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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 11 June 2015

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Disabled People's Access (Public Transport)

1. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of recent progress in improving disabled people's access to public transport. [900245]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): The Department for Transport's 2015 annual progress report on promoting accessibility for disabled people on public transport has just been published, and it demonstrates good progress in achieving an inclusive transport system. The Government remain firmly committed to improving disabled people's access to all public transport services.

Chi Onwurah: In Newcastle, we are proud that our Metro was the first in the country to be fully wheelchair accessible, and I hope that the Minister will support renewed investment in it. That vision of inclusive transport should by now include talking buses, given that the technology is so widely available, but the Minister has done nothing to ensure that is implemented and has cut by half the budget for accessibility, so when will we have inclusive public transport?

Claire Perry: The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that 83% of buses operating in the UK now meet legal accessibility requirements, and that will rise to almost 100% by the end of next year. She is right to focus on talking buses—something that she and I have worked on with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association—but we have been advised that the cost of rolling that out across the country is prohibitively high. However, another way—I am sure that she, as a highly experienced digital expert, will approve of this—is to make all data on public transport open-sourced so that applications such as the Next Stop app, which is being trialled in Leeds, can be rolled out. That would give a much more personalised service to disabled people accessing public transport.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I am sure that the Minister welcomes the progress being made across the country in improving disabled access,

but will she look at the issue of theoretical access, where elevators are often left out of order for days, if not weeks, on end, making disabled access only theoretical?

Claire Perry: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that further.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, there have obviously been great advances in improving access for those with sensory disablement—sight and hearing problems. As people travel between the four regions, has the Minister had any discussions with the Minister responsible in Northern Ireland to ensure uniformity in access for those with sensory disablements across the whole United Kingdom?

Claire Perry: I have had not had those discussions, because I have only recently picked up that part of my portfolio, but my predecessor might have done. I shall apprise myself of the facts and, if necessary, would be delighted to have that meeting.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): We all strongly support proper access to public transport for disabled people, which is absolutely essential. As the Minister represents a rural area, as I do, does she agree that some bus companies simply cannot afford to provide that? One way forward must be through dial-a-ride services, such as the one offered by Bradies taxis in Malmesbury, which I launched last Saturday, whereby elderly and disabled people in particular can ring up and find small buses to take them where they want to go.

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend, whose constituency neighbours mine, makes an important point. Of course, I was delighted that the Government made money available in the previous Parliament to support exactly that sort of community access scheme.

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): The Minister's colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones)—I congratulate him on his appointment—said at a transport event last night that his door would always be open. I invite the Minister and her new colleague to start with disabled people's access to buses, because the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the Transport Committee have all said that the Government's exemption of bus companies from mandatory driver training is not working? The Government have ducked and dived on this: a review was first promised for 2014, then more evidence this January confirmed the disquiet, and this week I received a written answer telling me that there will be a research project—a review of the review of the review. Will she use the open door that her colleague spoke about to stop the buck being passed for disabled people on buses?

Claire Perry: All our ministerial doors are always open to all colleagues. I invite the hon. Gentleman to focus on the fact that almost 100% of drivers have now received some form of disability awareness training. We think that the future lies in providing public sector data, so that people can use an app themselves to make their

specific journey. The cost of providing this across the UK can be prohibitive, but we will have 100% accessibility on all buses by the end of next year.

Road Investment Strategy

2. **Stephen McPartland** (Stevenage) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to deliver the road investment strategy. [900246]

5. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to deliver the road investment strategy. [900249]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): The road investment strategy, published in December 2014, set out ambitious plans for £15.2 billion of investment in the strategic road network between 2015 and 2021. The Department created a new Government-owned company, Highways England, to focus on delivering this plan. Highways England published its delivery plan in March this year, setting out next steps for the schemes starting construction or completing by the end of March 2020.

Stephen McPartland: The widening of the A1M between junctions 6 and 8 will release the economic stranglehold on Hertfordshire. Will the Minister update the House on the Department's plans to start that work?

Andrew Jones: I most certainly can. As part of the road investment strategy, the A1M between junctions 6 and 8—the Welwyn to Stevenage stretch—will become a smart motorway. I cannot provide an exact start date for construction, but the next step is the detailed design and planning of the scheme, plus consultation with the local community to produce the best possible scheme. That work will be taken forward by Highways England. My hon. Friend has long been a keen champion of this scheme, and I will make sure that he is kept fully informed of progress.

Stephen Metcalfe: One of the things my hon. Friend and I agree on is the need for additional Thames crossings, but we potentially disagree about the location. Will he confirm that, before any final decisions are taken, he will fully evaluate the effect of free-flow tolling on the current Dartford crossing? Will he also look at whether what is currently proposed answers the question that was posed more than a decade ago?

Andrew Jones: It is rare, and always a matter of regret, if I ever have any disagreement with my hon. Friend. There is no doubt that a new crossing is needed. There are encouraging signs that the Dart charge is already bringing some relief to congestion in the area, and I can assure him that its impact will be evaluated and monitored carefully. However, I have major reservations about the suggestion to look again at all the schemes, as I do not want to delay progress. It has taken 10 years to reach this point, and we do not want to blight any more homes. Highways England is developing options for both possible locations and will take those to a public consultation scheduled for late this year or early next. I will be happy to discuss the matter further with my hon. Friend.

Chris Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): A road investment strategy is only as effective as the bodies that are tasked with delivering it. Will the Minister therefore have conversations with Highways England about its catastrophic mismanagement of the Posthouse roundabout A483-A55 junction in my constituency, where delays to commuters and huge costs to businesses continue months after the work should have been concluded?

Andrew Jones: I will have monitoring meetings with Highways England every month for the remainder of the time in which it delivers our plan. I want to make sure that it is on top of this and delivering it. The Government's ambition for the road investment strategy is significant, with £15 billion of investment, 127 schemes and 1,300 additional lane miles. It is a significant step change for our strategic road network. Its delivery is critical, and it is one of the top things that I will focus on. I will also focus on a method of communication from Highways England and me to all colleagues.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): One of the most important decisions made in the previous Parliament was the decision to proceed with the Mottram bypass in my constituency, giving us the much-needed improved connectivity between Manchester and South Yorkshire. There are now a number of issues to resolve to take the scheme forward, particularly whether Hollingworth will benefit and whether we can build a new tunnel under the Pennines, which, if feasible, will be very exciting. May I trouble the ministerial team for a short meeting in this Session to advance these matters further?

Andrew Jones: Yes; I am happy to do that.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Before the election, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and I had a very useful meeting with the previous Roads Minister in connection with the A15, which provides access to the Humber ports. Although this is a local authority road, some involvement with the Department will be necessary. Will the new Minister meet me and all the agencies involved at an early date?

Andrew Jones: The A15 is a local road and this will be a local decision. I know that a business case is being developed. I will be happy to meet my hon. Friend and local organisations such as the council or the local enterprise partnership. The key thing is to make the business case as robust as possible, and I will certainly help him to deliver that.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be very familiar with the A50. May I draw the Minister's attention specifically to the A50 where it runs through my constituency, where the slip roads are frankly dangerous? The weekly number of blue light incidents is alarming, and the number of near misses is deeply troubling. The Secretary of State will also be aware of the situation just down the road at the Blythe Bridge roundabout. Will the Minister look urgently at what is going on with that section of road?

Andrew Jones: I am not personally familiar with the slip roads as the hon. Gentleman describes them, but I will be happy to take this issue forward. If he would like

to contact me with any of his concerns, I will happily take them up with Highways England and then get back him with an answer.

High Speed 2

3. **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): What progress his Department has made on preparing for construction of the High Speed 2 rail line. [900247]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): We are currently undertaking a very significant level of activity to prepare for construction of phase 1. Preparations include growing HS2 Ltd's capability by bringing in senior teams with extensive experience of major rail and infrastructure programmes; commencing ground investigation works; progressing the procurement of contractors to undertake £750 million-worth of enabling works; and preparing to commence procurement of contractors for the main civil works this autumn.

Maggie Throup: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be aware, many Erewash residents continue to live with the uncertainty of the location of the east midlands HS2 hub. Will he press HS2 Ltd for a final decision on the hub's location?

Mr McLoughlin: May I welcome my hon. Friend and congratulate her on the fantastic result she secured in the general election?

No decision on the phase 2 route and station locations has yet been made. The Government intend to announce a way forward on phase 2 later this year. I certainly appreciate the uncertainty for those people around the route that is being talked about, but it is absolutely essential that we get the best possible connectivity to serve the whole of the east midlands. I think that we are all concerned to do that, but I certainly understand the concerns raised by my hon. Friend.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): To construct HS2 to Crewe, Manchester and Leeds, another Bill, or Bills, will need to be prepared. When will they be published?

Mr McLoughlin: Let us take one step at a time. As I have said, we have not yet confirmed the route. Once it has been confirmed, that preparation work will be undertaken. A separate Bill is being considered to deal with another stage to phase 2—phase 2A—which would go from Handsacre to Crewe.

Mr Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that progress on the preparations for the construction of HS2 have been delayed because of the antiquated Victorian processes to get permissions to build a major project of this nature? What are the Government's proposals to modernise and improve the procedures?

Mr McLoughlin: I think that I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his helpful question. It is right that we address people's concerns, and I think that we are making the progress that was set out when HS2 was first promoted by the previous Government. The Bill before the House is making good progress.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): First, I welcome the Secretary of State back to his departmental position. I am sure we will find many areas of common interest and purpose within this portfolio to assist people in Scotland and across the UK.

On HS2, what meetings has the Secretary of State had with the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities, Mr Keith Brown MSP, the Scottish Government Minister for Transport?

Mr McLoughlin: I note that Mr Brown said in another Parliament that he had not met me, but I have spoken to him on the phone on a number of occasions and am more than happy to arrange a meeting with him. It is very important that Scotland gets the benefit of HS2 from day one, and it will. Trains will continue to run on conventional lines once they come off the high-speed lines.

Drew Hendry: With respect to the Secretary of State's keenness to make progress, may I urge him to meet the Scottish Government Minister as a matter of urgency? Will he confirm that he will undertake to do so?

Mr McLoughlin: I will be more than happy to meet Mr Brown when a time can be found that is convenient to both of us.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The Select Committee on HS2 will shortly visit the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty, to see the stunning national jewel we are all trying to protect by getting extra tunnelling for the railway. May I invite the Secretary of State to visit the Chilterns with me—I know that he has visited on many previous occasions—to look at the AONB and to see why the tunnelling is essential to keep our manifesto pledges to “build new infrastructure in an environmentally-sensitive way” and to “maintain national protections” for AONBs?

Mr McLoughlin: As my right hon. Friend says, I have visited the Chilterns on many occasions, but visiting with her might be irresistible. [HON. MEMBERS: “Irresistible!”] I might stick by the first word. I will go and investigate, Mr Speaker and report back to the House. If it can be arranged and fitted in with my diary, I will be more than happy to visit.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I welcome the Government's renewed commitment to HS2 and look forward to the announcement later this year of the precise route for phase 2. Will the Secretary of State indicate whether any serious consideration is being given to advancing the date for construction of the Sheffield to Leeds section of phase 2? If it is, and if that goes ahead, what will that mean for the parliamentary timetable?

Mr McLoughlin: There is great demand from Leeds, Sheffield and other areas in the north for an accelerated programme, which I understand. It is right that we go through all the proper procedures. I am very pleased that all the attempts to judicially review the Department have been unsuccessful save for one, which was on a very specific item. It is right that we act properly within

the rules and the law to enable those developments to take place, but David Higgins is certainly looking at that, and I very much support him in that objective.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that the upgrade works to Birmingham New Street station are running more than a year overdue. What assurance can he give me that construction work on HS2 will not suffer a similar fate, causing disruption not only to my constituents in Lichfield, but to those of Mr Speaker in Buckingham.

Mr McLoughlin: How to curry favour, Mr Speaker!

My hon. Friend is right that there has been some overrun at Birmingham New Street station. There are occasions when big infrastructure projects overrun and do not come in on budget, but I point out to him the many projects that get done on time and well within budget. Crossrail is a fantastic tribute to engineering in this country, and it is on time and on budget. We are getting better at delivering such very big projects.

Aircraft Noise (Gatwick)

4. **Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce aircraft noise near Gatwick airport and its effect on communities living under the flight path. [900248]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): The Government recognise that noise is the primary concern of local communities near airports. Aircraft noise has reduced significantly over the last few decades and the Government remain committed to working with Gatwick airport, the Civil Aviation Authority, NATS, UK airlines and the Gatwick consultative committee, which includes community representatives, to reduce and mitigate aircraft noise.

Tom Tugendhat: I welcome the comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but add that my constituents are still suffering from the current airspace strategy. Will he confirm that environmental mitigation will continue to be part of the consideration in the implementation of airspace strategy?

Mr McLoughlin: In welcoming my hon. Friend to the House, I assure him that mitigating the aviation industry's effect on the environment has been and remains a key factor of aviation strategy. We need to strike a fair balance in our policy between the negative environmental impacts of aviation and the positive economic and consumer benefits that the industry provides.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): When does the Secretary of State expect to receive the Davies report on south-east airports, and how soon thereafter does he intend to make a decision on the future of airports in the south-east?

Mr McLoughlin: I expect to receive the Davies report shortly. I will not anticipate at this stage when a decision will be taken. When the report is received, I will make a statement to the House.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that those Cabinet Ministers who have a constituency interest in either of the airports will not be part of the Government's consideration of the Airports Commission's work?

Mr McLoughlin: I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government will act in a proper and open way in informing the House of the decisions they take once they have received the report.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): If Gatwick were to be given approval for an additional runway, what would the Minister's intentions be if either the airlines or the airport authorities decided to remove direct flights between Heathrow and major regional airports such as Belfast, which are the absolute lifeblood of my constituency?

Mr McLoughlin: Until I have received the report I am not going to start discussing what may or may not happen. What I will say is that I know how important connectivity between airports is to both Northern Ireland and Scotland. Those slots are incredibly important. I will bear that in mind, as I know Sir Howard Davies will, once we have the report.

Local Roads

6. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the condition of local roads. [900250]

16. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the condition of local roads. [900264]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): Road condition statistics for 2013-14 show an improvement to the local road network, with fewer main roads requiring maintenance than a few years ago. The funding of just under £1 billion that we are providing to councils this year—enough to fix up to 18 million potholes—should continue that trend. I am launching a pilot today, and when we launch the scheme next year it will provide councils with an incentive to ensure they are being as efficient as possible and that taxpayers' money goes further. That incentive will add up to £578 million by 2021.

Sir David Amess: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his promotion. Local residents are delighted with improvements to the A13 and A127, and with the record amount of money dedicated to road improvement, which is helping to deal with potholes. Will my hon. Friend reassure the House that road safety is a top priority, with particular regard to crash barriers?

