>
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<td>Humber</td>
<td>27.94</td>
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<td>Leeds City Region</td>
<td>67.45</td>
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<td>Liverpool City Region</td>
<td>71.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater Manchester</td>
<td>130.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheffield City Region</td>
<td>37.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheshire and Warrington</td>
<td>43.28</td>
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This flexible funding sits alongside £475 million for Local Transport Majors and £2 billion long-term funding for housing transactions through the Home Building Fund. This was the most competitive round yet, and allocations were made based on a bidding round that took place last year. This honours our manifesto pledge to agree an expanded set of deals to empower the towns, cities and counties across the country to fulfil their potential and create an economy that works for all. The expanded deals will provide LEPs in the Northern Powerhouse with the power and funding to support local businesses, unlock housing where it is most needed and develop vital infrastructure to allow places to thrive.

The funding will also be used to create jobs, equip a new generation with the skills they need for the future and attract billions of pounds of private sector investment. This investment is Government stepping up, not stepping back, building on our strengths to boost national productivity and growth.

This adds to the £2.9 billion we have already invested in growth deals in the Northern Powerhouse in previous rounds, providing targeted financial support to locally-determined projects in order to unlock growth.

This is part of Government efforts to build a Northern Powerhouse to help the great cities and towns of the North pool their strengths and take on the world. Step by step we are making the Northern Powerhouse a reality with over a million businesses involved, foreign direct investment up by a quarter and 187,000 jobs created in the past year alone.

We will announce the allocations for LEPs in other regions over the coming weeks.

[HCWS428]
Written Statements

Tuesday 24 January 2017

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):
A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) will be held in Brussels on 27 January 2017. EU Finance Ministers are due to discuss the following items:

Early morning session

Ministers will be briefed on the outcomes of the 26 January meeting of the Eurogroup and the European Commission will present an update on the current economic situation. Ministers will discuss the European Court of Auditors report on the single supervisory mechanism.

VAT: reverse charge mechanism

The Commission will give a presentation on the proposal for a temporary derogation to apply a generalised reverse charge mechanism.

Current financial service legislative proposals

The Council presidency will provide an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Presentation of the presidency Work programme

The Maltese presidency of the Council of the European Union will present its priorities for ECOFIN over the next six months, which will be followed by an exchange of views.

European semester 2017

Ministers will adopt Council conclusions on the annual growth survey, alert mechanism report and approve the Council recommendations on the economic policy of the euro area.

Basel Committee’s post-crisis banking reform agenda

The Commission will give Ministers an update on the progress made on the finalisation of the post-crisis reforms since the Basel meeting in November 2016.

High-level group on own resources

Mario Monti, Chair of the High-level group on own resources will present the group’s final report, which will be followed by an exchange of views between Ministers.

EIB Economic Resilience Initiative

Werner Hoyer, president of the European Investment Bank, will outline the state of play of the Economic Resilience Initiative, providing preliminary evidence of its initial implementation and the ongoing fundraising process for the grant component of this initiative.

EU: Prospectus Regulation

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Simon Kirby):
This Government have decided not to opt in to the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) provision within the European Commission’s “Proposal for a regulation on the prospectus to be published when securities are offered to the public or admitted to trading”.

Article 31(1) of the proposal requires that where member states have chosen to pursue a criminal sanctions regime for breaches of elements of the proposals, those member states must ensure that information can be shared between competent authorities across the EU. As the provision requires co-operation involving law enforcement bodies, the Government believe these are JHA obligations and therefore our JHA opt-in is triggered. The Government will inform the Council of their decision not to exercise their right to opt in to the relevant provision.

The Government have decided not to opt in to these provisions as there are no significant benefits to be gained from doing so. The obligation to share information will fall on member states who have a relevant criminal sanctions regime, and UK competent authorities will be in a position to access this data irrespective of the decision to opt in. The Government have no intention to introduce a criminal sanctions regime in a way that would lead to this regulation imposing an obligation on the UK or on our competent authorities.

College of European Union Commissioners

The Maltese presidency of the College of EU Commissioners will present its priorities for ECOFIN over the next six months, which will be followed by an exchange of views.

European Semester 2017

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National Infrastructure Commission

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Simon Kirby):
I wish to update the House on the establishment of the National Infrastructure Commission.

The purpose of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) is to provide expert, impartial analysis of the long-term infrastructure needs of the country. The NIC reports on high-priority issues and produces an in-depth, independent assessment of the UK’s major infrastructure needs on a 30-year time horizon.

On 12 October 2016 the Government informed the House that the NIC would be established on a permanent basis as an Executive Agency of HM Treasury in January 2017. [HCWS181]

The Government are today establishing the NIC as an Executive Agency of HM Treasury, and the Treasury is today publishing a framework document. The framework document sets out the broad framework within which the NIC will operate, and outlines its roles and responsibilities. A copy of the framework document has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. [HCWS431]

National Infrastructure Commission Reports:
5G/Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):
I am today depositing in the Libraries of both Houses two recent National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) reports, in accordance with the National Infrastructure Commission charter.

“Connected Future”, published on 14 December, sets out what the UK needs to do to become a world leader in 5G networks. The Government will consider the recommendations carefully and respond at Budget 2017. The Government have already taken steps to ensure that Britain is 5G ready and the Chancellor recently announced a £1 billion investment which will support 5G trials and investment in fibre networks.
“Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Interim Report”, published on 16 November, sets out immediate investment priorities and challenges to ensure a joined-up strategy for the area bringing together planning, housing and transport. The Government welcomed this interim report at autumn statement and committed to invest £137 million to support the Commission’s transport recommendations on the Oxford to Cambridge expressway, and East West Rail. The Government also welcomed the NIC’s work looking at a range of delivery models for housing and transport in the corridor, including development corporations.

The National Infrastructure Commission was set up in October 2015, to provide expert independent analysis of the long-term infrastructure needs of the country. As well as in-depth reports into specific issues, it produces a once-in-a-Parliament national infrastructure assessment (NIA) setting out a long-term vision for UK infrastructure. [HCWS433]

TRANSPORT

Mersey Gateway Transport

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): The Government support investment in the transport network given the benefits it provides to the economy. That is why we are providing substantial funding for the Mersey Gateway bridge scheme in Halton.

In addition, the Government are delivering a number of transport improvements in and around Halton. These include:

- the Halton curve which will enable passenger services from north Wales and west Cheshire to directly access Liverpool city centre and Liverpool John Lennon airport;
- Warrington Waterfront transport infrastructure scheme, a package of highway investment, including a bridge over the River Mersey, which opens up commercial land and alleviates congestion to the south of Warrington town centre;
- the Omega J8 (M62) highway improvements to support the rapid and significant expansion of the Omega employment site now employing over 5,000 people; and
- access improvements to Knowsley industrial park and A5300 Knowsley expressway improvements, highway investments to support access to one of the major employment sites in Liverpool city region.

As part of the Department for Transport’s road investment strategy, Highways England will deliver the M56 J11a scheme to provide a new junction with the Mersey Gateway Bridge which will support the Daresbury enterprise zone, key to the knowledge economy in the north-west.

In 2015 the Government announced they would look at the feasibility of extending Mersey Gateway bridge toll discounts to residents of Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington. The Department has undertaken detailed work and evaluated options for how this could happen, what the costs would be and what this would do to the contracts already signed by Halton Borough Council to deliver the scheme and the tolling infrastructure.

The feasibility work considered the legal position and the costs to the taxpayer and concluded that free tolling will not be extended beyond Halton Borough Council.

The Government have already provided £86 million to Halton to develop the scheme, to pay for land and to deal with land contamination. Once the scheme opens, the Government will also be providing a further substantial contribution of £288 million to help fund both the cost of the bridge and also to increase the funds available to enable residents of Halton to use the bridge for free.

It is Government policy that users of estuarial crossings should help pay for the benefits they receive. The Mersey Gateway is no different. As is the case with the Dartford crossings, an exception is to be made for residents of Halton given that the existing Silver Jubilee crossing is the only road link between the two halves of the borough. Other users will have a range of frequent user discounts available to them to use a crossing that will deliver considerable congestion and journey time improvements to boost the region’s economy.

In evaluating the options open to the Government we have considered a number of issues. On the legal side, the feasibility work showed there would be a significant risk of a successful legal challenge to a decision to extend free tolling to some local councils and not others. On the cost side extending free tolling to only a handful of local councils would still be at a substantial cost to the taxpayer. An extension of user discounts to not just Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington, as originally suggested, but also to the other three authorities that neighbour Halton (Knowsley, Liverpool City Council and St Helens), would be at an estimated cost of £604 million to the public purse. If, as is the case with Halton, the cost was to be split between the Government and local authorities, £377 million would fall to the five local councils. For all these reasons we have taken the decision not to extend free tolling beyond Halton.

The Mersey Gateway bridge is on target for opening in autumn 2017 which is a great testimony to the hard work that all parties including Halton Borough Council have put into this scheme. [HCWS434]
Written Statement

Wednesday 25 January 2017

CABINET OFFICE

Conduct Guidance: Northern Ireland Election

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Ben Gummer): As is normal ahead of an election, guidance has today been issued for civil servants in UK Government Departments and those working in arm's-length bodies, on the principles that they should observe in relation to the conduct of Government business in the run-up to the forthcoming elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 2 March 2017.

The guidance sets out the need to maintain the political impartiality of the civil service and the need to ensure that public resources are not used for party political purposes during this period. The period of sensitivity begins with immediate effect.

Copies of the guidance have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and on the Cabinet Office website at: www.gov.uk.

[HCWS435]
Written Statements

Thursday 26 January 2017

DEFENCE

Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body Appointment

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Janet Whitworth as a member of the Armed Forces’ Pay Review Body. Mrs Whitworth will begin her three-year appointment on 1 March 2017. This appointment has been conducted in accordance with the guidance of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary: RAF Police

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): I wish to inform the House that I am laying today the first report from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) inspection of the Royal Air Force police (RAFP).

The Armed Forces Act 2011 places a duty on HMIC to inspect and report to the Ministry of Defence on the independence and effectiveness of investigations carried out by each service police force, and this is HMIC’s first statutory inspection report on the RAF police.

I consider this report to be a positive endorsement of the RAFP providing assurance from an independent civilian authority that the RAFP is well led overall. Six recommendations have been made and five areas for improvement have been identified. The Royal Air Force accepts the report’s findings and work is already under way to address the recommendations and areas for improvement.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council—16 January 2017

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 January. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting was held in Brussels.

A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted can be found at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2017/01/16/.

Agenda items included the middle east peace process, Syria and a forward look for 2017. Ms Mogherini briefed Foreign Ministers on the recent European Court of Justice ruling on Morocco. Ms Mogherini also informed Foreign Ministers of the outcome of the previous week’s talks in Geneva on the Cyprus settlement.

Syria

Foreign Ministers discussed developments in Syria including the ceasefire agreement announced by Russia on 29 December; and the talks convened by Russia and Turkey to be held in Astana. Ms Mogherini updated Foreign Ministers on: the EU’s regional outreach initiative; the EU’s Syria strategy; and a road map for EU policy on Syria. Ms Mogherini also informed Ministers that the EU would co-host a conference on Syria to follow up the London conference of February 2015. The Foreign Secretary welcomed this and, together with other Ministers, reconfirmed support for post-conflict reconstruction in Syria once a credible political transition was firmly under way.

MEPP

Foreign Ministers had an informal discussion about issues relating to the middle east peace process. The Foreign Secretary reiterated the UK’s commitment to a two-state solution.

Ministers agreed without discussion a number of measures:

The Council adopted conclusions on Lebanon.

The Council delisted four entities from the list of persons and entities subject to restrictive measures against Iran.

The Council approved the delisting of five vessels from the list of persons and entities subject to restrictive measures against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, following the respective delisting by the United Nations Security Council.

The Council decided on the withdrawal of the European Commission from the EU-level framework in accordance with the recommendation of the UN Committee for the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities so as to ensure the independence of the monitoring framework.

The Council approved the conclusion of the protocol to the Euro-Mediterranean agreement establishing an association between the EU and Algeria. The protocol contains a framework agreement on the general principles for the participation of Algeria in EU programmes and agencies such as Europe’s programme for small and medium-sized enterprises COSME, Europe Creative or Horizon 2020.

The Council approved rules of procedure to be adopted by various trade sub-committees established under the EU-Ukraine association agreement.

Overseas Security and Justice Assistance Guidance

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): I would like to inform the House that I have today published revised guidance concerning overseas security and justice assistance (OSJA).

The need for UK security and justice assistance overseas is growing. Our expertise is highly valued across the world and improves the standards and capabilities of law enforcement and security agencies operating in the most challenging environments. Through this work we aim to improve the lives of people in the world’s most insecure regions, by enhancing the abilities of states to uphold the rule of law. However, it is important that we ensure that the skills and expertise we impart are not used to cause harm. The OSJA guidance is HMG’s tool for assessing the human rights risks of our overseas security and justice assistance work and identifying measures to mitigate those risks.
The OSJA guidance was first published in December 2011 by my predecessor, the then Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague of Richmond, and revised in 2014. I am proud that the new OSJA process will remain the most comprehensive and demanding tool of its type anywhere in the world. The document I am publishing today renews our commitment to take every reasonable step to identify and reduce the risk that we will inadvertently do harm when assisting overseas. It restates our commitment to proper oversight by Ministers of all assistance projects which carry serious risk.

The revised procedure today draws on five years of experience in applying the guidance. The changes in this version include a more rigorous risk assessment; clearer guidance on the role of the UK’s overseas network and of HMG Departments and agencies outside the FCO; and more detail on how to conduct the process in complex situations, for instance when several Departments are working together on the same project. It also provides for officials already deployed overseas who are caught in exceptional circumstances (such as an unfolding terrorist attack) to act immediately within the spirit of the guidance to protect the public or safeguard the integrity of evidence provided that the full documentation follows within 24 hours. Finally the new procedure includes measures which will allow more public scrutiny of the OSJA process within this Department’s annual human rights report.

The update will be available on gov.uk. My officials will continue to monitor the implementation of the guidance and propose revisions from time to time.

Attachments can be viewed online at:
http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-01-26/HCWS441/

HOME DEPARTMENT

Migration Advisory Committee: Shortage Occupation List

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): The independent Migration Advisory Committee has today published its partial review of the shortage occupation list relating to teachers. A copy can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/migration-advisory-committee. I am grateful to the Committee for its thorough and detailed study.

The Committee has recommended that maths and physics teachers remain on the shortage occupation list; that computer science, Mandarin and science teachers should be added to the list; and that chemistry teachers should be removed from it.

The Government have accepted the Committee’s recommendations in full and the necessary changes will be made to the immigration rules to reflect this.

The Government are committed to reducing net migration to sustainable levels, which means the tens of thousands. That means we need to need to look first to the resident labour market to fill vacancies. The Department for Education is spending over £1.3 billion up to 2020 to attract new teachers into the profession. This includes continuing to offer generous bursaries of up to £30,000 tax-free in priority subjects and a £67 million investment in STEM teaching in England to recruit up to 2,500 additional maths and physics teachers, and increase the skills of up to 15,000 existing teachers over the course of this Parliament.

However, we recognise there may be a need to recruit overseas where we continue to have genuine skill shortages or require highly specialist experts. We adjust the shortage occupation list from time to time and in line with the Migration Advisory Committee’s recommendations to ensure that, where necessary, labour can be sourced from outside the European economic area.

HCWS441

WORK AND PENSIONS

Welfare Delivery

The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds): The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is today publishing its proposals for the future of its estate, including Jobcentres and back-office sites.

On 31 March 2018 DWP’s PFI PRIME (private resource initiative for the management of the estate) contract with Telereal Trillium expires. This 20-year contract covers the majority of DWP’s current property portfolio of over 900 sites. This gives us an opportunity to review which offices we will need in the future, taking account of the increased use of our online services, the impact of universal credit and the anticipated demand on our services.

The roll out of universal credit and our reforms of Jobcentre Plus have increased the number of interactions claimants now have with us online. For example, eight out of 10 claims for jobseeker’s allowance are now made online and 99.6% of applicants for universal credit full service submitted their claim online.

As a result we only need 80% of the space we currently occupy to continue to deliver our services and make sure that people will always be able to access the support they need to get back to work. Moreover, we are recruiting and expect to have 2,500 more work coaches in post by March 2018 compared to today.

For the vast majority of offices there will be no change in location, although the purpose of the building may change. Where we are proposing closing a site we will take all possible precautions to minimise disruption for claimants, and vulnerable people will receive home visits and postal claims.

All of the planned changes will be made in consultation with staff, taking into account the impact on benefit claimants and DWP staff. We will do everything we can to offer staff affected alternative roles and want to avoid any redundancies wherever possible. However we do recognise that in a small number of cases relocation will not be reasonable or achievable for individuals working in our back-office functions and exits may be required.