Andrew Jones: I can most certainly provide that reassurance to both my hon. Friend and the House. Road safety is at the heart of our programme; in fact, it was detailed as a key objective of our road investment strategy. Work on road safety was the first work I commissioned in the Department, which I did within hours of starting. I hope that that shows my personal commitment to this subject.

Liz McInnes: I am very pleased to hear that funding will be made available to councils to enable them to repair potholes. I receive regular complaints about the condition of my local roads, with potholes a major issue. I am not going to name each road individually because they are far too numerous to mention, but when will the funding be made available to Rochdale Council so that it can maintain the roads to the standard my constituents expect and deserve?

Andrew Jones: We have already announced a very generous scheme. This year, a needs-based formula is allocating £901 million across England, of which the hon. Lady's council has already received more than £2.4 million.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Potholing has taken on a new meaning in the Ribble Valley and, quite frankly, it is dangerous when done in a car, on a bicycle or on a motorbike. The Minister mentions the £15 billion going into the road investment strategy. Cannot some of that money now be diverted, not into new roads but into existing roads to ensure that the potholes are filled once and for all?

Andrew Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in December a fund of almost £6 billion to take us up to 2021, running at £976 million per annum, to support local highway authorities with their highway maintenance. I am sure the feedback that I suspect we all receive from our constituents will be supportive of that.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The issue is not just about resources; it is about making sure that utility companies undertake proper reinstatement when they dig up the highway. Will the Minister look again at whether the regulations in respect of utility companies opening up the highways can be looked at afresh, so we can ensure our roads are reinstated to their proper condition?

Andrew Jones: The hon. Gentleman raises a very interesting point and I would be very happy to take that forward.

Cycling

7. **Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to promote cycling. [900251]

9. **Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to promote cycling. [900255]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): The Government are committed to doubling the number of journeys made by bicycle and to continuing the excellent progress we made in the previous Parliament when, thanks to a strong economy, we were able to invest record amounts in cycling. The Infrastructure Act 2015, which will shortly come into force, places a duty on us to produce a cycling and walking strategy. It will contain specific objectives and funding requirements to meet those objectives.

Graham Evans: Weaver Vale has many excellent cycling groups and initiatives, such as Pedal Power and Breeze, to encourage constituents of all ages to get on their

bikes. Under the last Government there was record investment in cycling. Will my hon. Friend please confirm that the Government will carry on the previous Government's excellent work?

Claire Perry: I know of my hon. Friend's great interest in and support for local cycling. Indeed, as a keen Boris biker myself—or perhaps they will soon be known as Zac zippers—I am delighted to support both my own personal commitment and the Government's firm commitment to making cycling the journey method of choice, particularly for short journeys.

Alex Chalk: As has been noted, cycling has been enjoying a renaissance in recent years. Will my hon. Friend reconfirm that new road schemes built by Highways England will be cycle-proofed to enable more of us to get on our bikes?

Claire Perry: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. He fought a marvellous campaign, and I know he is a keen cyclist. He was also one of the first MPs to lobby me on behalf of his own rail services. He is doing a brilliant job. Yes, I can confirm that the Government are committed to cycle-proofing any new road scheme—a really important change—and we have committed £100 million to do just that.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Is it not an act of the deepest cynicism for the Government, a few months before the election, to announce, in a fanfare of self-congratulation, a very modest increase in spending on cycling safety, only for that money to be axed in the first week after the election? Why should any of Britain's millions of cyclists believe a single word the Government say?

Claire Perry: I am slightly disappointed, because I know that the right hon. Gentleman is a keen cyclist, and I am sure he will know and welcome the fact that when the last Administration came to power, cycle spending across the country was around £2 a head; that currently it is around £6 a head; and that in the cycle ambition cities, it will reach £10 a head. I have been assured that the cycle ambition city programme, which the previous Government introduced, will fully deliver its outputs. He should welcome that.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): What steps is the Minister taking to make cycling safer, particularly in our great cities, such as London? There can be no greater deterrent to people getting on their bikes than their fear of cycling on busy roads.

Claire Perry: I am sure that, like me, the hon. Lady has had some very scary cycle journeys. We have to continue to work with cyclists. Bikeability training—so we start young—is important. We also have to make sure that any new road scheme does what road schemes of old did not do, which is make sure that cycling is “baked in” to those road designs. She will also know that we are working closely with local authorities and Transport for London to make sure that any pilot changes to HGV requirements are looked at carefully and, potentially, implemented.

Road Congestion

8. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to alleviate road congestion. [900253]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): The Government's road investment strategy has committed £15 billion to deliver 127 schemes over the next five years. Some of these schemes will tackle long-standing congestion and safety problems as well as major capacity enhancements around Manchester. On local roads, a programme of local road schemes with around £1 billion of departmental funding has been announced.

Jeff Smith: Wilmslow road, which runs through my constituency, is one of the most congested roads in the area, as a result of the large numbers of unregulated buses that pass down it. When does the Secretary of State expect progress to be made to allow the London-style bus franchising powers that Manchester needs?

Mr McLoughlin: We will say more about buses later in the Session, and I hope that that will answer some of the hon. Gentleman's questions, but it is also true that buses need a good road network as well.

21. [900269] **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware of the congestion at the Dartford crossing. It has been eased by the free-flow system put in place, but the administration of that system under the Dart Charge scheme is woefully inadequate and has caused misery for my constituents. Will he, as a matter of priority, please address this issue and end this frustration for my local residents?

Mr McLoughlin: I certainly understand the frustration felt by my hon. Friend's constituents. Indeed, the roads Minister has organised a meeting on this subject. This is a major change, however, and many people are saying that they are going through the tunnel and over the bridge a lot quicker. There have, therefore, been improvements, including in journey times, but the frustrations that his constituents face are not acceptable, and we will take them up with the company.

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made by the Government to ensure the affordability of bus travel for young people, particularly when, after September 2015, young people must attend work-based training or education until their 18th birthday—and bus travel is simply unaffordable now for many such young people?

Mr Speaker: Also, it can potentially relieve road congestion.

Mr McLoughlin: That is an ingenious way of bringing the hon. Lady's question into order, Mr Speaker. I absolutely agree with her about the importance of bus travel, and we have seen investment in buses. I am more than happy to discuss in greater detail with the hon. Lady some of her concerns about the accessibility to buses.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): As the Secretary of State and the rail Minister will know from visiting Bath before the election—I thank them very much for that—air

pollution and congestion are among the biggest issues in the Bath area. What does the Department have in process to invest in local roads, including in the long-awaited A36-A46 link road in my constituency?

Mr McLoughlin: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his fantastic victory. I met him and the council leaders in his constituency before the election and I know that they had some positive plans for transport. Given that the council has become Conservative controlled as a result of recent elections, I look forward to working with it to see those plans taken forward.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Would the Secretary of State and his Department support a strategic congestion commission for the city of York, where congestion is having a real impact on the environment, on businesses and on the lives of people living in our city?

Mr McLoughlin: It is important for local authorities to come forward with plans, but they also have to ensure that those plans are right and proper for the city. I will be interested to hear of any plans suggested and I will look at them.

Infrastructure Projects

10. **Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with local authorities and local enterprise partnerships on delivery of transport infrastructure projects. [900256]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I am delighted to say that this Government will spend an unprecedented £56 billion on transport infrastructure over the next five years. It is our view that this money is most usefully spent when organisations such as local authorities and local enterprise partnerships, which know best about the needs of local people and the community, are involved. That is why we consult them on every large national project and indeed why we are devolving local funding to them, putting them firmly in the driving seat for local decision making.

Jo Churchill: As my hon. Friend is no doubt aware, my Bury St Edmunds constituency sits directly on both the rail link from Norwich through to London, which I know is due for improvements, and on the A14 road corridor that connects Felixstowe, the country's fifth largest container port, to the rest of the country. Could the Secretary of State and Ministers visit the constituency to discuss a collaborative funding approach with the local enterprise partnership and other bodies to facilitate improvements on the A14 and the campaign for no more delays on that road?

Claire Perry: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. I saw her predecessor enjoying a small glass of wine in Westminster only last night, and he wishes her well. I would be delighted to visit, with other colleagues if appropriate, to see what is going on in her constituency. She will know that the local growth fund is already providing £8 million-worth of investment in Bury St Edmunds, including in the eastern relief road. I look forward to seeing that and to hearing about other projects.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I remind the Minister that many local enterprise partnerships and local authorities feel bypassed by Government policy at the moment when it comes to infrastructure? The northern powerhouse, which many of us have not yet fully assimilated, is one thing, but my constituents want fast improvement in rail and road infrastructure now.

Claire Perry: May I just gently say to the hon. Gentleman that there are some stunning examples, particularly around the Anglia region, where the east of England LEPs have been absolutely in the driving seat of delivering really good analysis and pulling in important amounts of funding? I suggest that the hon. Gentleman gets involved with his LEP and makes sure that it has the right people on board, because LEPs can be very powerful agents of change.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm the Government's willingness to work with the Solent LEP and the Isle of Wight council to set up an island infrastructure taskforce to examine the future of transport on the Isle of Wight and cross-Solent options?

Claire Perry: During the last Parliament, my hon. Friend brought in a team to make that point, and they argued the case very assiduously. I am delighted to confirm that our Department is committed to working with him and local partners to deliver the infrastructure upgrade.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): It is welcome that the Government are saying that decisions on infrastructure projects should be made locally, but later this year a Conservative Secretary of State will decide on the Leeds New Generation trolleybus scheme, which is being forced on us because the Labour Government said that we could not have a bus-based scheme. Will the Secretary of State now intervene, and allow us to make our own decisions about what is the best transport system?

Claire Perry: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I should meet to discuss the matter—I should be delighted to discuss it further—but, as I have said, we believe that local people are best placed to make decisions about local transport.

Rail Franchise System

11. **Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the rail franchise system. [900257]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): We continuously monitor a range of indicators, including performance figures and passenger satisfaction. Rail use is at its highest level since the 1920s: 1.65 billion passenger journeys were made in Great Britain on franchised passenger trains in 2014-15. The number of journeys made on the rail network has more than doubled since the introduction of the franchise system .

Anna Turley: Will the Secretary of State join me in urging Network Rail to upgrade the level crossing in Redcar town centre? West Dyke Road, which is a main artery into town, has been closed more than 15 times in the last year. Network Rail has promised upgrades, but they are not forthcoming. The problem is having a huge impact on small businesses, which are having to close, and also on bus routes.

Mr McLoughlin: I welcome the hon. Lady to the House. My hon. Friend the rail Minister will be more than happy to meet her to discuss the issue. Network Rail has a huge investment programme, and it is certainly trying to address the problems of level crossings.

18. [900266] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): As the Secretary of State will know, I was very disappointed that, at the time of its franchise bid, it was not possible to persuade Virgin Trains to provide a service to Grimsby via Market Rasen. It is already running four trains a day to Lincoln. Is there anything to prevent it, under its franchise, from extending at least one service a day to Grimsby via Market Rasen in order to serve that huge rural area?

Mr McLoughlin: I shall be happy to look into the matter, but I welcome the fact that the new franchise on the east coast is producing some remarkable new services, which will benefit towns that have not had rail services for some 50 years.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): London Overground and Merseyrail have transformed stations and services that were unreliable and unsafe under the previous franchise holders. In stark contrast, the recent performance of franchise-holders such as Southeastern has been woeful on lines that Ministers had considered devolving to Transport for London before rejecting the plan. Notwithstanding the rhetoric on devolution, the reality is that progress has been as slow and inconsistent as commuters' early morning trains.

There is a real appetite for taking on more services in the north, the west midlands and elsewhere. Is it not time to get on with that, rather than sticking with franchises that are failing passengers?

Mr McLoughlin: In 13 years, there was no devolution of rail services. We have done more to devolve rail services in five years than the last Government even considered possible, and I am very proud of that.

Network Rail (Investment)

12. **Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of progress in implementing Network Rail's investment programme. [900258]

15. **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of progress in implementing Network Rail's investment programme. [900262]

17. **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of progress in implementing Network Rail's investment programme. [900265]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): As the independent regulator for the railways, the Office of Rail and Road is responsible for overseeing and enforcing Network Rail's obligations. The ORR reports twice a year on performance in "Network Rail Monitor". The last report noted that there had been relatively successful delivery during control period 4, but that the expected progress had not been made in the early stages of the enhancement projects in control period 5. The Department is working with the ORR and Network Rail to ensure that the vital passenger benefits are delivered.

Conor McGinn: The latest figures show that the cost of rail season tickets held by commuters from Garswood, Rainford, Earlestown and Newton has risen by up to 25% since 2010. Can the Secretary of State explain to my constituents why the Government are allowing blatant profiteering that is ripping off passengers?

Mr McLoughlin: I am very pleased that in the last two years we have capped rail fares at RPI, and we have also promised to cap rail fares for the next five years at RPI, and that is what we will do.

Nick Smith: Costs are rising on the Great Western electrification project and there are fears that plans could lead to downgrading on the line to south Wales. The rail regulator's website this week slipped out that only two of the four lines west of Newbury might now be electrified. Will the Secretary of State confirm that this option is being looked at and whether the project has indeed been downgraded, and what the consequences will be for passengers?

Mr McLoughlin: I do not want to see any downgrading of our electrification programme. In the last five years we electrified some 50 miles, which compares favourably with the 10 miles managed in the 13 years of the last Labour Government. The electrification programme is a very big and ambitious programme and I want to see it delivered.

Nic Dakin: Any delays to the Network Rail infrastructure programme are a concern to those in the rail supply chain, including Tata Steel in Scunthorpe. Does the Secretary of State agree that essential track maintenance and renewal must go ahead in a way that does not affect the supply chain and threaten jobs?

Mr McLoughlin: The enhancement of the railways is important for the supply sector, but it is also important that that sector is competitive and provides Network Rail with competitive rates. We are all keen to see that. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that there will be a £39 billion programme of rail investment over the next five years. We are also looking at investment in High Speed 2 and, so far as railway track is concerned, we are looking at investment in Crossrail, too.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): What assessment has the Secretary of State made of progress in electrifying the midland main line and whether that would be enhanced by electrifying the branch line through Langley Mill and Alfreton in my constituency at the same time?

Mr McLoughlin: May I also congratulate my hon. Friend on his remarkable achievement with his majority? He has been a great advocate of further expansion of electrification on the midland main line, and I am happy to discuss it with him in more detail.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the rail investment programme is good but would be better still if we had more stations? He visited Stonehouse Bristol Road station in my constituency, which provides a very good example of why some stations should be reopened.

Mr McLoughlin: I am pleased that we have seen some stations reopened and some announcements of new stations. My hon. Friend and I did visit that station in his constituency and I am glad that, with his increased majority, he will continue to make a good case for it in this House.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Although investment in Network Rail's existing lines is welcome, my constituents in Lewes really want a second main line from Sussex to London, and the Chancellor kindly gave us £100,000 for a feasibility study in the last Budget. Will the Secretary of State update me on the progress of that study?