We have already announced proposals for around 93 sites. A full list of our proposals for all of our remaining Jobcentre and back-of-house sites is available as an attachment online. There are a small number of sites which we are still negotiating with landlords. I have
indicated these on the list and will update the House when I am able to. I will be writing directly to those hon. Members whose constituencies will be affected by the proposed closures or moves of DWP services announced today. I will also be writing to my counterparts in the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

Attachments can be viewed online at: http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-01-26/HCWS439/.
Written Statements

Friday 27 January 2017

DEFENCE

Defence Equipment Plan

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): I am pleased to place in the Library of the House today the fifth annual summary of the Defence equipment plan. The plan shows the Ministry of Defence (MOD)'s progress in delivering an affordable programme.

The National Audit Office (NAO) is publishing in parallel its independent assessment of the affordability of our equipment plan. Its report notes the size, challenges and financial complexity of the Defence equipment programme. One consequence of the progress we have made to date is the agreement between the NAO and the Department to move from the NAO providing external assurance of the major projects report, to internal, but still independent validation by the MOD’s Cost Assurance & Analysis Service. The NAO also points out where we must continue to improve and refine our work in the future. We will continue to work openly with the NAO to demonstrate the financial robustness and affordability of the equipment plan.

The Government are committed to the Defence budget increasing by 0.5% above inflation each year for the remainder of this Parliament. We are planning to spend £178 billion on equipment and support out to 2025-26, which will provide our Armed Forces with the equipment to deliver Joint Force 2025.

[HCWS442]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

NATO Parliamentary Assembly

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): I wish to confirm that the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Jamie Reed) will be replaced by the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) as a Member of the United Kingdom delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

My right hon. Friend the then Foreign Secretary (Mr Hammond) published the full list of the United Kingdom delegation in his written statement on 23 November 2015.

[HCWS322]
Written Statements

Tuesday 31 January 2017

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): I represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, alongside my colleagues Fergus Ewing MSP, Lesley Griffiths AM and Michelle McIlveen MLA, on 12 and 13 December in Brussels.

EU quota negotiations, involving decisions on fishing opportunities for the next year for quota stocks in the North sea, Atlantic, channel, Irish and Celtic seas, were first on the agenda, and were ongoing for the entire duration of the Council. This was the third annual Council at which fishing opportunities were set under the rules of the reformed common fisheries policy, which aims to have all stocks fished at sustainable levels by 2020 at the latest.

The UK secured a number of crucial changes to the Commission’s original proposals including, where science supports it, quota increases for fishermen around all parts of the UK. This is due to stocks recovering after years of the UK’s insistence on limiting catches with sustainable scientific limits. Quotas secured include:

- North sea: cod +16.5%, whiting +17%, anglerfish +20% saithe +53% sole +22%
- Irish sea: haddock +25% and nephrops +8.6%
- Western channel: haddock +7% and sole +20%
- North sea hake +12% and western hake +9%

The quota settlement for 2017 is worth just over £705 million to the UK, around £34 million more than in 2016.

The agreement means that for 2017, 29 stocks of interest to the UK will be fished at or below their maximum sustainable yield rate (MSY), an increase on 2016, out of 45 such stocks for which MSY assessments have been made. At the EU level, 44 stocks are fished at or below MSY, as announced by Commissioner Vella at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/vella/announcements/agrifish-council_en

Where the latest scientific evidence supported it, the UK Government argued against unnecessary quota cuts proposed by the European Commission, securing the same quota as in 2016 for many species, including cod and sole in the Irish sea, anglerfish in the Celtic sea and whiting in west of Scotland.

There were some challenges especially on stocks like bass, cod, and megrim in the south west and sole in the eastern channel, where action is necessary to cut fishing mortality in order to allow these stocks to recover. However, we worked hard to secure an agreement that strikes the right balance for both our marine environment and coastal communities.

For 2017, sea bass catch limits from vessels using fixed gill nets were set at 250kg per month for unavoidable by-catch—a reduction of around 80% from 2016—while hook and line commercial fishermen saw their potential catch cut by around 23%. The restrictions on recreational angling will remain the same as in 2016.

Proportionate quota uplifts were agreed for demersal stocks subject to the landing obligation in 2017. As in 2016, the Government will continue to support the English inshore fleet to adapt to the landing obligation, by allocating to them the first 100 tonnes of quota uplift of a species and 10% thereafter. There will be additional quota uplift in 2017 for new species such as North sea cod and north western waters pollack.

A paper was presented on climate change effort share regulation and land use, land use change and forestry (LU/LUCF), discussed alongside the “any other business” item on agroecology. Many member states, including the United Kingdom, were broadly satisfied with the proposals outlined in the paper. The UK intervened to argue that a methodology should be found to ensure a fairer distribution of credits between member states.

After this, the Council agreed conclusions on tackling unfair trading practices in the farming supply chain. The UK managed to secure a wording change that lessens the chance in 2017 of burdensome EU legislation that could hinder our current work in this area, as undertaken by the groceries code adjudicator.

There then followed a political discussion on new regulation for organic produce, which will continue into the upcoming Maltese presidency.

Several other items were discussed under “any other business”:

- Austria lodged a request to maintain the current level of support for first generation biofuels, supported by other member states. While noting this remains the responsibility of Commissioner Canete, Commissioner Hogan informed Council that the reduction of support was very modest, pertaining to a very small part of the biofuel sector.
- France debriefed the Council on a conference of Mediterranean countries that took place in Tirana, Albania, where agricultural and rural development and migrations in the Mediterranean zone was discussed.
- Commissioner Andriukaitis informed the Council about the first meeting of the food waste platform.
- Commissioner Andriukaitis also updated Ministers on the work of the expert group on accelerating sustainable plant protection products. The advisory group recommended speeding up approvals of low-risk active substances, measures to stimulate businesses to apply for authorisations and the identification of low-risk products already on the market.
- Commissioner Andriukaitis announced that the new regulation on plant pests was now in force. The Commission sees this new legislation as allowing a much more proactive approach to the prevention of the entry of new pests into the EU. Malta, as incoming presidency, mentioned plans to establish fora to take forward further discussion on identifying further action.
- The Slovak presidency explained that the Commission had issued a guidance note expressing a preference for the use of the plant breeders’ rights framework, rather than the patent legislation to register new strains. This was welcomed by a range of other member states.

On 23 June, the EU referendum took place and the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. During this period the Government will continue to negotiate, implement and apply EU legislation. Leaving
the EU will present us with opportunities to better manage fisheries in our waters and become global champions for sustainable fishing, while protecting the marine environment.

JUSTICE

Courts and Tribunals

The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald):
The Government are committed to making sure people from all backgrounds can access justice.

Since fees were introduced, record numbers of working people have sought to resolve employment disputes either through tribunals or conciliation.

In 2015-16 there were more than 92,000 workplace disputes bought forward for resolution—the highest number since ET fees were introduced.

We believe we can improve on this, so today I am launching a consultation on proposals to extend support available to people on low incomes through the Help with Fees scheme.

Under our proposals, the monthly threshold for a full fee remission would be increased from £1,085 to £1,250—broadly the equivalent of someone earning the national living wage. There are additional allowances for people living as couples and those with children.

We will bring forward further measures to improve legal support in a Green Paper by early 2018 and the Prison and Courts Bill, due to be published shortly, which will enable more people to bring cases online, making it simpler and easier to access justice.

Under the extension to Help with Fees scheme, more people would not pay a fee at tribunal and others would contribute less than under current arrangements.

In particular the extended scheme would benefit women, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people and younger people, who all feature disproportionately among low income groups.

These proposals would apply not only to people bringing ET proceedings, but also to those bringing proceedings in the civil and family courts and most other tribunals.

We have also decided to exempt from fees a small number of proceedings related to payments made from the national insurance fund. Unlike most proceedings before the ETs, in most cases the applicant is unable to conciliate, and they are unlikely to be able to recover the fee from an employer which in many cases will be insolvent.

We have decided to take this action following the findings of the post implementation review of the introduction of fees in the employment tribunals (ETs), which I am also publishing today.

The review has undertaken a very detailed and thorough analysis of the evidence, and we have concluded that fees have been generally successful in meeting the original objectives.

The Government believe it is important that those who can afford to pay for ETs continue to do so. An extra £9 million a year is raised through ET fees.