Mr McLoughlin: I know the Minister with responsibility for rail, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), is more than happy to discuss that project with my hon. Friend following her stunning electoral success.

Michael Dugher (Barnsley East) (Lab): Recent reports suggest that the Government are looking at breaking up and privatising parts of Network Rail. We know that under this Government Network Rail is still underperforming and needs to improve. That was again highlighted by the recent investigations by the Office of Rail Regulation—and just ask anyone enduring the misery that is commuting into London Bridge at the moment—but does the Secretary of State agree that the last thing we need in the railways is more privatisation and more fragmentation?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman should not believe everything he reads in the papers. I sometimes think he writes some of the press releases and then believes what he has written, but they always seem to be inaccurate. Network Rail has a very big job to do in delivering its enhancements, but it is no good complaining that the work inconveniences people because we are building a far better railway network, and that is absolutely essential.

Michael Dugher: That was not an answer, so we will try again. The Secretary of State's own Department—this is not my press release—refused to deny recently that it was looking at changes to the structure and ownership of Network Rail. The truth is we need improved co-ordination across our railways, we need to put right the fact that the only people who have no say in the running of the railways are the passengers themselves, and we need more public control, not less. Can he now tell the House categorically that his Department is not looking at or considering options to break up or sell off parts of Network Rail?

Mr McLoughlin: I always look at all the suggestions that are put forward, whatever they relate to. The hon. Gentleman says that I did not answer his question, but what he means is that he did not get the answer he wanted. I did answer his question: we expect Network Rail to invest huge amounts of money in enhancing the system, and I want to see that being done by getting good value for money.

Topical Questions

T1. [900235] **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): It is good to be back. Five weeks ago today, the British people gave us a clear mandate to finish the job of fixing our economy, paying off our debts, modernising our infrastructure and securing a better future. I am glad to say that no time has been wasted since the election. We have already seen the completion of the tunnelling for Crossrail and announced the train companies shortlisted to transform rail services in East Anglia. We have also confirmed that high-speed rail and the northern powerhouse are priorities, which will help to end the decades-old economic gap between north and south. This Government will continue with that job and that challenge.

Toby Perkins: The Secretary of State seems keen to talk about increased majorities. Many of the 21,829 people who recently voted for me in Chesterfield are concerned about the state of our roads. They are saying clearly that the state of Britain's roads is dangerous and damaging to people's cars, not only in Derbyshire but across the country, and should be a major priority. When will the Government take seriously the issue of potholes, and when will we see a serious plan to get them sorted?

Mr McLoughlin: I hope the hon. Gentleman will address the question he has just put to me to Derbyshire County Council, because I have substantially increased the funding available to that council to fix potholes. They have got the money; let them get on with the job.

T5. [900239] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State back to his place. In Lowestoft, we are now getting on with the preparatory work for a third crossing at Lake Lothing. A lot needs to be done in a short time, and I would be grateful if he could confirm that he will continue to work with me and the local community to get the crossing built as quickly as possible.

Mr McLoughlin: I have visited the site of the crossing, which my hon. Friend is keen to see completed, on no fewer than two occasions. He is to be congratulated on the scheme, to which the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have paid considerable attention. I have asked my officials to support Suffolk County Council and the local enterprise partnership in taking forward the scheme, and I understand that a meeting took place in Lowestoft last Friday to maintain the momentum. I am sure that my hon. Friend will keep up the pressure on us.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): This was the week in which Ministers boasted that they were going to cut red tape by replacing the counterpart driving licence with an online system. That is a good objective. The trouble is that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's computer system has already crashed under the strain. Motorists who want to hire a car abroad now have to contact the DVLA online and obtain a code in order to access the same information that they would previously have had in their pocket, and if they do not hire the car within three days, they will have to go back to square one because the code will have expired. Mr Speaker, you could not make it up! Cutting red tape? It's a mess, isn't it?

Mr McLoughlin: The simple fact is that people do not have to do that online; they can phone. There was a problem on the first morning of the new system, but since then it has been operating successfully.

T8. [900242] **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his tremendous support in helping us to secure a direct train service from London to Shrewsbury. Initial results from Virgin show that the passenger numbers are very encouraging. Our next priority is to secure the electrification of the line from Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury. Will he meet a delegation from Shropshire, to enable him to understand the urgency of this matter?

Mr McLoughlin: All my colleagues are urging me to agree to extra investment and extra spending, and I am keen to do that where a good case can be made for it. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for rail will be more than happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the matter.

T2. [900236] **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State clear up the confusion caused by the Chancellor's recent comments about a separate rail franchise for Devon and Cornwall? He will be aware that those bits of the First Great Western franchise are the least profitable. Is there not a danger that they would be unviable on their own, and that we would suffer service cuts?

Mr McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said what I would say as well—that we are always looking at ways to improve the franchising system and the service for passengers. I very much hope that new rolling stock will be announced for that particular line in the not too distant future.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): What level of assurance can my right hon. Friend give to my constituents who most frequently use the Great Eastern and West Anglia lines that the outcome of the Greater Anglia franchising process will lead to new rolling stock?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), for Ipswich (Ben Gummer) and for Chelmsford (Mr Burns), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), on leaving us in no doubt of the importance of upgraded, improved rolling stock on

that franchise. We are looking at all rolling stock options as part of the process and high quality points will be awarded for proposals to upgrade the franchise. The invitation to tender will be provided to bidders in August of this year.

T3. [900237] **Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Now that HS2 Ltd has declared that it sees no business case for extending the high-speed line to Scotland, will the Secretary of State confirm that it is now an England-only railway and that full Barnett consequential for the devolved countries will be announced in the next comprehensive spending review?

Mr McLoughlin: I do not accept that at all. Indeed, I have said that I want to see services going to Scotland, and one of the points in the report by Sir David Higgins about faster services was that those will go on to north Wales as well.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for confirming a further announcement on phase 2 of High Speed 2, but a number of my constituents are affected by blight in relation to HS2 Ltd. Will he encourage representatives of the company to meet with my constituents to discuss the severe impact on their businesses and homes?

Mr McLoughlin: I understand the point made by my hon. Friend. With big infrastructure schemes such as HS2, announcing the route always brings problems for people living along it. I am more than happy to meet her and see if more can be done by HS2 Ltd.

T4. [900238] **Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): This week we have heard further reports of delays to the decisions about another runway in London. Will the Secretary of State comment on when he thinks that the Government will finally make a decision about whether to have a third runway at Heathrow?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Lady may read reports, but I suggest that she should not believe everything that she reads. We have not yet had the report. When we have had the report, I will make a statement to the House and set out the proposals and our intended way forward.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): One measure that would help enormously with aviation capacity issues in the south-east, in particular given the worries of my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), is the reopening of Manston airport. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his visit to that location only a couple of months ago. The PricewaterhouseCoopers report is now with his Department, so will he agree to meet me as soon as possible to discuss its implications?

Mr McLoughlin: I am more than happy to meet my hon. Friend and his neighbour to discuss the PwC report, although I have yet to see it.

T7. [900241] **Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): The Secretary of State may be aware that a tender process is under way for the Northern rail franchise.

Salford and Eccles is a densely populated urban area that requires good transport links to the rest of Greater Manchester and beyond but, like many northern cities, it enjoys a less than favourable rail service. Favourable rail services are essential for the economic growth and regeneration of areas such as Salford and Eccles. What action will the Secretary of State take to ensure that the Northern rail franchise tender process provides for an increased level of rail provision, including more frequent services and better connectivity to our cities across the north?

Mr McLoughlin: I fully accept how important rail services are to the hon. Lady's constituents and those in neighbouring constituencies, and that is why we are investing hugely in the northern hub. As she knows, investment that is finishing off at Victoria station at the moment is incredibly impressive. Furthermore, I am sure that she will join me in thanking the Government for announcing that we will get rid of the Pacers. They were there throughout the previous Labour Government, but we have announced that they will go after 40 years.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Maximising the number of contributors demands brevity, which in any case is expected of topical questions. In looking for the textbook example of the genre, my gaze focuses on someone with 27 years' service, who can provide the tutorial—Sir Gerald Howarth.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows, I am a practising aviator. Indeed, I believe I am the only Member of this House who performs aerobatics, and so I believe we can never have too many runways. In that spirit, may I ask him to assure the House that he has not ruled out additional runway capacity at both London Gatwick and London Heathrow?

Mr McLoughlin: Given your recent ruling, Mr Speaker, I shall say that I am awaiting delivery of the Howard Davies report. When I have it, I will make a further statement to the House.

T9. [900243] **Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): Last week, I attended the handover ceremony at Enfield Town station whereby some suburban rail lines were transferred to London Overground. Its promise of a better service and cheaper fares is good news for commuters. But how does the Minister intend to ensure that all passengers, across Enfield and beyond, will get a fair deal, given that some are having to pay National Rail pay-as-you-go fares simply because their services are operated by Govia Thameslink Railway or Abellio Greater Anglia, and not London Overground? Will she put pressure on those companies to match London Overground?

Claire Perry: The Government welcome the devolution of these inner services to the Mayor and Transport for London, which, again, demonstrates our support for devolution when appropriate. However, many people using those lines will be coming from further afield, and the national franchising system provides the best way to secure rail services. We are freezing rail fares for the next

five years and working extremely hard to deliver a massive infrastructure improvement that will benefit the right hon. Lady's constituents, as well as those across the UK.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): A collapsed wall is blocking one lane of an already congested road through the centre of Shipley. That wall is owned by Network Rail. My constituents have been waiting for months for it to be repaired by Network Rail, but it keeps delaying and we now face a further three-month delay before the wall is fixed. Will the Minister get Network Rail to pull its finger out and get that wall repaired straightaway?

Mr McLoughlin: Yes.

Mr Speaker: May I say to the Secretary of State, given my knowledge of the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), that he is very wise?

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Secretary of State is aware that the funding for the coastguard tug currently stationed in Orkney is guaranteed only until the end of this financial year. Will he convene a round-table meeting, perhaps involving Scottish Ministers, local authorities and industry representatives, to see how we might find a way of keeping this most vital provision in place in the future?

Mr McLoughlin: I am aware of the vessel, partly because I visited it with the right hon. Gentleman in the last Parliament, and I am more than happy to meet him to discuss this matter.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that money allocated to the regional air connectivity fund has been safeguarded and that it will continue to support public obligation services such as that currently enjoyed by Newquay airport in my constituency?

Mr McLoughlin: I have used that service on a few occasions in the past year, and it has been very much welcomed. That funding is there for the duration of that contract and then we will look further at things once it comes to an end.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Graham Allen. He is not here. I call Barry Gardiner.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Woodland Trust has identified 43 ancient woodlands that are threatened by HS2. Will the Secretary of State advise the House of the measures he will take in the ambitious infrastructure roll-out programme he talked about earlier to protect further bodies of ancient woodland?

Mr McLoughlin: It is important that we do our best to protect woodlands wherever we can. I would also point out to the hon. Gentleman that 2 million more trees are to be planted on the proposed route.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to disappoint colleagues; the demand is greater than ever, which is a very healthy phenomenon, but I am afraid that supply is finite.

Business of the House

10.34 am

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 15 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Scotland Bill (day 1).

TUESDAY 16 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the European Union Referendum Bill (day 1), followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to landfill tax.

WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE—Opposition day (2nd allotted day). There will be a debate on Opposition motions, including on productivity.

THURSDAY 18 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the European Union Referendum Bill (day 2).

FRIDAY 19 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 22 June will include:

MONDAY 22 JUNE—Second Reading of the Education and Adoption Bill.

TUESDAY 23 JUNE—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the European Union (Finance) Bill followed by motion relating to the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE—Opposition day (3rd allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 25 JUNE—General debate: subject to be announced. In future, this day will be allocated to the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 26 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business. I read in *The Times* this morning, rather than hearing in his future business, that the Government plan to rush through their controversial plans for English votes for English laws as early as next week. We have had no detail on those proposals, and no debate is scheduled. Apparently, the Government plan to change Standing Orders and avoid having to legislate. As this is a matter of serious constitutional significance, may I ask the Leader of the House to confirm what his plans are, when he intends to bring them before this House, and how he intends to ensure that all Members have a proper chance to have a say in any change?

At his Mansion House speech last night, the Chancellor pledged to pass a law to ensure that he keeps his own promises. It is easy to see why he needs one, given his abysmal economic record in the previous Parliament. He missed his own deficit reduction target, leaving himself a deficit of £75 billion, and he borrowed £200 billion more than he said he would five years ago. It is no wonder that he needs an emergency Budget to clear up the mess he left himself in. He sprayed around £25 billion of unfunded election spending commitments, and he has no idea where he will find his £12 billion of social security cuts. Is the British Chambers of Commerce not right to say that the Chancellor is just as likely to miss his latest deficit target as he was to miss all the rest?

Last night, the Governor of the Bank of England declared in the City that the age of irresponsibility was over, and he called for tougher rules to drive out continuing major market abuse. Instead of political trickery to distract us from the Chancellor's record, may we have a debate in Government time on the fair and effective markets review, and a statement from the Chancellor on the legislative action he plans to take better to control ethical drift in the City?

At the weekend, I actually thought the Prime Minister had broken the habit of a lifetime and done something prime ministerial by putting the interests of the country ahead of those of his party. At the G7, he briefed the press that his Ministers would have to back his position on the EU or else. He even dispatched the ever dutiful hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton) to warn on the "Today" programme that Ministers who do not agree with the Prime Minister would have to quit the Government. But a few hours later, he was in full retreat. By Monday lunchtime, the Bavarian hills were alive with the sound of U-turns. I know that before the election he admitted that he cries at "The Sound of Music", but it is not "Edelweiss" that gets him now; it is "How do you solve a problem like Back Benchers?"—talk about the Con Trapps!

Last week, I highlighted the Leader of the House's poor record on answering written questions, and I am beginning to worry that his old habits are returning. I have now asked him this question twice but have had no answer. Given that the Prime Minister has pre-resigned, and the UK Independence party leader has unresigned, will the Leader of the House, who is a notable Eurosceptic, tell us whether he will have to resign to fight for a no vote in the looming referendum?

It has not been a good week for the smaller parties. UKIP launched an attack on Sainsbury's supermarket because it mistakenly thought a supermarket chain was funding the EU referendum yes campaign; it has attacked the LGBT community as "bigots" after being banned from London Pride, the irony apparently being completely lost on it; and last night its former chief of staff went on TV and said that UKIP is full of

"rag-tag, unprofessional, embarrassing people"

and revealed that it had had to lock certain doors because the people behind those doors were too embarrassing to be seen.

And what about the Scottish National party? The vaingloriously self-styled Scottish 56 have now been in Parliament for nearly a month. They promised to make the Scottish lion roar at Westminster—

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Grrr!