The review concludes that fees have been successful in promoting conciliation as an alternative way to resolve workplace disputes.

The review states that“there is no conclusive evidence that ET fees have prevented people from bringing claims” and that higher numbers turning to ACAS is a “positive outcome”.

This indicates the current system is generally working effectively and is operating lawfully.

This does not mean there is no room for improvement and where we have identified issues, we have not been afraid to address them.

In particular there is evidence that some people have found the fees off-putting—even if they were affordable or they may have qualified for fees to be waived.

This has been addressed with a campaign to raise awareness of the scheme and a new online application form to make it easier for people to apply.
Written Statement

Wednesday 1 February 2017

HOME DEPARTMENT

Policing

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today laid before the House “The Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2017/18” (HC 944). Copies are available in the Vote Office. The report sets out my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary’s determination for 2017-18 of the aggregate amount of grant that she proposes to pay under section 46(2) of the Police Act 1996, and the amount to be paid to the Greater London Authority for the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime.

The allocations that have been laid before the House today are as set out in my statement of 15 December. This reflects the fact that the Government are committed to protecting the public. The Government will provide the resources necessary for the police to do their critical work, and prioritise finishing the job of police reform by enabling the police to transform so they can tackle changing crime, deal with previously hidden crimes and protect the vulnerable.

Following the principles set out on 4 February 2016 when setting out the final police funding settlement for 2016-17 [HCWS510] direct resource funding for each PCC, including precept, will be protected at flat cash levels compared to 2015-16, assuming that precept income is increased to the maximum amount available in both 2016-17 and 2017-18. No PCC who chooses to maximise precept in both years will face a reduction in cash funding next year compared to 2015-16. We have updated our precept forecasts for 2017-18 since February to reflect actual tax base increases in 2016-17.

I will continue to allocate specific funding for counter-terrorism policing to ensure that critical national counter-terrorism capabilities are maintained. We have allocated £633 million resource funding and £42 million capital funding to support counter-terrorism policing in 2017-18. In addition a further £32 million will be provided for armed policing from the police transformation fund in 2017-18. Police and crime commissioners will receive full counter-terrorism funding allocations imminently. For security reasons these allocations will not be available in the public domain.

This statement also includes details of other funding streams that the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Government intend to provide to the police in 2017-18. I have set out in a separate document available online the tables illustrating how we propose to allocate the police funding settlement between the different funding streams and between local policing bodies for 2017-18. These documents are intended to be read together.

Police capital

As set out in the provisional police grant report in December I still intend to allocate the majority of capital funding directly to local policing bodies.

Attachments can be viewed online at: http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-02-01/HCWS446/
Written Statements

Thursday 2 February 2017

CABINET OFFICE

State of the Estate 2015-16

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Ben Gummer): I have today laid before Parliament, pursuant to Section 86 of the Climate Change Act 2008, the “State of the Estate in 2015-16”. This report describes the efficiency and sustainability of this Government’s Civil Estate. The report is published on an annual basis.

[HCWS449]

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Growth

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): In the last Parliament, £7.3 billion of the Local Growth Fund was awarded to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through the first two rounds of Growth Deals. In the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor announced the regional breakdown of a further £1.8 billion of the Local Growth Fund. Today I am pleased to announce the individual awards that LEPs in the East of England and in London and the South East will receive.

Table A: Growth Deal 3 Funding Awards for LEPs in the East of England and in London and the South East

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEP</th>
<th>Funding Award (£m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buckinghamshire Thames Valley</td>
<td>20.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast to Capital</td>
<td>66.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise M3</td>
<td>71.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Cambridgeshire, Greater Peterborough</td>
<td>37.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hertfordshire</td>
<td>43.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>141.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Anglia</td>
<td>69.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire</td>
<td>24.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solent LEP</td>
<td>31.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East LEP</td>
<td>102.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thames Valley Berkshire</td>
<td>35.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This flexible funding sits alongside £475 million for Local Transport Majors and £2 billion long-term funding for housing transactions through the Home Building Fund. This was the most competitive round yet, and allocations were made based on a bidding round that took place last year. This honours our manifesto pledge to agree an expanded set of deals to empower the towns, cities and counties across the country to fulfil their potential and create an economy that works for all. The expanded deals will provide LEPs in the East of England and in London and the South East with the power and funding to support local businesses, unlock housing where it is most needed and develop vital infrastructure to allow places to thrive. The funding will also be used to create jobs, equip a new generation with the skills they need for the future and attract billions of pounds of private sector investment. This investment is Government stepping up, not stepping back, building on our strengths to boost national productivity and growth.

This adds to the £2.2 billion we have already invested in Growth Deals in the East of England and in London and the South East in previous rounds, providing targeted financial support to locally-determined projects in order to unlock growth.

The Government announces the award of £556 million to LEPs in the northern powerhouse on 23 January. We will announce the awards for LEPs in other regions over the coming weeks.

[HCWS454]

DEFENCE

War Pension Scheme Uprating 2017

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): The new rates of war pensions and allowances proposed from April 2017 are set out in the tables below. The annual uprating of war pensions and allowances for 2017 will take place from the week beginning 10 April 2017. Rates for 2017 are increasing by 1% in line with the September 2016 consumer price index.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>War Pensions Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**W AR PEN SIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disablement Pension (100% rates)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>officer (£ per annum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other ranks (weekly amount)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age allowances payable from age 65

| 40%-50% | 11.95 | 12.05 |
| Over 50% but not over 70% | 18.35 | 18.55 |
| Over 70% but not over 90% | 26.10 | 26.35 |
| Over 90% | 36.70 | 37.10 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disablement gratuity (one-off payment)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific minor injury (min.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specified minor injury (max.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5% gratuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-14% gratuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19% gratuity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUPPLEMENTARY ALLOWANCES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unemployability Allowance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adult dependency increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increase for first child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increase for subsequent children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
War Pensions Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invalidity Allowance</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>higher rate</td>
<td>21.80</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle rate</td>
<td>14.20</td>
<td>14.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower rate</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>7.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constant Attendance Allowance</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>exceptional rate</td>
<td>134.40</td>
<td>135.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermediate rate</td>
<td>100.80</td>
<td>101.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full day rate</td>
<td>67.20</td>
<td>67.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part-day rate</td>
<td>33.60</td>
<td>33.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comforts Allowance</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>higher rate</td>
<td>28.90</td>
<td>29.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower rate</td>
<td>14.45</td>
<td>14.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility supplement</td>
<td>64.15</td>
<td>64.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)</td>
<td>67.20</td>
<td>67.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic earnings limit (annual rate)</td>
<td>5,590.00</td>
<td>6,240.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionally severe disability allowance</td>
<td>67.20</td>
<td>67.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe disablement occupational allowance</td>
<td>33.60</td>
<td>33.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing allowance (£ per annum)</td>
<td>230.00</td>
<td>232.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education allowance (£ per annum) (max)</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td>120.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Widow(er)s' Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widow(er)s'—other ranks (basic with children) (weekly amount)</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>135.15</td>
<td>136.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widow(er) Officer higher rate both wars (basic with children) (£ per annum)</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7,187.00</td>
<td>7,259.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childless widow(er)s' u-40 (other ranks) (weekly amount)</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32.37</td>
<td>32.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widow(er) Officer lower rate both wars (£ per annum)</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,496.00</td>
<td>2,521.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supplementary Pension</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90.41</td>
<td>91.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age Allowance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>age 65 to 69</td>
<td>15.40</td>
<td>15.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age 70 to 79</td>
<td>29.60</td>
<td>29.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age 80 and over</td>
<td>43.90</td>
<td>44.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children's Allowance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase for first child</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.20</td>
<td>21.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase for subsequent children</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23.75</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Orphan's-pension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase for first child</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.25</td>
<td>24.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase for subsequent children</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26.55</td>
<td>26.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unmarried dependant living as spouse (max)</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>132.80</td>
<td>134.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rent Allowance (maximum)</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50.90</td>
<td>51.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult orphan's pension (maximum)</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>103.85</td>
<td>104.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council: 6 February

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 6 February. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting will be held in Brussels.

Foreign Affairs Council

The agenda for the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) is expected to include Ukraine, Egypt, Libya and the middle east peace process.

Ukraine

Ministers will focus on the importance of sustained international support for Ukraine’s reform process. The UK strongly supports Ukraine’s reform agenda which is crucial to build a modern, stable state. We expect discussion will also cover developments in relation to the Minsk agreements.