Ms Eagle: But, as we hear, so far it has been more of a whimper. As of Friday, of the 1,300 oral questions asked of Government, as far as I can see they have barely managed one each. They tabled what they thought was a reasoned amendment to the Second Reading of the Scotland Bill, but it was so badly drafted that it was ruled out of scope and not selected, so they could not even vote on it. They tried to amend the European Union Referendum Bill, but forgot to put their leader's name on the amendment. I am sure it was just a coincidence that the name of the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) appeared at the top instead.

To cap it all, one of the SNP's most senior Members, who has been here since 2005—

Mr MacNeil: Senior?

Ms Eagle: Most long-standing, anyway. He failed to vote on the Second Reading of the European Union Referendum Bill because he was cowering in the toilet in the wrong Lobby. In the light of all this, the SNP's grand plans to shake up Westminster appear to be going rapidly down the pan.

Chris Grayling: Let me start with English votes for English laws, which the hon. Lady raised at the start of her remarks. I urge her not always to believe everything she reads in the papers. We will shortly make proposals on this front and we will discuss them in the House. There will be time for hon. Members on both sides to give them consideration and there will be a full and proper debate on them. We will naturally ensure that the House gets the opportunity to give them full consideration, as all parties would expect, and I will, of course, discuss them with her and with the other parties when we are ready to do so.

On the Mansion House speech last night and the Chancellor's plans, the hon. Lady should take a look in the mirror when she talks about those who should be taking note of the need for better management of our economy. I remind her that this Government and our predecessor the coalition have over the past five years brought down step by step the largest peacetime deficit in this country's history. Why did we have to do that? Because of the actions of the Labour party in government, by its own admission and that of many of its leading lights. I have been reading with great interest in *The Times* this week the post-mortem of Labour's election defeat. What comes through most strongly is that the party never got to grips with the fact that it messed up the economy. If we need good practices in this country in future, it is to make sure that Labour does not wreck things again.

The hon. Lady also referred to the comments made by the Governor of the Bank of England. If she wants a debate on the fair and effective markets review, as I said earlier there are two Opposition days coming up shortly. The Opposition are, of course, free to have that debate. If it is a question of ensuring good practice in the City of London and in our banking sector, I ask her to remember who it was who knighted Fred Goodwin. This party has nothing to be ashamed of in our work to sort out a massive problem that we inherited. Labour Members should be embarrassed about how they changed regulation, knighted the people who messed things up for us and now pretend that none of that ever happened.

The hon. Lady asked me about resignation. I am rather enjoying our Thursday exchanges, but I reassure her that the first person to leave our discussions at the Dispatch Box will not be me. When she becomes deputy leader of the Labour party, as I am sure she will, she will be moving on to a new job in the very near future and I will be facing a new person across the Dispatch Box.

I am not only a little concerned by the fact that the hon. Lady has had only one new declaration this week; I am worried that I may be a jinx on Labour contests embarked upon by people who shadow me. Only this

week I discovered that the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who was my shadow in the previous Parliament and who is standing to be the Labour candidate for Mayor of London, has not even got the support of his own constituency party—it is voting for Tessa Jowell. May I seek the hon. Lady's reassurance that her constituency party is supporting her for the deputy leadership of the Labour party?

Finally, this week has seen one of the great sporting events of this country in my constituency, and I have to boast about it. It is of course the Epsom derby, a magnificent event, attended by large numbers of people, a great race, a fine finish, a worthy winner in Frankie Detorri. I offer my congratulations to everybody involved in making it such a successful event. But the attention of the bookies is turning this week to a different race, a race that is taking place rather closer to this Chamber. Each morning at around 7 o'clock a queue of Labour Members of Parliament forms, a queue of Scottish National party Members of Parliament forms, and when the door opens there is an unseemly race for the seats. Given that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) is involved in that race, I am concerned for his welfare, and I wonder whether we should order a health and safety investigation to make sure that no one is injured in this daily fracas.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Perhaps we can return to the important subject of the business of the House for next week. I look with some confidence to a senior stateswoman in the House to provide an example of the brevity that is required on these occasions. I call Mrs Cheryl Gillan.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): My inspirational constituent, nine-year-old Archie Hill, has Duchenne muscular dystrophy, and with his parents Gary and Louisa has been campaigning to get NHS access to Translarna, the first treatment to address the underlying genetic cause of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The process for clearance by NHS England was stopped in December 2014 but the decision is due in the next few weeks. May we have an urgent debate to reinforce the desperate need for this drug for those individuals whose quality of life could be drastically improved by immediate access to Translarna?

Chris Grayling: I suspect that many of us in the House have constituents and families of constituents who have come to see us, having experienced the dreadful impact of Duchenne muscular dystrophy, and our hearts go out to all those who suffer from this dreadful disease. The matter will be debated in Westminster Hall next week. It is a matter that is very much on the agenda of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I know that he will make more information available to the House shortly.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business.

May I say to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) that my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan Iar (Mr MacNeil) was merely practising his roar in the bathroom last week, and a very impressive roar it is

[Pete Wishart]

too—[*Interruption.*]—as one can hear. When it comes to opposition, it sometimes helps to actually oppose, rather than voting with the Conservatives for two weeks in a row—Labour voting with the Tories, the Tories voting with the Labour party. The SNP Benches are where the real opposition takes place.

We all immensely enjoyed the Chancellor's Mansion House speech, and I understand that we are about to have a statement, not from the Chancellor but from a junior Treasury Minister, about the plans to sell off RBS shares at a knock-down price. I hope we are also going to hear something about the other stuff that was mentioned in the Mansion House speech last night, not least the proposal to put in place plans for a fiscal surplus, binding future Governments. To me that looks like setting in stone this Government's austerity plans and balancing the books on the backs of the most marginal and vulnerable in our community, so we need to hear clearly the Government's intention in that regard.

Next week we have two days on the Floor of the House to consider amendments to the European Union Referendum Bill, and there are still outstanding issues in relation to 16 and 17-year-old voters, the franchise and the date of the election. If the referendum date is not changed, we could face the ridiculous and absurd prospect next May of 16 and 17-year-olds being ID-ed in the ballot station as they get around to the business of voting in the Scottish Parliament elections, and being booted out and not allowed to participate in the EU referendum. We need to hear clearly that the Government are ruling out any prospect of an EU referendum on the date of the Scottish Parliament elections.

Lastly, it is quite clear now that the Government intend to rush through their plans for English votes for English laws. It may not be next week or the week after, but they have already said that there will be no legislation and no scrutiny. There are huge constitutional issues in this, not least for you, Mr Speaker, as you will be placed in an invidious political situation, where you may be asked to certify whether I and my hon. Friends can vote on significant issues that may have an impact on our constituents. We need a full and proper debate about this. We need to hear when the Leader of the House will bring forward the proposals and how we are to have full consultation and a full debate.

Chris Grayling: I have noticed the battle taking place between the two parties across the Floor of the House over who is the real Opposition. I suspect that battle will continue for some considerable time. All I would say to the House is that while it is going on, we will carry on governing the country and doing the right thing for our constituents.

The hon. Gentleman made a comment about the speech made at the Mansion House last night by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and talked about austerity. I do not think he quite understands what a basic and simple concept this is: it is a good idea that people live within their means. That is what we stand for. It is his party that stands for irresponsibility, and that irresponsibility is what got this country into a mess in the first place. It is absolutely right that we should be responsible in the future. I am just disappointed that Scottish nationalists simply do not understand that.

On the European Union Referendum Bill, of course I have seen the amendments SNP Members have tabled. They will be debated next week and we will see whether the House supports them.

On English votes for English laws, as I said earlier, we will talk to all parties in the House. Hon. Members will have time to respond and there will be a full debate in this House.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Who decides?

Chris Grayling: It will be decided by this House—by Members of Parliament, each one, individually, with one vote. SNP Members keep missing a point on this: we are not simply talking about changes for the future; we are also talking about the situation today. There are issues that affect my constituency on which the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) can vote, but there are very many issues that affect his constituency on which I cannot vote. There are real issues of fairness in devolution and we intend to deliver that fairness.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): The Leader of the House recently joined me on a visit to Cannock Radio, and I am sure he agrees that it is a fantastic example of a small start-up business that provides an invaluable service to the local community. May we have a debate on the issuing of FM licences to local community radio stations such as Cannock Radio?

Chris Grayling: I very much enjoyed my visit to Cannock Radio, which I thought was a great example of a community radio station that is starting to have a real impact locally. I understand my hon. Friend's point and know she will raise the matter with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and perhaps seek an opportunity for an end-of-day debate on the Floor of the House.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): May I ask the Leader of the House for an urgent debate in Government time on the ongoing migration crisis in the Mediterranean? Such a debate would give us all the opportunity to put on record our thanks to those serving on board HMS Bulwark, but it would also give us time to discuss the wider migration crisis and the terrible plight of refugees from Syria.

Chris Grayling: I believe that this is one of the matters that should be brought before the House shortly, and we are looking at that now. I share the hon. Lady's view of the work being done by our armed forces, particularly the crew of HMS Bulwark, who are doing an amazing job in the Mediterranean. It is clear that the situation in the Mediterranean is not sustainable. A long-term solution will have to be found; we cannot go on and on with lives being lost in the way they have been. It is very much on the Government's agenda, and it should and will be on this House's agenda.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I very gently point out that Members who were not here for the Leader of the House's statement should not expect to be called? People must be present at the start and stay if they wish to be called.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): The news of any job losses is disappointing, and it is concerning to hear this week that HSBC intends to make 8,000 staff redundant. Equally concerning is the news that it is considering moving its headquarters from the City of London. Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate in which the Government can highlight what is being done to ensure that London maintains its position as a global city and the global centre for professional and financial services?

Chris Grayling: We will all have been deeply disappointed by yesterday's announcement by HSBC. We extend our good wishes, sympathies and concerns to all those affected, and I know that all the relevant authorities will do their best to help mitigate the impact of the change. It is vital that we maintain the competitiveness of our banking sector—something the Chancellor of the Exchequer addressed last night. A Treasury Minister will be at the Dispatch Box shortly to talk about the issues raised last night, so my hon. Friend might have an opportunity to raise those concerns directly.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder affects at least 7,000 children born every year in this country. A new all-party group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder will hold its inaugural meeting on 30 June, and I encourage Members to attend. The chief medical officer is carrying out a review of the advice given to pregnant women on how much alcohol, if any, can be taken during pregnancy. Has the Leader of the House had any indication from colleagues in the Department of Health on when a statement will be made to the House on the chief medical officer's updated advice?

Chris Grayling: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the work he is doing. That is one of those issues that divide no one in this House politically. We all have an opportunity to be champions for those affected by some of the most dreadful diseases and health problems in our society. My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health will have noted what he said, but I will ensure that his concerns are passed on to them and that they get back to him and indicate when a statement will be made.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Rural businesses in my constituency are disadvantaged in their access to superfast broadband. What progress has been made on our commitment to provide subsidised satellite services for those in the hardest-to-reach areas?

Chris Grayling: That has been a matter of concern for the Government, and indeed for the previous Government, over the past few years. We are working hard with providers, applying a push where necessary, to ensure that rural broadband is rolled out as fast as possible, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is working hard on the issue. I suggest that my hon. Friend writes to the Secretary of State, and I will ensure that his comments are drawn to the Department's attention today. I also advise him to raise the matter at the next Culture, Media and Sport Question Time.

Mr Speaker: I also point out to the House that, in order to preserve the unique character of business questions, colleagues need to relate their questions to the business of the House for next week. That simply requires a Member, in pursuing the point of his or her choice, to remember to ask for a debate or a statement in the following week.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): May we have a debate in Government time on Lord Carter's report on how £5 billion could be saved in the NHS between now and 2020, with particular reference to how, following the Lansley reforms, the Government would find it difficult to insist on value for money in foundation trusts?

Chris Grayling: We are grateful to Lord Carter for the work he has done in that report. The NHS faces significant financial challenges, and finding further efficiencies will be an important part of meeting them. The Health Secretary appears before the House regularly, and I expect that he will update the House in the near future on how he intends to respond to the report.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): In the interests of Members' health—particularly yours, Mr Speaker—may we have a debate next week on the lighting in the Chamber? Is the Leader of the House aware that in 1988, when we voted for lighting in the Chamber, we lost daylight when the yellow film was put over the windows, but we gained these huge chandeliers? It is now possible—I will write to you about this, Mr Speaker—using liquid crystal display privacy glass to restore daylight to the Chamber and to cut the cost of the chandeliers by half by putting in LEDs, which would cut the carbon footprint by two thirds. Can we debate that next week?

Chris Grayling: I am sure, Mr Speaker, that you and I agree that my hon. Friend should write to us both with something we can put before other members of the Commission when it first meets.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Secretary of State make time available next week for an extended debate on the subject of hospitals in south-west London—a debate he might like to participate in—so that we can look at the issue of funding for St Helier hospital? As £290 million was guaranteed under the coalition Government, I want to ensure that that funding is available when plans come forward for the hospital.

Chris Grayling: The right hon. Gentleman and I share an interest in this issue because we share the same NHS trust. I am concerned to make sure that both hospitals have a successful future. If he wants to raise the issue, I suggest that he looks to bring forward an Adjournment debate. I suspect that we have not ended the period of debate locally. I know that we will both continue to be champions for our own communities.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): May we have a debate or a statement next week about fly-grazing and straying horses? This problem is affecting many constituencies, and it has got significantly worse since the alterations to regulations in Wales. It is a big problem that the RSPCA and the police are struggling with.

Chris Grayling: I am very much aware of that issue. Many of our constituencies are affected by fly-grazing, and there are genuine animal welfare concerns about what is taking place. My hon. Friend is a seasoned requisitioner of Adjournment debates—she has one on Bangladesh next week—and I am sure that the subject she has raised is another on which she can continue with that.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Mr Speaker—[*Interruption.*] I have selflessly discovered, purely for the benefit of colleagues, that if they ever want some easy fame, they should merely wander into the wrong Lobby and go to the washrooms. That seems to work a treat.

On a serious matter, may we have a statement in Government time on the financial support mechanisms for onshore wind—the cheapest form of renewable generation? Since an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* a week last Sunday, there has been huge uncertainty in the industry, affecting jobs, investment and businesses. Surely the Department of Energy and Climate Change should not be briefing newspapers when it seems to be unaware of the situation and the outcomes.

Chris Grayling: I noticed with interest this week that a police spotter helicopter appeared to sight a big cat in Glasgow; whether there is any connection, I do not know. The Energy Secretary will appear before this House in 10 days' time, and that might be an opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to raise the issue with her directly.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I am very proud of the contribution made to my constituency by a significant number of the Nepalese community. Indeed, many of them came to this country following their service in the Brigade of Gurkhas. Given that that history extends back to 1815, may we have a debate in Government time in order to discuss the contribution made to the British Army in the past 200 years by the Gurkha regiment?

Chris Grayling: We all owe a debt of gratitude to the Gurkhas, who have served this country over a very long period. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he does with the Nepalese community and with the Gurkhas. I also congratulate him on his re-election to this House. We will come back to this matter regularly. There will be opportunities to debate defence issues, and he will no doubt want to use those to raise the role of the Gurkhas, to praise them for what they have done, and to ensure that we have proper welfare support for them.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Before our mission in Iraq creeps beyond the 900 mark, should we not debate the calamitous decisions that sent 632 of our brave British soldiers to their deaths in Iraq and Helmand, lest we again try to punch above our weight militarily, which always leads to our dying beyond our responsibilities?

Chris Grayling: It is important to say that we all face a real threat from the growth of ISIL in the middle east, and it is right that the international community comes together to combat that threat. I remind the hon. Gentleman that our role in Iraq today—it is only Iraq, not Syria—is at the invitation of the Iraqi Government. That is a big difference from what happened 10 years ago.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Eleven thousand of my residents in Heathfield have been without a post office since the postmaster and freeholder unexpectedly left. We have been told that it will take at least three months to get a new post office, despite the local council providing a free parking berth. May we have an urgent debate to discuss why it takes Post Office Counters Ltd so long to bring in temporary, and indeed permanent, replacements for all constituents represented in this House?

Chris Grayling: First, may I welcome my hon. Friend to his place? I know he will be a very effective representative for his constituency, and it is clear that he has already started in that vein. My advice to him is that, while he could table questions or secure a debate, going directly to the organisation itself can, in my experience, be a very effective way of delivering results more quickly, and I urge him to do that.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): Britain has a persistent and enormous trade deficit with the rest of the European Union, amounting to more than £1 billion a week and equivalent to 1 million lost British jobs. That is being driven by the overvaluation of the pound against the euro, the exchange rate having risen by a third since the post-crisis drop. May we have a debate on this serious economic misalignment and the damage it is inflicting on British manufacturing?

Chris Grayling: One of the great myths in this country is that manufacturing collapsed under a Conservative Government. In fact, it was during the 13 years of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown that manufacturing in this country fell by almost a half as a proportion of our national income. We have spent the past five years trying to turn that around. I am very pleased that this country now makes more cars than the whole of Italy. There is a lot still to do—we have a lot of mess to clear up—but people should not think that the problems of our trade deficit and our manufacturing sector were caused by Conservative Members; we are the ones who are trying to fix them.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Next Thursday we will debate the European Union Referendum Bill in a Committee of the whole House, but unfortunately, if the Government make two statements, and if there also happens to be an Urgent Question, we would have only two and a half hours to debate the Bill, which means that we would only have time to discuss the first group of amendments. Could the Leader of the House make a statement next week to change the situation so that we can go past the moment of interruption in order to discuss the second group of amendments? Could he also try to ensure that no Government statements will curtail debate on that very important Bill in a week's time?

Chris Grayling: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns. It is very important that the House has a full opportunity to debate the Bill. There is already a considerable amount of time available in the system for that, but I want to make sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House feel they have a proper opportunity to debate the amendments.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): We have already heard this morning of concerns about broadband, and those concerns are shared by all parties in all parts of the UK. The Leader of the House has already indicated that there is Government time available on 25 June. There are new Secretaries of State for Culture, Media and Sport and for Business, Innovation and Skills. Is this not a perfect opportunity for the Leader of the House to allocate time for Members to discuss broadband services in the UK?

Chris Grayling: I know that the issue is a matter of concern to Members on both sides of the House and in different kinds of constituencies. Of course, we will from next week have opportunities to debate matters of general concern on those days allocated for them, and I expect that subject to make an early appearance on that list.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): Could we have time to debate the problem of rural roads? More and more lorries are getting larger and larger, and they are not able to use a lot of rural roads. When they are supplying supermarkets in rural areas, they are blocking roads. In places such as Exmoor, which I cover, that is becoming a serious problem. Please could we have time to discuss the situation?

Chris Grayling: Unfortunately my hon. Friend has just missed Transport Questions, but I will make sure that his concerns are drawn to the attention of the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there is a propensity—I suspect due to a dependence on sat-nav—for unsuitable vehicles to use roads that simply are not wide enough for them. I encourage all organisations that have logistics operations, including haulage firms and the major supermarkets, to make sure that their drivers take a smart approach to planning where they are going to go, and do not just simply follow the sat-nav.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Could we have a statement or debate in Government time on when the request for proposals for maritime patrol aircraft will be issued, and could that statement include a commitment to base such aircraft in Scotland?

Chris Grayling: I understand the hon. Lady's concerns and I will make sure that they are passed to the Ministry of Defence. We have had Defence Questions, but there will be several other opportunities to question Defence Ministers in the next few weeks, and I suggest she does that.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Many of us would like to see the fullest realisation of the Prime Minister's vision for European Union reform and a fundamental change to our relationship with it. Will the Leader of the House make time for a statement next week, and in subsequent weeks, to make sure that we are appropriately updated on the process of renegotiation?

Chris Grayling: I commend my hon. Friend for his work in this vital area and for his responsible approach. He is right to focus on the need for renegotiation and for a changed relationship. The status quo in our relationship with the EU is simply not in the interests of this

country. What surprises me is that Labour Members have decided to support a referendum, but still appear to believe that the status quo is in our national interest, when it palpably is not. They need to make their minds up.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): May we have an urgent statement or debate next week about the Cancer Drugs Fund decision not to make the drug sunitinib available on the NHS? My constituent Adrian Steel, who has kidney cancer, is having to pay for his treatment. May we have a debate on that as soon as possible?

Chris Grayling: I am aware of the concerns, and these are difficult and sensitive issues. Our system was rightly established by the previous Labour Government to assess the effectiveness of drugs and whether they should be made available on the NHS. Some decisions are controversial and difficult for those affected by those illnesses. I will ensure that the right hon. Gentleman's concerns are passed today to the Department of Health. I know Ministers will want to return to the issue at an appropriate moment.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): The number of young people in and around Andover in my constituency who have tragically died at their own hand in the past few years has reached disturbing levels. Further, Veterans in Action, a charity based just outside Andover, is currently on a round-Britain tour raising awareness of post-traumatic stress disorder. Bearing in mind the striking maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), can the Leader of the House be persuaded to make time for us to debate mental health issues, and particularly mental health provision to veterans and young adults?

Chris Grayling: I take the issue very seriously. It is disturbing for all of us that the number of young male suicides has risen to a level not seen in a generation in this country. We need to get to grips with the problem. I am pleased that, in the last Budget before the general election, the Chancellor said he would make additional funding available for mental health work in the national health service. I commend all those who are working in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere both to raise awareness and to find ways to tackle the problem, which I know will come before the House regularly. I suspect there will be cross-party support for a debate in one of the Backbench Business Committee slots.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Channel 4 is a Government-owned company. This week, the chief executive's pay was increased to £855,000. Could we use next Thursday to debate excessive pay at Channel 4 and how it can be brought under control?

Chris Grayling: Responsibility is paramount in top pay awards. There are times when it is necessary to pay a substantial sum to get the right person, but many of us in the House will share the hon. Lady's concerns that organisations such as Channel 4 need to get top pay awards right, and need to be very careful about how they approach them. Next Thursday, we will debate the European Union (Referendum) Bill, so that might not be the best day to slot in a debate on top pay awards, but those standing for the chairmanship of the Backbench

[Chris Grayling]

Business Committee will have heard her. Perhaps they will want to address top pay awards more broadly, and not simply in relation to the circumstance she mentions.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): We are fortunate in Colchester to have a fantastic zoo. I urge Opposition Members to visit so they can work on their roar.

Colchester is one of the fastest-growing towns in the country. Tens of thousands of homes have been built, but with inadequate infrastructure to support them. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on infrastructure in areas where there is high housing growth?

Chris Grayling: That is a significant challenge. We need to build more houses to ensure that the next generation can get on to the housing ladder, but we need to do so sensitively to protect the environment in which people live. That is a major priority for the Government. Of course, we must have the infrastructure in place to achieve that. That is why we are investing in roads and rail, and why we are seeking to ensure that, as our economy develops, we have an infrastructure fit for the 21st century. I assure my hon. Friend that, when he finds the moment at questions or through the Adjournment debate system to take those issues to Ministers, they will listen extremely carefully to the challenges his area faces.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): The Leader of the House referred earlier to an upcoming debate on Translana, the Duchenne muscular dystrophy drug. In Prime Minister's questions yesterday, the Prime Minister said that unfortunately, because he was off to the EU summit, he could not meet the six young boys going to Downing Street to seek his support in getting the drug for themselves. I am now writing to the Prime Minister to secure a meeting between them and Muscular Dystrophy UK. Will the Leader of the House help me to secure that meeting?

Chris Grayling: I will certainly pass on the hon. Lady's request to the Prime Minister. He did mention that he had had a meeting with an affected family and one of the young people who was going to No.10 Downing Street. I know that in different circumstances he would have wished to meet them and I will certainly pass on her request.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Following the resignation of Mr Blair as middle east peace envoy—a bizarre appointment if ever there was one—will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate or a statement on the publication of the Chilcot report, which has been delayed for far too long.

Chris Grayling: All of us in government would dearly like to see the Chilcot report published, but as it is an independent report it is out of our hands. It is in the interests of the country to get the report published, to see the full the details of what it says, to learn any lessons and to ensure that mistakes are not made in future.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Leader of the House aware that every Member of this Parliament has at least 1,000 constituents with undiagnosed heart arrhythmia, or irregular heartbeat? Many of those who have been diagnosed are given the wrong treatment—even something as awful as an aspirin. Three wonderful new drugs approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence will stop people going from heart arrhythmia to a stroke. Can we make all Members aware of this real problem facing our constituents?

Chris Grayling: I commend the hon. Gentleman for making the House aware of that. He makes an immensely important point. This does affect people. A support group was set up recently by one of the Conservative association members in my constituency to help those affected. There is a great network of people who know and understand the condition, but I encourage him to continue to work to make Members aware. We can be a valuable conduit to people who have experienced problems and can tell them some of the things out there to help them to solve them.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Television programmes such as “Inside the Commons” have improved the public's understanding of the workings of this House, including among those in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend make a statement on the possible implications of any refurbishment programme at the Palace of Westminster on the workings of this House?

Chris Grayling: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to this House and welcome him to this great building. I regard it not only as a vital heart to our democracy, but one of the great historic buildings of the world. It is absolutely the case that it faces big challenges. Hon. Members will have received an email from the Clerk yesterday inviting them to a briefing next week on the independent report on how we make sure the building has a long and successful future. There are some interesting and difficult challenges ahead. There are some difficult decisions to take. Instinctively, I think it is important that this building remains consistently at the heart of our democracy and that we do not end up being forced to move somewhere else.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Dairy farmers in my constituency are struggling with falling milk prices and the failure of First Milk to represent them properly. If this is affecting the Stirling constituency it must be affecting constituencies across the country. Will the Government bring forward a debate or make a statement on this most urgent of issues?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely understand the issues the hon. Gentleman raises, which are shared by dairy farmers in the constituencies of many hon. Members on both sides of the House. Questions to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be next Thursday. I advise him to raise the issue directly with the Secretary of State then.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I welcome the statement that we will shortly have the Second Reading of the Education and Adoption Bill. Will the Leader of the House give consideration to a specific

debate on school standards and Ofsted inspections? I know that Ofsted inspections are of concern to many hon. Members. It would give us an opportunity to highlight recent cases, such as Suffolk One Sixth Form College in my constituency, which, due to the excellent work of staff and pupils, has just moved from good to outstanding?

Chris Grayling: We are fortunate in this country to have some excellent schools that do a first-rate job for our young people and raise standards in a way that is essential to our future, but some schools do less well and some need a bit of a push, and Ofsted does an important job in making that happen. The purpose of the Education and Adoption Bill—the education piece of it—is to ensure we have the right mechanisms to continue to drive up standards. I hope that my hon. Friend will use that debate to raise some of the success stories in his constituency, and to address our strategy to ensure that things carry on getting better.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The under-10 metre inshore fishing fleet in coastal communities around England is urgently waiting to know when the Leader of the House will lay before Parliament the proposals in the Conservative manifesto to reallocate fishing quotas towards the under-10 metre fleet. When will this be coming forward?

Chris Grayling: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an exact date, but the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be before the House next Thursday. I suggest that he puts his question to her then. I know she will try to be helpful.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Resources committed to key components of our foreign policy soft power capabilities, including the British Council and the British World Service, continue to fall at a time when the significance of soft power continues to rise. Will my right hon. Friend at least consider a debate in the Chamber on the importance of soft power, which is often referred to in passing but has never been properly debated, given that in this information age winning the story is just as important as winning any battles or conflicts?

Chris Grayling: I am concerned that the House has an early opportunity to debate some of the international challenges we face, and I hope that when we have secured the right opportunity my hon. Friend will raise what I believe is a very important issue.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Leader of the House referred to investing in rail and roads earlier. Today's *Hull Daily Mail* reports that the long-awaited upgrade of the A63 at Castle Street, which is vital to the Hull economy, will be delayed into the 2020s, as will the rail electrification. Both are essential and were promised in this decade. May we please have a debate in Government time on whether the northern powerhouse is no more than a slogan for places such as Hull?

Chris Grayling: The northern powerhouse is absolutely not just a slogan for places such as Hull. It is in the interests of everyone's economic future that we have a

strong set of northern towns and cities to provide a counterbalance to the south-east, generating the technologies, growth and businesses we need for the future. I cannot comment on what is reported in the hon. Lady's local paper today, but I know that my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary will take note of her concern. She should seek to contact him directly or raise the issue with him the next time he is before the House, but I am clear that the Government have invested, and will continue to invest, in our infrastructure to ensure that it is fit for the 21st century.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) about the Chilcot inquiry, I would be grateful if we had a statement confirming that no former Members will be sent to the other place until the Chilcot inquiry has been published, enabling Members to scrutinise the inquiry and the recommendations of the House of Lords Appointments Commission and to have access to all the relevant information before anyone is sent to the House of Lords?

Chris Grayling: I know that the Prime Minister and the team in No. 10 Downing Street will have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said. I cannot guarantee that no former Member will find a new role in the near future, but, as for those who might be more closely linked to what took place, I am sure that his comments will be carefully noted.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): The Government recently boasted of being the workers' party, which many of my constituents find absolutely laughable. If they really are the workers' party, why are they planning to punish hard-working, low-income families with a £5 billion cut to child tax credits? When can we have an urgent debate on these proposals?

Chris Grayling: First, may I congratulate the hon. Lady on her wisdom, because I believe that she is the only Labour MP this week to add her name to the shadow Leader of the House's tally? I hope she can persuade many more of her hon. Friends to do the same in the next few days.