Egypt

Ministers will discuss Egypt’s bilateral relationship with the EU and Egypt’s role in the region. We expect discussions will cover Egypt’s political and human rights situation, including the growing restrictions on civil society. Ministers are also likely to discuss how the EU can help strengthen Egypt’s internal security, co-operate on regional stability and work together on combating illegal migration in the region.

Libya

Discussions will cover the latest developments in the Libyan political process. We will encourage the EU to consider how it can best continue to support the Libyan political process.

Middle east peace process

Ministers will discuss progress on the middle east peace process (MEPP) and may reflect on obstacles to peace including incitement, terrorism, demolitions and recent settlement expansion.

[HCWS453]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Post-Council Statement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): The first (informal) meeting of EU Interior and Justice Ministers during the Maltese presidency took place on 26 and 27 January in Valletta. The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), and I represented the UK.

Interior day began on 26 January with a discussion on reform of the common European asylum system. I intervened to reiterate the benefits of separating the proposed relocation mechanism for redistributing asylum

[HCWS450]
seekers between member states from the draft revised Dublin regulation—which the Government have not opted into—and to support activity, including engagement with third countries, aimed at controlling inward migration flows. Ministers agreed to take forward further work to define “solidarity mechanisms”, and on upstream engagement with third countries.

In the afternoon Ministers discussed IT systems for borders and security. There was broad support for the use of biometric data for law enforcement and border security purposes. I reiterated the Government’s call for more proactive sharing of criminal records and to encourage practical solutions, but warned that proposals for a single EU repository/system for fingerprint and DNA data may infringe on member state competence.

In the margins of the meeting, the Policing Minister and I held a number of discussions with other member states on issues including the extension of passenger name records (PNR) exchanges to high-speed rail links, and on the impact of the recent judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJE) in the Watson/TELE 2 case. Member states agreed to work together to make progress in addressing both issues.

On Justice day, Ministers held an exchange of views on the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (EPPO) and moved towards agreeing in principle a text that can subsequently be taken forward by member states under enhanced co-operation. The UK did not intervene in this discussion as we will not participate in the EPPO. The next General Affairs Council (7 Feb) will be asked to agree to ask the European Council whether this measure can be pursued under enhanced co-operation.

This was followed by discussion on a proposed insolvency directive to harmonise insolvency standards. The Policing Minister intervened to support the broad objectives of the measure, which reflect many existing principles of insolvency law in the United Kingdom, but highlighted that we still needed to analyse the detail of the measure. Most member states who spoke cautioned against over-harmonisation as this is an area where national laws and practices diverge.

Over lunch, the Commission presented its new draft legislation aimed at tackling money laundering and terrorist financing. The Policing Minister expressed support of the aims of the legislation as our criminal law is already in line with the proposal harmonising criminal offences and penalties. However, he reminded member states that the UK’s general position on refusing to be limited by EU common rules in relation to criminal law means we may not choose to opt in.

Avon Fire and Rescue Authority: Statutory Inspection

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): There have been long standing allegations made against Avon fire and rescue authority in respect of its governance.

In June 2016, the chairman of Avon fire and rescue authority approached the Department requesting assistance with launching an inquiry into concerns raised by members of the authority. That request was subsequently withdrawn by the chairman. In August 2016, and again in October 2016, I asked the fire and rescue authority to commission a full investigation, independent of the authority, into the allegations but the chair and vice-chairs of the authority have made clear to me that they do not intend to commission such an investigation.

In light of this response, I have today commissioned a statutory inspection under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 into Avon fire and rescue authority’s compliance with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions in respect of governance are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The inspection will focus on the authority’s functions in respect of governance, including, but not limited to, the authority’s duties of accountability and assurance under the fire and rescue national framework.

I consider that the extent, seriousness and persistence of the allegations made against the authority, together with the alleged failures to properly deal with complaints, if well founded, would indicate that the authority is failing to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. Such allegations would suggest that the authority is unable to deliver economically, efficiently and effectively now or in the future. As a result, I consider that a statutory inspection is appropriate in this instance and is in the public interest. I should make it clear that I express no view about whether or not the allegations are well founded, as that is a matter which will now be considered by the inspection.

It is in the public interest to ensure that allegations of this seriousness are carefully considered by a suitably qualified person of impeccable standing. Dr Craig Baker will be appointed as the inspector. Dr Baker is an independent consultant who has advised public sector organisations for over 30 years in the UK and overseas.

TRANSPORT

Airport Capacity and Airspace Policy

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): Today I will be laying before Parliament a draft airports national policy statement and beginning a period of extensive public consultation on the policy proposals it contains. National policy statements were introduced under the Planning Act 2008 and are used to set out Government policy on nationally significant infrastructure projects. This draft airports national policy statement sets out the need for additional airport capacity, as well as the reasons why the Government believe that need is best met by a north-west runway at Heathrow.

The draft airports national policy statement, appraisal of sustainability of the draft airports national policy statement, incorporating a strategic environmental assessment, an assessment of the policy under the habitats and wild birds directive, a health impact analysis, and an equality impact assessment will be made available online.

The airports national policy statement, if designated, will provide the primary basis for making decisions on any development consent application for a new north-west runway at Heathrow Airport.
For a scheme to be compliant with the airports national policy statement, the Secretary of State would expect Heathrow Airport Ltd. to:

- demonstrate it has worked constructively with airlines on domestic connectivity—the Government expect Heathrow to add six more domestic routes across the UK by 2030, bringing the total to 14, strengthening existing links to nations and regions, and also developing new connections;
- provide compensation to communities who are affected by the expansion including noise insulation for homes and schools, improvements to public facilities and other measures. This includes establishing a community compensation fund and a community engagement board;
- honour its commitment of payments for those people whose homes need to be compulsorily purchased to make way for the new runway or for those who take up the voluntary scheme of 25% above the full market value of their home and cover all costs including stamp duty, reasonable moving costs and legal fees;
- put in place a number of measures to mitigate the impacts of noise, including legally binding noise targets and periods of predictable respite. The Government also expect a ban of six and a half hours on scheduled night flights;
- set specific mode share targets to get more than half of airport users onto public transport, aimed at meeting its pledge of no more airport-related road traffic with expansion compared to today;
- implement a package of industry-leading measures to limit carbon and air quality impacts both during construction and operation; and
- demonstrate that the scheme can be delivered in compliance with legal requirements on air quality.

I have appointed Sir Jeremy Sullivan, the former Senior President of Tribunals, to provide independent oversight of the draft airports national policy statement consultation process and ensure best practice is upheld.

**Consultation on airspace**

We need to think about how we manage the rising number of aircraft in an efficient and effective manner. By taking steps now to future-proof this vital infrastructure, we can harness the latest technology to make airspace more efficient as well as making journeys faster and more environmentally friendly.

I am therefore also publishing proposals to modernise the way UK airspace is managed, which will be consulted on in parallel. The policy principles set out in this airspace consultation influence decisions taken later in the planning process for a north-west runway at Heathrow, if the airports national policy statement were to be designated, including how local communities can have their say on airspace matters and how impacts on them are taken into account.

It is an important issue and one that will define the principles for shaping our airspace for years to come. It is therefore sensible to allow members of the public to consider both matters at the same time.

The proposals being published for consultation today include the functions, structure and governance of an Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise, which we will establish. The Commission would build relationships between industry and communities, embed a culture of best practice, and ensure an even fairer process for making changes to airspace.

The proposed new call-in function for a Secretary of State on airspace changes, similar to that used by the Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government for planning applications, create a democratic back-stop in the most significant decisions, much called for by communities.

The consultation on airspace policy, new air navigation guidance and the strategic rationale for upgrading the UK’s airspace will be made available online.

**Aviation strategy**

The aviation sector is a great British success story, contributing around £20 billion per year and directly supporting approximately 230,000 jobs across the United Kingdom. It also supports an estimated 260,000 jobs across the wider economy.

I want to build on this success. My Department is currently progressing work to develop a new strategy for UK aviation.

This strategy will champion the success story of the UK’s aviation sector. It will put the consumer back at the heart of our thinking. The strategy will also explore how we can maximise the positive role that our world class aviation sector plays in developing global trade links, providing vital connections to both the world’s growing economies and more established trading partners. Connections that will only grow in importance as our trading network expands.

I will come back to the House to update you on our plans for the strategy as they develop over the coming weeks.

**Consultation and parliamentary scrutiny**

These two consultations will last for 16 weeks and close on 25/05/2017. At the same time, and as required by the Planning Act 2008, a period of parliamentary scrutiny (the “relevant period”) now begins for the airports national policy statement, ending by summer recess 2017.