We have seen the most enormous drop in unemployment across the country, and we have the lowest unemployment claimant count that we have had in this country for about 40 years. If that is not a sign of being the party of the workers, I do not know what is.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): My hero of the week is Adam Armstrong. When an error with his name was made in an online booking with Ryanair and he asked them to change it, they wanted £220. He quickly worked out that if he changed his name by deed poll to what it said on the booking and got a new passport, he could do it at under half the price. Genius! May we have a debate on aviation so we can expose these rip-off practices and put a stop to them?

Chris Grayling: We should always commend innovation when we see it, and that was certainly a fine example of innovation. There is, of course, another simple solution: "If you don't like flying Ryanair, you can always try flying easyJet".

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): May we have a statement or a debate in Government time on why, at a time when this Government can find £100,000 million for Trident renewal, more than 1,500 RAF service personnel will lose their jobs over the next five years, further undermining our conventional defences?

Chris Grayling: Where we and the SNP differ is that in an increasingly unstable world, with a whole variety of new challenges, this does not seem to be a moment to scrap our nuclear deterrent. That is a point of difference and a point of principle between us, but Government Members stand by what we believe in.

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): Today is the deadline for the planning inspectorate to make a recommendation to Ministers at the Department of Energy and Climate Change after a long-running and hugely expensive public inquiry into the proposed Navitus Bay offshore wind farm. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on whether it is appropriate for this proposal to remain confidential until the Secretary of State publishes her decision on 11 September? In the meantime, will he note that this proposal is opposed not only by me, but by my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch (Mr Chope), for Poole (Mr Syms), for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) and anybody else I have forgotten in Dorset?

Chris Grayling: I can understand the challenge my hon. Friend faces in trying to remember all the Conservative MPs in Dorset—there are now so many of them in his part of the world. As always, my hon. Friend is a powerful advocate for his constituency and for the county of Dorset. I know that the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change will have listened carefully to what he said. It is a sign of the concern about this matter that an Adjournment debate has been called next Monday by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax). I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) will want to make a point in that debate. I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will have listened carefully to my hon. Friend, but she has to do this job properly in her role as assessor of the issues.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): My constituent Mr Len Jones has seen the value of his British Airways pension put at risk by the trustees' decision to change the basis on which those pensions are uprated. May we have a debate on the responsibilities of pension trustees to pension holders?

Chris Grayling: I am aware of this issue because a constituent of mine is similarly affected. It is a difficult set of circumstances, and these are matters for the pension funds, the trustees and British Airways. I know that the hon. Lady and other Members feel strongly about this, so I suggest she raise the issue at Work and Pensions questions or seek to requisition a debate on the subject either on an end-of-the-day Adjournment or in Westminster Hall.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I am actively supporting the excellent local campaign to save the playing fields at

Oundle primary school. May we have a statement from an Education Minister on the state of play with the sale of these important open spaces?

Chris Grayling: Fortunately, Education questions are on Monday, so my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to raise a topical question there. My view is that we have to be immensely careful before developing any playing fields. We are going to see increased need for housing in future, but increased need for housing means increased need for recreation. We must make sure we have adequate supporting facilities to support the development of housing.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): May we have a debate in Government time on accountability in the NHS? Under the current system, we raise an issue with Ministers, who say it is a role for NHS England, which does not respond. A serious complaint that I put to Ministers was passed to NHS England 11 weeks ago, but I have had no reply. There is a lack of accountability, and we need to debate that.

Chris Grayling: It is unacceptable for Members of Parliament not to receive from NHS England a proper response to concerns. For many years, members of the public and Members here have argued that the NHS should not be a political football and that politicians should not be directly involved in the day-to-day running of it. That is what the last Government did, and I think we have ended up in a better place for it. Of course, it is not acceptable, as I said, that inquiries are not responded to. I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are drawn to the attention of the Secretary of State, who can act for him.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I shall almost certainly not be able to accommodate everyone—there are simply too many Members wishing to speak—but maximising the number of contributors requires single, short supplementary questions, without preamble, and characteristically pithy replies from the Leader of the House

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Given the widespread interest in productivity, may we have a debate that will allow Members to identify their priorities for improving productivity throughout the United Kingdom?

Chris Grayling: I believe that the Labour party has decided to use its Opposition day for a debate on productivity, which will provide an opportunity to remind Labour Members of their very poor record in that regard.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House tell us more about the consultation that will take place on the issue of English votes for English laws, about the amount of time that will be allowed for the House to debate and vote on those matters and about the timing of that debate?

Chris Grayling: I will not give details of our plans today, but I will tell the hon. Gentleman that Members will have an opportunity to respond and a proper opportunity for debate. I shall set out our plans shortly.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): On Sunday, I was present for the unveiling of a new defibrillator on the outside wall of the Bay Horse Inn, a pub in the village of Roughlee. May we have a debate on the excellent North West ambulance service “Cardiac Smart” campaign, which aims to improve survival rates among those who experience out-of-hospital cardiac arrests?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who is one of two Members who are volunteer responders. I commend him for his role in that extremely important work. I also commend his local ambulance service for what it is doing, which is enormously important. Effective first response and the presence of defibrillators can make the difference between life and death. The Government take it very seriously, and we are therefore providing additional funds for more defibrillators around the country to try to save lives.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): In the early hours of Sunday morning, 21-year-old Dominic Doyle was stabbed in Denton. So far, five people have been arrested and charged. May we have a statement from the Home Secretary on what more the Government can do to tackle the scourge of knife crime?

Chris Grayling: Any stabbing is both unacceptable and tragic for those involved. It would not be right for me to comment on the specific case because it is under investigation, but, by chance, the Home Secretary is sitting on the Bench near me and will have heard the hon. Gentleman’s comments. I know that she will choose to respond in due course when she can, given that the matter is currently being investigated.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): The loss of a family pet is a painful process, but it is amplified when the loss of that pet is caused by malicious poisoning by a neighbour. May we have an urgent debate on sentencing for the crime of poisoning animals and on animal welfare issues?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend has obviously experienced a shocking circumstance in his constituency. These are dreadful acts, and of course it is right and proper for them to be dealt with by the full force of the law. As I said earlier, the Home Secretary is sitting next to me, and I am sure that she heard what my hon. Friend has said.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): In the last Parliament, the other place passed unwanted, ill-thought-out laws on caste discrimination, causing a great deal of concern in the Hindu community. The Government have said that they do not intend to enact those unwanted laws. May we have a statement on when the Government will repeal them?

Chris Grayling: I understand my hon. Friend’s concern, and I know that the matter has greatly concerned the community in his constituency. I will ensure that those concerns are drawn to the attention of the Department for Communities and Local Government, and I will ask the Department to respond to him.

Mr David Burrows (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Enfield’s Labour council is putting our green belt at risk by buying up farmland such as Sloemans Farm. May we

have a statement that will make it clear that Enfield’s green belt is safe in the Conservative Government’s hands?

Chris Grayling: During the general election campaign, the Prime Minister made some strong commitments in relation to the green belt. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that, regardless of who owns the land, green belt provisions will still apply. The fact that his local council has decided to buy land does not mean that its decision will be given the go-ahead by the Planning Inspectorate or that it will be able legally to develop the land unless it is appropriate for it to do so.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Will the Leader of the House join me in passing his best wishes to those who were injured in Monday’s horrific crash on the M62, which closed part of the motorway for 20 hours? May we have an urgent debate on trans-Pennine motorway links, so that we can discuss congestion, alternative routes and new exits for the M62?

Chris Grayling: Our sympathies go out to everyone involved. We wish those who were injured a speedy recovery and commend all the members of the emergency services. Our firefighters cut people out of crashed cars, and our paramedics save lives. They do a fantastic job for all of us, as they clearly did in this instance. I will ensure that my hon. Friend’s concerns are drawn to the attention of the Transport Secretary, but he may also wish to consider applying for an Adjournment debate.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): Will the Leader of the House afford the House a statement on the Cardiff city deal? The Secretary of State for Wales is meeting 10 local authority leaders today to bring a consensus together in south Wales, and this is very important for the south Wales economy.

Chris Grayling: A lot of work has been put into this, and I hope a successful resolution will be reached. I encourage my hon. Friend to talk directly to the Secretary of State about this matter, but I will make sure his concerns and wishes are passed on.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The sustainable development goals are due to be adopted in New York in September and the House has not yet had a proper opportunity to debate them. Will the Leader of the House make time available on 25 June, when the Government have extra time, to permit that debate to take place?

Chris Grayling: I am very concerned to ensure the House has a proper opportunity to debate matters related not simply to aid and international development but also the challenges we face around the world, and I give my hon. and learned Friend a commitment that I will work to ensure there is an early chance to do so.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Neuroblastoma is a rare aggressive cancer affecting just 100 children a year in the United Kingdom, including Ruby Laura Young in my constituency, a two-year-old who is battling to save her life. May we have an urgent debate on the assistance available to all those suffering from this disease?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely understand the concerns my hon. Friend raises; a little boy in my constituency, Adam Bird, died four years ago as a result of this dreadful disease. There is an opportunity next week in Westminster Hall to raise and debate this issue. I know the Health Secretary will be listening carefully because when children are affected in this terrible way it is a matter of concern to us all.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): May we have a debate into the damning Ofsted report into the inadequacies of Sandwell children's services, which was published last week and points to failures of leadership over a long period of time and a failure to protect the most vulnerable children in Sandwell? May we have a debate to see what the Government can do?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is right to be concerned when a local authority appears unable to properly address child safeguarding issues. As we all know, we have seen terrible events in other parts of the country where this has happened. One would not wish to see it happen in Sandwell. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue. I suggest that he come to the House on Monday to raise it directly with the Education Secretary and he may also, depending on the context of the debate, have an opportunity the following week to do the same in the debate on the Education and Adoption Bill.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): May we have a statement from the Government on the progress of the Perry review into the decriminalisation of non-payment of the TV licence and any indication of when the review will be completed and available to this House?

Chris Grayling: The review is due to be completed in the next few weeks. I know my right hon. Friend the Culture Secretary will wish to update the House as soon as possible after that.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): May we have a debate on the difficult situation many people, including in my constituency, find themselves in when county court judgments laid against them for non-payment of costs are made if solicitors offering no win, no fee arrangements and their insurers go bust?

Chris Grayling: I have not previously come across that issue even in my previous role in the Justice Department. It is clearly worth raising directly with Ministers. I suggest my hon. Friend looks to bring it up in an Adjournment debate.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we have a debate on what the Government can do to make life easier for small businesses by cutting red tape? In the last Parliament, we had the one-in, one-out rule, then the one-in, two-out rule. Now that the Government are not constrained by the Liberal Democrats, surely we can have one in, three out, four out or even five out?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I cannot promise whether it will be one in, three out, four out or five out, but I can promise him that my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has plans to save £10 billion in costs by reducing red tape during this Parliament, which will make a real difference to business.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Leader of the House will recall his recent visit to my constituency, when we met an active neighbourhood watch group. These are vital organisations up and down the country. May I suggest this might be a useful topic for discussion in the general debate he has planned for a fortnight today?

Chris Grayling: I was very impressed by the work I saw when I visited my hon. Friend's constituency. Our country depends on people who are prepared to get involved in their communities. They can make a real difference. That is clearly what is happening in his constituency. I note his request.

Anderson Report

11.39 am

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the publication of the Anderson report and the parliamentary consideration of investigatory powers. As the House will know, it is this Government's intention to bring forward legislation relating to the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies' use of investigatory powers and to have that legislation enacted before the sunset provision in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 takes effect on 31 December 2016.

In 2014, the Government asked the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, David Anderson QC, to conduct a review of the operation and regulation of law enforcement and agency investigatory powers, with specific reference to the interception of communications and the separate issue of communications data. David Anderson has completed that review, and this morning my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a written ministerial statement to lay that report before the House.

The report makes 124 recommendations, covering sensitive intelligence capabilities, and it extends to more than 300 pages. Following careful consideration by the Government and the security and intelligence agencies, I can confirm that no redactions have been made to the report prior to publication. I would like to put on record my, and the Government's, thanks to David Anderson for his thoroughness and dedication in undertaking this important work.

As the report highlights, there is a range of threats against the UK and its interests from terrorism, both at home and overseas, to cyber-attacks from criminals. Many groups, not just the Government, have a role to play in ensuring that the right capabilities are in place to tackle those threats. We will continue to work closely with all partners, including the intelligence agencies, law enforcement and industry, to take all these issues forward and to continue to keep us safe from those who would do us harm.

David Anderson's report is complemented by two further independent reviews in this area. In March, the Intelligence and Security Committee published its "Privacy and Security" report. This set out a comprehensive review of the intelligence agencies' capabilities and the legal and privacy frameworks that govern their use. Later this summer, a panel co-ordinated by the Royal United Services Institute and established by the former Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), will report on the legality, effectiveness and privacy implications of the UK's surveillance programmes and assess how law enforcement and intelligence capability can be maintained in the face of technological change. These independent reviews are each important and valuable contributions to the continuing debate about the role of our security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies, their use of investigatory powers and their oversight. The Government will need to give proper consideration to their recommendations, but I believe that collectively they will provide a firm basis for consultation on legislation.

I would now like to turn to the parliamentary handling of this legislation. The operation and regulation of the investigatory powers used by the police and the intelligence

and security agencies is a matter of great importance to the security of this country and, I know, an issue of great interest to many Members. As David Anderson makes clear, it is imperative that the use of sensitive powers is overseen and fully declared under arrangements set by Parliament. It is therefore entirely right that Parliament should have the opportunity to debate those arrangements in full.

The Anderson review was undertaken with cross-party support and I believe that it provides a sound basis for taking this issue forward in the same manner. To ensure that that is the case, the Government will publish a draft Bill in the autumn for pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of Parliament, with the intention of introducing a Bill early in the new year. Given the sunset clause in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014, the new legislation will need to be in place by the end of December 2016.

I have said many times before that it is impossible to debate the balance between privacy and security—including the rights and wrongs of intrusive powers and the oversight arrangements that govern them—without also considering the threats that we face as a country. Those threats remain considerable, and they are evolving. They include not only terrorism—from overseas and home-grown in the UK—but industrial, military and state espionage. They include not only organised criminality but the proliferation of once-physical crimes online, such as child sexual exploitation, and the technological challenges that that brings. In the face of such threats, we have a duty to ensure that the agencies whose job it is to keep us safe have the powers they need to do the job.

I would like to finish by paying tribute to the vital work of the men and women of the intelligence and law enforcement community, whose work is not always known, whose successes often go unrecognised and whose efforts day in and day out are fundamental to keeping everyone in this country safe. I commend this statement to the House.

11.44 am

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement and join her in paying tribute to the agencies and police and the vital work that they do to keep us safe. Because their work is so important, they need a robust and up-to-date legal framework for that work, and that is what they want as well. Their job is to protect our liberty as well as our security in a democracy.

I strongly welcome the publication of David Anderson's report, which we all need to consider in detail. We called for the report in our amendment to the emergency legislation last summer, and we did so because we believed that the existing framework was no longer fit for purpose. The Intelligence and Security Committee has also called for a new framework. Technology has moved on, but neither the law nor the oversight has. The law is, in David Anderson's words,

"incomprehensible to all but a tiny band of initiates...and—in the long run—intolerable."

Reforms are needed. First, as the report confirms, it is clear that proportionate surveillance and interception are vital to saving lives and to averting and disrupting dreadful attacks. The Home Secretary is right to highlight the changing threats, and communications data have

[Yvette Cooper]

been used to tackle some awful crimes. The report refers to a case in which the US authorities found a movie file of a woman sexually abusing a four-month-old girl. Communications data were used to track the source of an email to a man in Northampton and, as a result, he and his girlfriend were convicted of serious sexual abuse of three children, all less than four years old. There is no doubt therefore that powers are needed and that they need to keep up with new technology. We cannot allow the sunset clause to let existing powers lapse without new legislation in their place.

Secondly, we have argued that, alongside strong powers, we need strong checks and balances and significantly stronger oversight of how the system works. I welcome the report's proposals to strengthen oversight by introducing a new, stronger independent surveillance and intelligence commission, merging the existing system of commissioners, which I have long argued is not strong or transparent enough, and by introducing judicial authorisation of warrants. Both would be important steps, but their detail needs to be right, so that they do not add delays to urgent processes or detract from the Home Secretary's wider responsibility to assess risks to national security and be answerable to Parliament. I believe that those reforms would strengthen the legitimacy of a long-term framework, and I urge the Home Secretary to consider and agree to them.

Thirdly, the report confirms some of the problems with the original draft Communications Data Bill, which the Joint Committee that scrutinised it at the time stated was too widely drawn—we agreed. David Anderson says:

“There should be no question of progressing proposals for the compulsory retention of third party data before a compelling operational case for it has been made out (as it has not been to date)”.

I agree with David Anderson and, again, I urge the Home Secretary to accept that recommendation.

I welcome the points that the Home Secretary made about a future investigatory powers Bill based in large part on David Anderson's report being subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of both Houses and about how we will have the opportunity for cross-party debate. I also urge her to ask the business managers to schedule a day's debate on the Anderson report, so that Members of all parties may discuss it fully and to foster a wider public debate to get the widest possible consent and legitimacy for the new framework. There has been a wider public debate in other countries, including the US, than there has so far been here.

Finally, David Anderson's report calls for greater public avowal and transparency of capabilities and legal powers. Everyone understands that many national security operations need to be secret to be effective, but I urge the Home Secretary to consider that recommendation closely, too, as there needs to be sufficient transparency for us in Parliament to take responsible decisions on getting the legislation right.

We need freedom and security in our democracy, the powers to keep people safe and the checks and balances to protect people's privacy and to ensure that the powers are not abused. The digital age is a wonderful source of freedom and opportunity, but it also brings new challenges from new crimes and new threats to our

security. David Anderson's report helps us to face both. We in this House now need to ensure that the report helps us to navigate both the opportunities and the challenges to sustain and to strengthen our democracy in a digital age.

Mrs May: I thank the shadow Secretary of State for the tone and approach she has adopted on these matters, which—as we all accept across the House—are incredibly serious. It is important that we have full debates about them, as we will be able to do. In the timetable I have set out, people will have an opportunity to reflect fully on the David Anderson report, and other reports that have already been published or will be published, so that when they come to look at the Government's proposals, they will be able to do so against that firm background.

It is important to draw to the House's attention the fact that David Anderson looked into all investigatory powers and techniques. He recognised the necessity of the powers and techniques. The issue he was looking at was whether the legislative framework we have is the right one. He has made the point that the current legislative framework is found in a number of different Acts of Parliament, so it is sometimes difficult for people to see the complete picture. Obviously, one of his purposes in his recommendations is to bring that picture together, and to look at the questions of authorisation and oversight.

The right hon. Lady mentioned two particular issues, one of which was access to third party data. David Anderson does not say that this should not be permissible or possible; he says that he would like to see a better case made for it than has been made in the past, but he does not reject the use of access to third party data. On judicial authorisations, he has come down with a particular point of view in that area, and it happens that the ISC took a different view. In looking at this carefully, the point that we will want to reach is ensuring that any decision taken in this area does not adversely affect the relationship between the Executive and the judiciary in relation to other aspects of Government powers and what they need to do, and where any arrangements made are seen to have clear legitimacy and also reflect the issue that the shadow Home Secretary referred to—that the individual who bears the risk, regardless of who takes the authorisation, is of course the Home Secretary. So we have to look at those proposals in the context of that complex mix of areas that we need to consider.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Mr Anderson said in the preamble to his excellent report:

“The current law is fragmented, obscure, under constant challenge and variable in the protections that it affords the innocent.”

He went on to say:

“A multitude of alternative powers, some of them without statutory safeguards, confuse the picture further. This state of affairs is undemocratic, unnecessary and—in the long run—intolerable.”

Of his 124 recommendations, the shadow Home Secretary picked up on perhaps the most important—the one relating to this issue of judicial authorisation. This country relies on ministerial authorisation more than any other country in the world, with the possible exception of Zimbabwe. Will the Home Secretary please

look hard at this recommendation, with a strong recommendation that it is carried out and the transfer of power from ministerial authority to proper judicial authority takes place as soon as possible?

Mrs May: As I indicated in my response to the shadow Home Secretary, we will look at that recommendation carefully, as indeed we will look at all 124 recommendations. Obviously, we will reflect on what David Anderson has said and on any further debate that takes place in relation to this. As I said to her, it is important that we recognise that the question of the relationship between the Executive and the judiciary is not just one that relates to the powers that David Anderson has been looking at, and we need to think carefully about this issue. I recognise the force with which my right hon. Friend encourages me to go down that route, but today I am not in a position, and do not intend, to say that the Government are going to do one thing or another. I think it is right that we reflect more fully on these aspects and make our proposals in the draft Bill that we will publish in the autumn.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Scottish National party also welcomes the publication of this report, but we will oppose any plans to introduce what is sometimes referred to as a snoopers charter, that being a charter that would sanction the mass collection of data and mass spying on people's private communications. Although the SNP is supportive of law enforcement and security services having appropriate access to the information they require, the appropriate checks and safeguards must be in place to ensure that the requirement to keep our community safe is balanced against the civil liberties to which we are all entitled.

This report seems to urge much stronger oversight of the activities of the police and the security services, which we welcome and, like others, I wish to single out the recommendation that warrants be authorised by senior judges. However, the new legislation is required to be more than just a change of name. There must be substantial changes in substance from the previous draft Bill, which threatened to impinge on civil liberties.

Cross-party co-operation in this Parliament has already forced the Government to backtrack on their plans to repeal the Human Rights Act—at least for the time being. In reaching out across the Chamber to MPs with concerns about civil liberties, my party will also seek to defeat any Government plans to curb civil liberties in the Bill. However, we wish to take a constructive approach, and I have four specific questions for the Secretary of State. First, will she confirm that the new legislation, which is to be introduced this autumn, will be more than just a name change and that it will contain substantial safeguards for civil liberties?

Secondly, under the summary of proposals, paragraph 10 says:

“A comprehensive and comprehensible new law should be drafted from scratch, replacing the multitude of current powers and providing for clear limits and safeguards on any intrusive power that it may be necessary for public authorities to use.”

Will the Home Secretary commit to implementing that proposal?

Thirdly, will the Home Secretary commit to engaging fully with her Scottish Government counterparts in so far as measures in any legislation impinge on the devolved

competences? Finally, she has announced plans for pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of Parliament. Will she confirm that representatives of the SNP will be invited to be part of that scrutiny?

Mrs May: I welcome the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) to the House and to her Front-Bench role. I was not able to do that when she spoke in the Queen's Speech debate, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to do it now. I have to say, however, that she is wrong to refer to the snoopers charter. There was never any proposal for such a charter. The Government wish to ensure that our law enforcement and security and intelligence agencies continue to have the capabilities that they need to keep us safe as people's activities in communications increasingly move from the physical to the digital. It is about ensuring that the law and the powers are up to date.

The hon. and learned Lady asked me four specific questions. I have already said in my response to the shadow Home Secretary that one of the issues, as David Anderson has also said, is that legislation is spread over several different Acts, and it is necessary to bring it together in a single law. We intend to look very carefully at David Anderson's proposals in relation to increased or changed oversight arrangements. We are talking about not simply rebranding an existing law but looking to see what legislation is necessary to ensure that these powers continue to be available with the right regulatory framework, the right oversight and the right authorisation arrangements into the future.

We have had to introduce two new pieces of legislation in the data and counter-terrorism area in the past 18 months. I hope that we can establish a law that can stand for some time, and that we will not have to come back to Parliament repeatedly with new legislation. When matters are devolved, we will hold discussions with the Scottish Government. As the hon. and learned Lady will be aware, national security is a reserved matter. She referred to pre-legislative scrutiny. I understand that discussions are taking place about the nature of the Joint Committee, and that is a matter for the business managers.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): Speaking as somebody who during my four years in office was supposed to be an initiate of the regulatory framework under which our agencies are supposed to work, I heartily endorse what David Anderson has said about its comprehensibility. For that reason, I greatly welcome the Government's move towards a new legislative framework. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that that framework should carry with it clarity and a degree of predictability and understanding, because without that the public will not be reassured that it might be misused? Equally, she might also agree that if we put together such a framework it is right and proper that we should give our agencies the powers they need to protect us, and not simply allow this to be an opportunity to prevent them from doing the job of protecting us, which in my experience they have been doing very well and ethically.

Mrs May: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his comments and, in particular, for his last point. It is absolutely the case that our agencies have been and are working lawfully and ethically in everything they do.

[Mrs May]

They have a difficult job to do and it is important, as he says, that we give them the powers they need. It is in everyone's interests that the legislation is as clear as possible, but I am tempted to say that although I start off thinking that it will be simple to provide a clear piece of legislation, once parliamentary counsel and the lawyers in this House and in the other place get hold of it, the clarity tends to get a little lost. We shall see what happens.

My right hon. and learned Friend raises another important issue, which is the question of foreseeability. People should be able to understand not just how powers might be being used but how they might be used in future, and that is of course an issue that would need to be considered.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I join the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary in thanking Mr Anderson for this excellent report. It is right that we should consider judicial scrutiny, and the approach of the Home Secretary to give this to a Joint Committee is the right one. It cannot be handled by one Committee. She will note that Committees in the previous Parliament—and individual Members—have talked about the fact that the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act was introduced in 2000 and needs to be updated. Does she agree that that is also on the agenda and that, as she consolidates these pieces of legislation, it is important that we consider that Act to ensure that our agencies have the right powers and that there is also a proper balance?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman is right and, of course, under his chairmanship the Home Affairs Committee touched on some of those issues. Some of the powers that David Anderson is talking about relate to RIPA and how it operates, and of course they will be considered as part of the new legislation.

Sir Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): May I draw the Home Secretary's attention to recommendation 66, which appears in paragraph 14.82? The report recommends the abandonment of judicial approval for local authorities seeking to obtain communications data. My right hon. Friend will remember the abuses by local authorities and the reasons we introduced these safeguards. I do not think that the public would mind local authorities using those powers on matters to do with Prevent, but they would rather object to them being used in relation to a person applying for a school place.

Mrs May: My right hon. Friend makes a pertinent point and I was pleased to work with him to ensure that we could introduce those extra safeguards in the operation of access to communications data and ending the intrusive use of these powers by local authorities. He is absolutely right. People will not want us to go backwards in how local authorities might use these powers. When intrusive powers are being used, it is essential that their use is necessary and proportionate, and I think that everybody would agree that their use in whether people were getting the right school places was neither of those.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I, too, welcome the work that David Anderson has carried out on this important issue. Does the Home Secretary accept that

there are many complications in all this, not least administratively, judicially, ethically and procedurally? As a former member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, may I ask her whether she will accept that the timetable she has laid down for the consideration of a draft Bill might be too tight? Will she give some consideration to whether it might be possible to renew the existing legislation if pre-legislative scrutiny needs to take more time?

Mrs May: I understand the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. We have the deadline of December 2016, which was put in consciously by the previous Parliament because it believed that it was necessary to look again at the legislative framework and that that should be done within a limited timetable. So I hesitate to suggest that we should at this stage say that that timetable should be changed. We should do what we can to ensure that we meet the timetable. I fully recognise that these matters are complex, and they raise issues in relation not just to what David Anderson has put in his report, but to other circumstances. It always behoves Government to make sure there are no unintended adverse consequences of any decisions that are taken in relation to that, and we will try to ensure that the maximum amount of time is available. At this stage, we should retain that December 2016 deadline because Parliament set it for very good reason.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): This is a first-rate and comprehensive report, but I accept what the Home Secretary said. This should not be the last word on the matter. There are other reports and we will want to try to get this consolidated. Despite my involvement on the Intelligence and Security Committee, I am increasingly of the view that we need to get public trust to ensure that judicial involvement is not simply a matter of oversight in relation to warrants. I very much agree with the comments of the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth). We need to get this right. We need consolidating legislation. It will be difficult, but we need to get it right both in this House and in the other place. That may take a little longer than the very ambitious timetable that my right hon. Friend has put in place, and I am glad that she is turning her mind to it in this way. Above all, we need consolidating legislation that does not potentially lead to what we have had in the past—a sense that arbitrage has been used because one piece of legislation is easier than another for the security services.

Mrs May: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. I thank him and the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) for the contribution they made on the Intelligence and Security Committee, which produced its own report in relation to these matters. My right hon. Friend is right about ensuring that there is public confidence and public trust. Some interesting figures are quoted in the David Anderson report from a poll taken of the public, which shows the significant trust and confidence that they have in our agencies, and the belief of the overwhelming majority that the agencies should have the powers they need to keep us safe. It is a feature of the British public that they have a more sanguine approach to the necessity of powers being held by the authorities than we may see reported elsewhere. But he is right: we need to look at these issues very carefully and ensure that that confidence is there.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. These are extremely sensitive and often complicated matters of which the House is treating with great care. I point out that we have another statement to follow. I want to accommodate colleagues, but somewhat greater succinctness is required.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): The overwhelming majority of the population at the time would no doubt have supported 90 days pre-charge detention. It is the job of the House of Commons to determine what is right—to get the right balance between the acute danger of terrorism and civil liberties, not to talk about what the large majority of the public may or may not want. We are elected to make the decision that we consider to be correct. Is it not the case that the Home Secretary intends to bring in a measure—rightly, in my view, described as the snoopers charter—which the previous Government could not introduce in the last Parliament because their coalition partner would not agree? As far as I am concerned—obviously, there will be a good deal of controversy about this—the snoopers charter is a greater affront to civil liberties than any measure that has been introduced or proposed in recent years.