I will be placing copies of all relevant documents in the Libraries of both Houses. Following consultation and parliamentary scrutiny, and assuming that in the light of these processes the decision is made to proceed, we expect to lay a final airports national policy statement before Parliament for debate and an expected vote in the House of Commons by winter 2017-18.

**WORK AND PENSIONS**

“Fuller Working Lives: A Partnership Approach”

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green): Today, we are publishing “Fuller Working Lives: A Partnership Approach”, a new employer-led strategy which outlines the demographic change facing the UK and the opportunities and challenges an ageing workforce present for employers, individuals, Government and for wider society.

We are living on average almost a decade longer than our grandparents. While this is good news, it also has implications for employers and the economy, as well as people’s own personal financial security, health and wellbeing.

In 2010, one in four of the working age population was aged 50 and over; and this is projected to increase to one in three by 2022. By 2035, people aged 50 and over will comprise half of the UK adult population (source: ONS (2014) population estimates and 2014-based population projections). Fuller working lives are important for individuals, employers and the economy.
For individuals, analysis shows that by delaying retirement until 65 instead of 55, a male average earner could have £280,000 extra income and might increase his pension pot by 60%. By retiring at 63 instead of 55, a female average earner who took a 10-year career break, could have £180,000 extra income and might increase her pension pot by 50% (source: DWP modelling, “Fuller Working Lives Evidence Base 2017”). Moreover, being in appropriate work is good for an individual’s health, both physical and mental.

For employers, in order to meet future demand it will be increasingly important to recruit, retain and retrain older workers. Over the next five years to 2022, there will be just under 2 million more people aged 50 years and over and 300,000 fewer people aged 16-49 (source: ONS (2014) population estimates and 2014-based population projections). We particularly want to support older workers to remain in and return to the labour market; one in four men and one in three women reaching state pension age have not worked for five years or more.

For the economy, adding just one year to people’s working lives could add 1% to GDP per year; that would be equivalent to £18 billion in 2015, according to ONS data (2015).

Leading employers have worked with us to identify the steps needed to ensure the retention, retraining and recruitment of older workers. The new strategy sets out the case for action business to business, as well as the importance of fuller working lives for individuals and the key actions that Government are taking. It is underpinned by analysis of the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of individuals and employers which are integral to the achievement of the fuller working lives ambition. To support individuals aged 50 years and over to remain in and return to the labour market and tackle the barriers to doing so.

I will place a copy of this strategy document and supporting evidence base 2017 in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS448]
Written Statements

Friday 3 February 2017

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):
A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Brussels on 27 January 2017. EU Finance Ministers discussed the following items:

Early morning session

Ministers were briefed on the outcomes of the 26 January meeting of the Eurogroup and the European Commission presented an update on the current economic situation.

VAT: reverse charge mechanism

The Commission gave a presentation on the proposal for a temporary derogation to apply a generalised reverse charge mechanism, which was followed by an exchange of views.

Current financial service legislative proposals

The Council presidency provided an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Presentation of the presidency work programme

The Maltese presidency of the Council of the European Union presented its priorities for ECOFIN over the next six months.

European semester 2017

Ministers adopted Council conclusions on the annual growth survey (AGS), alert mechanism report (AMR) and approved the Council recommendations on the economic policy of the euro area.

Basel Committee’s post-crisis banking reform agenda

The Commission gave Ministers an update on the progress made on the finalisation of the post-crisis reforms since the Basel meeting in November 2016, followed by an exchange of views between Ministers.

High-level group on own resources

Mario Monti, Chair of the high-level group on own resources, presented the group’s final report, which was followed by an exchange of views between Ministers.

EIB Economic Resilience Initiative

Werner Hoyer, president of the European Investment Bank, outlined the state of play of the Economic Resilience Initiative and provided preliminary evidence of its initial implementation and the ongoing fundraising process for the grant component of the initiative.

DEFENCE

NATO-led Kosovo Force

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning):
A new order has been made under section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable reservists to be called into permanent service in support of the United Kingdom’s contribution to the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).

The communiqué issued at the Warsaw summit in July 2016 makes it clear that the future operational posture, capability and disposition of KFOR will be conditions based and not calendar driven. Stability and security in Kosovo help to enhance the security of the United Kingdom. Intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities are important contributors to KFOR’s situation awareness and its ability to engage with local and international institutions, and of Commander KFOR’s ability to assess future posture. The UK has agreed to generate Human Terrain Reconnaissance forces to enhance the situational awareness of Commander KFOR to execute his mandate in Kosovo. This capability will operate in parallel with and within the ISR Battalion headquarters to provide command and control for UK forces.

Some of the specialist skills needed to meet this requirement are held within the Army Reserve. UK forces will deploy for a period of 12 months, consisting of two rotations of six months each. It is planned for the first unit to deploy in late March 2017. The number of reservists anticipated to deploy as specialists or in support of regular units is estimated at up to 22 per deployment.

The order took effect from the beginning of 23 January 2017 and shall cease to have effect at the end of 22 January 2018.

[HCWS456]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Environment Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):
I attended the EU Environment Council in Brussels on 19 December along with the Minister for Climate Change and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd).

I wish to update the House on the matters discussed.

EU Emissions Trading System (ETS)—progress report.

The Council undertook a full roundtable debate on the EU emissions trading system, on the basis of the presidency’s progress report. Ministers set out respective policy positions, and called for agreement at the next Environment Council in February. The presidency regretted that it had not been able to achieve a general approach, but felt that progress had been made on a range of technical issues. It identified the main issues to be resolved as rules for supporting sectors at risk of “carbon leakage” (where production relocates outside of the EU as a result of carbon costs); tackling the over-supply of emission allowances to provide a more meaningful carbon price signal; and management of the funds which support decarbonisation of the EU’s industrial and energy sectors. The Commission drew attention to the recent ENVI Committee vote in the European Parliament, setting out that this showed compromise was possible on ETS, and called on the Council to match the European Parliament’s timetable in order to allow trilogues to start in March. It highlighted the importance of reaching agreement on the EU ETS directive in order to demonstrate progress in implementing the Paris agreement and in providing businesses and investor confidence.

The UK thanked the outgoing presidency for its hard work and called on the Council to maintain ambition and pace under the Maltese presidency, with a view to finding consensus. The UK’s main priorities were addressing the surplus of allowances and strengthening the carbon price signal via an amendment to the market stability reserve; targeting carbon leakage protection to those genuinely at risk; ensuring that the modernisation fund...
was based on clear, collaborative governance; avoiding the infringement of member states’ fiscal sovereignty through provisions to allow member states to provide compensation for the indirect costs of EU ETS; and alleviating as much administrative burden as possible without undermining environmental integrity.

**AOB—Effort Share Regulation and Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation.**

The presidency gave an update on the state of play of these live legislative negotiations following publication of the Commission proposals in July 2016.

**AOB—Communication on Clean Energy for All Europeans.**

The Commission outlined the objectives and content of its recently published “clean energy package” and communication on clean energy for all Europeans.

**AOB—Report on recent international meetings: UNFCCC Marrakesh, 7-18 November (COP22).**

The presidency outlined the progress made at UNFCCC COP22 in Marrakesh in November. The Commission underscored its commitment to making progress on the 2030 climate and energy framework.

**The protection of human health and the environment through sound management of chemicals—Council conclusions.**

The presidency underlined the importance of the Council adopting conclusions given the ongoing work in this area including at international level. All who spoke endorsed the conclusions but stressed points of importance, including the ongoing regulatory fitness check (REFIT) of REACH, the commitments made under the 7th environmental action plan, the links to the circular economy package, the need to address endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) and more consumer information.

The UK stressed the need to ensure chemical policy continued to be based on a better regulation and a risk-based approach.

On this basis the presidency concluded the conclusions were adopted as drafted.

**AOB—REFIT fitness check of habitats and birds directives.**

The Commission informed delegations of its findings, presented in the recent staff working document on the nature directives, which noted that the directives were fit for purpose. The Commission noted that the EU should focus on smarter implementation. The UK welcomed the conclusions of the Commission’s fitness check (to improve implementation of the directives and not to reopen them) and called for more effective implementation together with the sharing of experiences on how to do this between member states. Many other member states made similar points and asked the Commission to actively focus on better tools and resources in order to achieve better implementation.

**AOB—Outcome of International Meetings: Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), 66th Meeting of International Whaling Commission and COP9 UNECE Convention on Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents.**

The presidency and the Commission informed Council on the outcomes of these recent international meetings.

**AOB—State of play of the Waste Package.**

The Council took note of information from the presidency and the progress it had made on negotiations of the waste package. The Commission agreed there was good progress and expressed hope a deal could be reached with the European Parliament during the Maltese presidency. On the substance, the Commission supported a common methodology for calculating recycling targets, separate collection, the use of economic instruments and ambitious recycling targets. Other member states intervened on topics of interest, including conflicting views on the levels of targets and reuse within the package, the phase-out of landfill and the proposed calculation methodology.

The UK welcomed the progress made under the Slovak presidency and emphasised the need to agree definitions and calculation methodology before setting targets. The UK also called for greater flexibility in the application of provisions on the circular economy and, while being supportive of the principle of reuse, highlighted the bureaucratic hurdles its inclusion in reporting could entail.

**AOB—Maltese Incoming Work Programme.**

The presidency gave a short summary of its achievements over the last six months. Malta, as incoming presidency, then explained its priorities, including a desire to build on the Marrakech COP22, advance both ETS and non-ETS negotiations and continue work to amend the waste directives. Priorities also included a focus on marine issues, including a development of a plastic strategy in the context of the circular economy, work on the nature directives, amending the restriction of hazardous substances (ROHS) directive and preparations for conferences of the parties on the Stockholm convention on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and the Rotterdam convention on the prior informed consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade.

**Further Environment AOBs.**

Council took note of an AOB from Austrian, French, Finnish and German delegations, supported by Czech Republic and Italy, which encouraged member states participation in next year’s European sustainable development week. Council also took note of an AOB from Hungary on the outcome of the Budapest water summit and an AOB information from the Commission on the communication on next steps for a sustainable European future. Poland presented an AOB on odour nuisance. The Czech Republic presented its AOB on the REFIT evaluation of the EU ecolabel.

On 23 June, the EU referendum took place and the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. During this period the Government will continue to negotiate, implement and apply EU legislation. The outcome of these negotiations will determine what arrangements apply in relation to EU legislation in future once the UK has left the EU.

[HCWS455]
**Petitions**

**Monday 23 January 2017**

**OBSERVATIONS**

**EDUCATION**

*The petition of residents of Birmingham Selly Oak constituency,*

Declares that Baverstock Academy should not be closed.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take action to save Baverstock Academy.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Steve McCabe, Official Report, 14 December 2016; Vol. 618, c. 921.]

*Observations from the Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb):*

The Baverstock Academy went into Special Measures in September 2014. The Department acted quickly to provide support to the academy’s senior leadership team and local governing body, monitoring attainment and progress closely.

When financial irregularities were uncovered in November 2015, the EFA issued the trust with a ‘Financial Notice to Improve’ (FNtI). The FNtI established that the Trust did not have the capacity to address the educational and financial issues at the school and the trust, on request of the Department, appointed an interim academy board in December 2015.

In June 2016 the LEAP Academy Trust submitted a special resolution to the Department for Education recommending that the Secretary of State terminate the funding agreement for the Baverstock Academy and allow the school to close.

Over the summer holidays and autumn term, officials worked to find a new sponsor for the school in order to allow the academy to continue. A number of high-profile sponsors considered the proposal, but after conducting their due diligence, they confirmed that the educational and financial issues affecting the school were too difficult to guarantee improvement and were therefore unwilling to take the school on.

Ofsted’s latest report published on 23 November 2016 confirms that the school remains in Special Measures. The Under-Secretary of State for the school system has considered all options and is now minded to close the Baverstock Academy.

There will now be a period of four weeks where we invite parents and members of staff to submit their views on the closure, ending on 7 February. We invite the petitioners to make their views known to the office of the Regional Schools Commissioner for the West Midlands through this process. All responses will be considered before a final decision is made on the future of the Baverstock Academy.

The Department will ensure that children’s education is not disrupted and will work with the LEAP Academy Trust and the local authority to identify alternative places for students where needed.

**FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE**

*Norfolk Island*

*The petition of residents of the UK,*

Declares that on behalf of residents of Norfolk Island, there is an identified historical, cultural, legal and constitutional relationship which Norfolk Island and the Norfolk Island people have celebrated since 1856 with the United Kingdom and the British people.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty’s Government to support the people of Norfolk Island to be able to uphold their right of self-determination in accordance with the United Nation’s Charter specific to decolonisation and humbly request the same right of self-determination as afforded to the people of the British Overseas territories.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Andrew Rosindell, Official Report, 23 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 1001.]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alok Sharma):*

Norfolk Island has been a Territory of the Commonwealth of Australia since 1914 and its governance is a matter for that country.

**TRANSPORT**

*Road safety in Southampton Itchen*

*The petition of residents of Southampton Itchen,*

Declares that there should be road safety measures introduced at the junction of Spring Road and Station Road in Southampton, after a series of road traffic accidents that have occurred in recent months.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Southampton City Council to review the safety at the Spring Road and Station Road junction and outline what actions it plans to undertake to ensure the safety of road and pedestrian users; and further that the council confirm the timeframe for implementing those changes.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Royston Smith, Official Report, 13 December 2016; Vol. 618, c. 762.]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):*

Local authorities are responsible for road safety on the local road network. Section 39 of ‘The Road Traffic Act 1988 puts a statutory duty on the local authorities to deliver an appropriate road safety education service and for the provision of a safe local road network. This includes road construction, accident investigation and analysis, traffic calming, setting speed limits and...
facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. It is up to individual authorities to determine how they meet their "statutory duty".

Traffic calming can be an effective way to reduce speed and improve road safety. It is for individual highway authorities to decide, in consultation with the local community, whether a particular road needs treatment and if so, the most suitable features to use. There are a wide range of traffic calming measures to choose from, including road humps, rumble devices (strips or areas), narrowings, build outs and chicanes. It would be inappropriate for the Government to intervene as this is a matter for the democratically accountable local authority.

The Department’s advice to highway authorities on the design and effectiveness of traffic calming measures is given in Local Transport Note 1/07: Traffic Calming. This brings together a summary of the research commissioned by DfT and other organisations, to provide advice on the use of traffic calming measures. It covers relevant legislation and the design, effectiveness and installation of measures. It is available from the Department’s website at:

Petition

Thursday 26 January 2017

OBSERVATIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

People of Syria

The petition of residents of Newcastle, County Down,

Declares that the humanitarian crisis in Syria has already resulted in thousands of deaths and shows no sign of a resolution; further that men, women and children are targeted by air strikes and, if lucky to survive, are being forced to leave their homes, tearing families apart and often resulting in further deaths; further that these people do not ask and do not deserve to be in this situation; and further that a peaceful means to end the war should be sought, rather than the continuation of air strikes.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to help protect the rights and lives of those affected by the war in Syria through the administration of aid, food and medical care to those who remain in the country as well as those who have been displaced; and further that the Government is encouraged to find a peaceful means to end the war rather than the continuation of air strikes.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Ms Margaret Ritchie, Official Report, 29 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 1490.]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):

The UK Government are deeply concerned about the appalling humanitarian situation in Syria. That is why the Government are committed to doing all they can to bring an end to this conflict and the suffering it is causing to millions of Syrians.

The Syrian regime’s prosecution of a military campaign against political opposition has brought suffering to millions and killed hundreds of thousands. The regime, with Russia and Iran’s support, has repeatedly carried out airstrikes which hit civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools. They have used indiscriminate weapons including barrel bombs, incendiary bombs and cluster munitions which may amount to violations of International Humanitarian Law. We are clear that, where there are allegations of war crimes, these should be investigated and those responsible held to account. We support the independent UN Commission of Inquiry’s investigations into human rights violations and abuses in Syria. We continue to call for all parties to comply fully with International Humanitarian Law and to ensure the protection of civilians.

The UK has undertaken airstrikes in Syria as part of Global Coalition action against Daesh. All missions are meticulously planned and every care is taken to ensure we minimise civilian casualties. The evidence from detailed assessments of each strike is that the UK has avoided any civilian casualties so far in this conflict.

The UK is at the forefront of the humanitarian response to this crisis, providing life-saving support to millions of people inside Syria and in neighbouring countries. We have allocated over £1.8 billion of our £2.3 billion pledge, and are working with our aid delivery partners to ensure we continue to respond as quickly and effectively as possible to needs as they evolve. Despite the denial of humanitarian access to many areas in Syria, UK aid is making a real difference. Since the beginning of 2012, we have provided across Syria over 16.4 million food rations and medical support to over 3.7 million people. In 2015-2016, UK aid helped almost 3 million people gain access to clean water.

Securing unfettered humanitarian access across Syria is paramount. The best way of delivering the large amount of humanitarian assistance that is required is by road, by trusted and neutral humanitarian partners who can ensure it gets to those who need it most. We continue doing all we can, through diplomatic means, to exert pressure on the regime, Russia and Iran to secure proper access and bring an end to their deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid.

We also continue to use all diplomatic tools at our disposal, working alongside our partners, to achieve a peaceful and negotiated solution to the crisis. As members of the International Syria Support Group and the UN Security Council, we have repeatedly called for a ceasefire in the hostilities between the Assad regime and the Syrian opposition to create the necessary conditions for political negotiations.

On 30 November and 13 December, emergency sessions of the Security Council were held at the UK and France’s request to discuss the situation in Aleppo. In those we called for the regime’s pitiless assault to stop and for the UN to be allowed access to help civilians on the ground. Russia has repeatedly blocked meaningful action in the UN Security Council, vetoing six UN Security Council Resolutions, including one on 6 December calling for a seven day ceasefire to allow the UN to get desperately needed aid to the civilians of besieged eastern Aleppo.

On 19 December, the UN Security Council adopted a Resolution which demanded full access for the UN across Syria and in particular requested the UN to monitor evacuations from eastern Aleppo. The UK strongly supported this action in view of our profound concerns at reports of atrocities by pro-regime forces as eastern Aleppo was being evacuated.

The UN Security Council welcomed Russian-Turkish-Iranian efforts to secure a reduction in violence through the ceasefire they announced on 29 December. We are concerned, however, about ongoing military action by the Syrian regime and Shia militia. It is vital that Russia, Turkey and Iran use their influence to ensure that the ceasefire is implemented fully to help end the suffering of the Syrian people.

Ultimately, the only real solution for peace and stability in Syria is an enduring political solution based on transition away from the Assad regime to a Government representative of all Syrians. We support fully the efforts of the UN Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to resume the political process through negotiations. Russia and Iran must use their influence and bring pressure to bear on the regime to return to the negotiating table and engage seriously.
Petition

Monday 30 January 2017

OBSERVATIONS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Climate Change

The petition of residents of Macclesfield,

Declares that climate changes impacts upon both people and places; further that the rapid progress towards ratification of the Paris Agreement is to be applauded; further that the UK requires a low carbon investment plan to transform the economy in line with the Climate Change Act 2008; and further that 1,100 individuals have signed a local petition on the same matter.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to publish an ambitious low carbon investment plan.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by David Rutley, Official Report, 30 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 1634.]

Observations from The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd): The Government remain committed to tackling climate change and to the UK’s Climate Change Act. Climate change remains one of the most serious long-term risks to our economic and national security. The Act introduced five yearly carbon targets to put us on a cost effective pathway to meeting our legally binding 2050 target. We need to meet our targets while keeping our energy supply secure and low cost.

The UK has already made great progress towards our goal. The UK is currently ranked third in the world for tackling climate change by the independent Climate Action Network. Provisional statistics indicate that UK emissions in 2015 were 38% lower than in 1990, and 4% below those in 2014. The UK met the first carbon target (2008-12) and is on track to meet the second (2013-17) and third carbon targets (2018-22).

The Government are looking ahead to our emissions reduction plan which will set out how we will reduce emissions through the 2020s. We recognise that the plan will form an important signal to investors, the markets and businesses. The Government are investing the time now to undertake critical preparatory work to ensure we get this right. This includes engaging across businesses, industry and other stakeholders on the shared challenge of moving to a low carbon economy.
Petition

Tuesday 31 January 2017

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH

Future of King Street Health Centre, Wakefield

The petition of residents of Wakefield,

Declares that King Street Health Centre is a vital service for Wakefield, and helps to ease the pressures on local GP surgeries, pharmacies, and Pinderfields Hospital; further that Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group is reviewing the future of the GP-led services at King Street Health Centre, as the contract is up for renewal in March 2017; further that the petitioners are concerned that closure or removal of services from King Street Health Centre would put at risk the future of the King Street Walk-in Service, which shares the same facilities, staff and building; and further that 1955 persons have signed an online petition in similar terms.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government and Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group to take all necessary steps to ensure that King Street Health Centre remains open and has the current contract for GP-led services extended to allow Wakefield residents continued access to health care.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mary Creagh, Official Report, 11 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 428.]
Petition

Thursday 2 February 2017

OBSERVATIONS

JUSTICE

Sentencing for death by dangerous driving

The petition of residents of the UK,
Declares that the death of James Gilbey in a hit and run on a pelican crossing is appalling; further that the driver who killed James was racing another car at speeds in excess of 90mph in a 40mph residential zone; further that the impact (adjudged to be 80mph) was such that James landed 70m down the road and was killed instantly from receiving multiple injuries; further that it is often the manner in which an object is used that makes it a weapon; further that the driver, leaving James on the road, fled the scene, disposed of the vehicle and burnt his clothes; further that we believe that choosing to drive and behave in this way is a calculated act, that should bring charges of manslaughter and not causing death by dangerous driving; and further that there is an e-petition on this subject, titled “Death caused by racing should bring a charge of manslaughter not dangerous driving” at https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/164488.

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to change the law so that death caused by racing should bring a charge of manslaughter and not causing death by dangerous driving.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Claire Perry, Official Report, 25 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 408.]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah):

In December the Government issued a consultation on driving offences and penalties relating to causing death and serious injury. It proposed that the maximum penalty for the most serious offences should be life imprisonment.

Driving offences can have devastating consequences for victims and their loved ones. Sentencing in individual cases is always a matter for the courts, which are independent from Government.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) can and will charge a person with murder or manslaughter where the evidence supports that charge, where it is in the public interest to do so and there is a reasonable prospect of a conviction.

The consultation proposed that those most serious driving offences of causing death by dangerous driving and causing death by careless driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs should have a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, the same maximum penalty open to the courts as manslaughter. The consultation closed on 1 February and the Government will consider the responses received and publish their response within 3 months.
Ministerial Correction

Thursday 26 January 2017

JUSTICE
Prison Staff

The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary of State for Justice on 24 January 2017.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Six major incidents in eight weeks is unprecedented in the 25 years I have been in this House. Following on from her reply to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), will the Secretary of State confirm that the figures to September meant a loss in that last year of 417 prison officers? When she says that she has to recruit 2,500 officers, does she not mean that in the next 12 months she will have to recruit 4,000 to make up those 2,500, and does she intend to do that?

Elizabeth Truss: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We need to recruit 4,000 officers over the next year. I announced initially that we were recruiting officers for 10 of the most challenging prisons. We have already made job offers to almost all those 400 people, so we are making good progress. We have recently launched a graduate scheme, Unlocked. Within 24 hours of announcing that scheme, we had expressions of interest from more than 1,000 candidates, so there are people interested in joining the Prison Service. It is challenging to recruit that number of officers, but we are absolutely determined to do so. It is what we need to do to turn our prisons around and make them places of safety and reform.


Letter of correction from Elizabeth Truss:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) during Questions to the Secretary of State for Justice.

The correct response should have been:

Elizabeth Truss: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We need to recruit 4,000 officers over the next year. I announced initially that we were recruiting officers for 10 of the most challenging prisons. We have already made job offers to almost all those 400 people, so we are making good progress. We have recently launched a graduate scheme, Unlocked. Within 24 hours of announcing that scheme, we had expressions of interest from more than 350 candidates, so there are people interested in joining the Prison Service. It is challenging to recruit that number of officers, but we are absolutely determined to do so. It is what we need to do to turn our prisons around and make them places of safety and reform.
Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 1 February 2017

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Homelessness Reduction Bill

The following is an extract from proceedings on Report of the Homelessness Reduction Bill on 27 January 2017.

Mr Marcus Jones: We have already announced more than £600,000 for a social impact bond in Greater Manchester to support entrenched rough sleepers who have the most complex needs. [Official Report, 27 January 2017, Vol. 620, c. 567.]

Letter of correction from Mr Marcus Jones:

An error has been identified in the speech I made on Report of the Homelessness Reduction Bill.

The correct statement should have been:

Mr Marcus Jones: We have already announced £1.8 million for a social impact bond in Greater Manchester to support entrenched rough sleepers who have the most complex needs.
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SIXTH SERIES
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