Mrs May: The response I give on that misnomer of a piece of legislation is the same as I gave the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry): it is no such thing as it has been described. It is about ensuring merely that, as matters increasingly move into the digital age, the agencies are able to have access to the same sort of data as they have had access to in the past, which is used in the vast majority of serious crime cases—not just in investigation, but in bringing prosecutions of serious criminals—and in counter-terrorism investigations.

The hon. Gentleman refers to the 90 days of pre-charge detention. I point out to him that the Conservative party opposed that measure, and I remind him that it was his Labour Government who introduced 28 days of pre-charge detention, and the coalition Government who reduced it to 14 days.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: For a pithy inquiry from the Government Back Benches, I think it wise now to look to a non-lawyer. I call Mr Mark Pritchard. [*Laughter.*]

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Good luck on both fronts, Mr Speaker, but thank you.

Is it not the case that the greatest civil liberty of all is the right to life? The Home Secretary is absolutely right that to call extra investigatory and surveillance powers for the intelligence services, with the right to legal oversights, a snoopers charter is a misnomer. Would the measure not be better termed a security charter?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes an important point. As I have said previously in this House, the issue of security and privacy is not a zero-sum game. One can only enjoy one's privacy if one has one's security.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): The Home Secretary has, in a welcome move, promised the House pre-legislative scrutiny of the legislation that will follow from Anderson's

excellent report. She says that it will include consideration not only of that report, but of the ISC's recent report and the forthcoming report from the Royal United Services Institute. There is another report, however, which is still secret: Sir Nigel Sheinwald's report. Although I understand that some of the details of that report are commercially confidential and cannot be released, can she make sure that Sir Nigel's conclusions are available to those conducting the pre-legislative scrutiny?

Mrs May: I will look at that. The Prime Minister's written statement today refers to the work that Sir Nigel Sheinwald undertook as the Prime Minister's data envoy. As my right hon. Friend makes clear—I did not refer to this—in parallel to the new legislation, we will be taking forward Sir Nigel's advice, including pursuing a strengthened UK-US mutual legal assistance treaty process and a new international framework. Sir Nigel was looking particularly at the question of the powers and capabilities in relation to cross-border matters and the international framework needed for that.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): In welcoming the report, I note that electronic communications and social media are powerful tools for the terrorist and their use and sophistication have been expanding very rapidly, but there remain concerns that the machinery within Government, and even more so within Parliament, to monitor and regulate through legislation is unable to keep up with that pace of change, which leads to concerns about safeguarding civil liberties. How does my right hon. Friend intend to use the opportunity of the report to address the mechanisms of reporting and oversight?

Mrs May: The previous Government acted to improve the mechanisms of parliamentary oversight by giving extra powers to the Intelligence and Security Committee. The ISC's report on its consideration of matters surrounding the terrible murder of Drummer Lee Rigby showed a step change in the sort of information available and investigation of the operations of the agencies by the ISC and gave Parliament a much greater ability to look at such matters. However, I will reflect on my hon. Friend's comment on the mechanisms overall and whether anything is needed in that respect.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): In coalition, the Liberal Democrats were right to block the snoopers charter, and in government the Conservatives are wrong to forge ahead with it.

On the subject of web logs, of which only Russia of the liberal democracies mandates the retention, will the Home Secretary allow proposals to track the browsing habits of 40 million UK citizens every week to be brought forward only if there is, as set out in paragraph 13b of the executive summary:

“a detailed operational case...and...rigorous assessment conducted of the lawfulness, likely effectiveness, intrusiveness and cost”

of the measures? Will she also confirm that, as David Anderson urges, no progress at all will be made on the question of third-party data until a compelling operational case has been made?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I take a different view from him on the communications data capabilities of the security

[Mrs May]

and intelligence agencies and of law enforcement. These are important powers and it is clear that those powers are degrading, so the ability of law enforcement to catch paedophiles and serious criminals has been reduced, as has the ability of our agencies to deal with the matters they deal with.

The right hon. Gentleman refers to web logs. In the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, we took one step to increase the capabilities of the agencies in respect of IP addresses, but it remains the case that not all those IP addresses can be recognised and reconciled because of the inability to introduce the further legislation that his party blocked when we were in coalition.

Finally, it is not the case that that legislation was about investigating, mapping or monitoring the web browsing habits of 40 million citizens every week of the year. That is a complete misdescription of what was proposed, and I suggest that if the right hon. Gentleman wants a proper debate, he stops using those terms.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): In my previous life, I prosecuted criminals for a living and I relied on evidence obtained under RIPA to convict the guilty. What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the importance of communications data in the fight against terrorism and serious organised crime, including helping those who prosecute criminals to bring them to justice in court?

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing her experience to this House. It is important that people recognise that this is not just a debate about what this House puts into legislation; it is a debate about the powers that our agencies have and the ability prosecutors then have to bring people to justice. Some 95% of serious and organised crime investigations make use of communications data, and such information is essential for prosecution in many of those cases. I am sorry that the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) is not in the Chamber today, because in his former incarnation as Director of Public Prosecutions, he was clear about the importance of communications data not only in investigating but in prosecuting criminals.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): As one of those who have struggled with the legislation for some time, I join in the welcome for David Anderson's recommendation that the new legislation be written in non-technical language that can be understood by intelligent readers across the world. I also welcome his recommendations that RIPA parts 1 and 4 be replaced and for increased judicial oversight—something that I think RIPA lacked, so I am glad that it will be looked at again. Also, I will read with great care what is said about the bulk collection of data.

This is an important measure, which needs to be debated much more widely than is currently the case. I support the calls for a day's debate in this Chamber, so that we all have an opportunity to debate the many issues relating to it. This is too important to be captured by a few voices. We need to have a more profound debate.

Mrs May: I am tempted to ask the hon. Lady that if she, a lawyer, could not understand the legislation, how does she think the rest of us managed? She will have seen the Leader of the House in the Chamber when the shadow Home Secretary called for a day's debate, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend will reflect on that point.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): We are all concerned about getting the balance correct between security and civil and human rights, and I have absolutely no doubt that the Home Secretary will devote her time to ensuring that, but is she concerned about reports that the social media websites in the United States are threatening to refuse to co-operate with legitimate requests for the provision of information about suspected terrorists and other serious criminals? If the reports are true, what conversations will she have with her American counterparts to ensure that that does not happen, and will she remind them during the course of those discussions that there is still a great deal of concern in this House and elsewhere about the lack of balance in the United Kingdom-United States extradition treaty?

Mrs May: On my right hon. and learned Friend's last point, we did make changes to the extradition arrangements between the United Kingdom and the United States when we brought in the forum bar—I think that it has been an important addition—which ensures the balance between the UK and the US in the extradition treaty. We of course talk regularly with communication service providers and social media platforms, and I talk about these measures with my counterparts in the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice in the United States. Of course, it is precisely those sorts of issues that the Prime Minister asked Sir Nigel Sheinwald to look at. As I indicated in response to the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), as a result of that work we will be taking forward work to enhance the mutual legal assistance treaty with the United States, but we will also be looking at a broader international framework within which the companies will operate in order to enable access to the data.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The report is a powerful vindication of the excellent work of human rights campaigners in this country who have long argued for greater proportionality in our surveillance laws. EU courts and now David Anderson have made it clear that the blanket retention of my constituents' data is unlawful—it is against human rights laws—so will the Home Secretary confirm that she accepts that principle and will use it in future legislation?

Mrs May: David Anderson has been very clear that the powers that the agencies have are powers that they need. His questions are these: what is the appropriate oversight of, and authorisation for, the use of those powers; and what is the appropriate regulatory framework? That is what we will be looking at.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Consolidation of the law in a non-controversial area is an immensely difficult and technical task that is normally handed over to the Law Commission for years. The right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) is concerned about the amount of time we have for scrutiny after the autumn. If this

law is being drafted from scratch, I do not think that my right hon. Friend has a cat in hell's chance of producing it in the autumn. Just how advanced is the internal work on drafting the Bill?

Mrs May: As I said in response to the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), we have a timetable that was set by Parliament, because it believed that it was important that the powers in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 should not be allowed to continue for a significant period of time, so it was decided that the right end point should be the end of 2016. Of course, some of the issues that the report deals with have been looked at by the Home Office previously, notably in relation to communications data.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I am grateful that the importance of thorough pre-legislative scrutiny has been recognised, but may I ask the Home Secretary to consider the recommendations relating to broader parliamentary scrutiny? In relation to recommendation 120, will she be wary of anything that might dilute the focus currently provided by the Intelligence and Security Committee? In relation to recommendation 122, will she ensure not only that public bodies, where appropriate and subject to the proper safeguards, provide the information to Parliament, but that Parliament has a proper means of testing and scrutinising that information?

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend for his points about the recommendations. Of course, as I indicated in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), we have already increased Parliament's power to look at those issues through the enhanced capabilities we have given to the Intelligence and Security Committee. I think that it is important that the Committee retains a clear focus so that we can be confident that it is able to bring the correct oversight to these matters, which is important and has been enhanced.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree with the Prime Minister that there should be no safe spaces on the internet for terrorists and paedophiles to communicate?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an important point that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made. We should ensure that our law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to ensure that there is no safe space for terrorists, paedophiles and other serious criminals to operate.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Having been involved in covert surveillance operations, I was always surprised by how many men and women it took to carry them out. Do our security agencies have enough people to do the job as well as it can be done?

Mrs May: Obviously we regularly look at the resources available to the security and intelligence agencies. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced before Christmas, the security and intelligence agencies and the police received a budget injection to cover a variety

of issues. We look at that regularly and will continue to do so, most notably in the upcoming comprehensive spending review.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend referred a moment ago to IP addresses. Will she set out the work that the Government will do with communication service providers in taking forward the agenda she has set out?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue, because of course, as I mentioned in my statement, it is not just a question of the Government working with the police and law enforcement agencies; we also need to work with industry. We meet the communication service providers regularly to discuss the use of the powers that the various agencies have, to ensure that the legislation is appropriate, and to look at the technological changes taking place.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Striking the right balance between liberty and security is essential in a free society, but on the issue of a snoopers charter, I invite the Home Secretary to give real weight to the opinion of David Anderson's distinguished predecessor as independent reviewer, Lord Carlile, who said that the Communications Data Bill was

"a proportionate response to enable law enforcement and prosecutors to keep pace with the ever more connected world in which we live."

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right to mention Lord Carlile's point about the previous Communications Data Bill. I believe that it was a necessary and proportionate response to the need to ensure that the agencies and the police continue to have the powers to keep us safe, to catch paedophiles, to prevent terrorism and to catch and prosecute serious and organised criminals. Those powers have degraded as people use digital communications more, so we need to update the legislation to ensure that the agencies and the police can continue to do their job.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): David Anderson rightly identifies trust as the issue at the heart of the matter. These powers obviously have a wider application, but in all the evidence to the Home Affairs Committee on Islamist radicalisation it was mistrust of the state that was used to manipulate and radicalise young Britons. While I add my voice to those welcome recommendations to strengthen judicial oversight, does the Home Secretary agree that it is essential to strengthen our counter-narrative efforts so that we can put the lie to those terror recruiters on our shores who are selling a glamorised and dishonest version of jihad, and so that we can reduce our need for these powers in the first place?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. In the fight against those terrorists who are led by Islamist radicalisation to take action, and indeed those doing the radicalisation, we need to look very carefully at that issue. She is absolutely right about that. The Government have a commitment to bring forward a counter-extremism strategy. The strategy will be about promoting the values we share in this country; the values that make our pluralistic society what it is, and that make it a society that many people wish to live in

[Mrs May]

and enjoy. We must ensure that our narrative against those plying a distorted view of Islam is strong so that we can encourage people to recognise that Islam is a peaceful religion, not a religion that is leading to acts of terrorism.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Robert Hannigan, the new head of the Government Communications Headquarters, has recently said that some technology companies are the command and control centres of terrorism because they positively fail to comply with Government requests to take material down in the post-Snowden era. Will these new measures help address that?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right. There is a very real responsibility for the communications service providers—the internet providers—in relation to the access that the authorities need for these powers. We need to make sure that the legislation is appropriate so that there can be confidence in it. The counter-terrorism internet referral unit has been, and is now, taking down about 1,000 pieces of terrorist material per week from the internet.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Technology moves on apace, and criminals are very quick to use new technology. However, the legislative process is much slower, and the Home Secretary has set out plans for detailed pre-scrutiny. What plans does she have to try to ensure that, as far as possible, the legislation is future-proofed so that we do not have to go through the process time and again?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. In fact, David Anderson himself has referred to the need to try to ensure that legislation can be technology-neutral so that it is, as it were, future-proofed. As I said in response to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), I hope that the legislation we will introduce is able to stand the test of time so that we are not constantly having to come back to this House with new proposals.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Writing about technology over the past 10 years, I saw a huge number of changes. I commend this report for trying to establish principles so that the legislation does not go out of date. Does the Home Secretary believe it is right

that, as a nation, we have the same powers in the age of Snapchat and WhatsApp as we had in the age of the telephone?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes the very important point that as people move on to new means of communication, we need to make sure that powers and the regulatory framework for those powers has kept up. That is what we wanted to do in the Communications Data Bill, but we were prevented by our coalition partners. We will obviously be looking to introduce the necessary requirements in the new legislation.

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah, good—Mr Byron Davies.

Byron Davies: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

In a previous life, having worked considerably in operational terms with RIPA, one of the difficulties I found was with the communications providers. What are the Home Secretary's ideas for the legislation to make sure that it does not create problems in future?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an important point. This is partly to do with the legislation and partly to do with ensuring that we maintain relationships with the communications service providers, to whom we talk to regularly about these matters. It is also about ensuring that this is the right legislation to give people the confidence that the powers are being used appropriately and where they are necessary and proportionate.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the Home Secretary and to colleagues. It has been a huge pleasure, both in the exchanges on the business question and in the exchanges that we have just enjoyed, to accommodate a very large number of new Members. I say in the gentlest terms, as a source of encouragement to new Members, that if they decide that they no longer wish to ask a question because it has already been asked—although that would set a dangerous precedent in the House of Commons—or for any other reason, that is fine, but if they are genuinely interested in being called, then, as old hands will be able to testify, persistence is a very important principle in the operation of the affairs of the House. In short, if you really want to get called—I cannot promise you will, but I think the record shows that I do try to accommodate most people most of the time—keep standing, and the chances are that you will get there in the end. Thank you very much.

Royal Bank of Scotland

12.33 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement regarding the Chancellor's speech at Mansion House last night.

First, I turn to the Royal Bank of Scotland. The £45 billion that the previous Government paid for the Royal Bank of Scotland represents the largest single bank bail-out in the world. The bank employs over 60,000 people in Britain and provides over a quarter of all small business lending in Britain. Its problems and its slow recovery have been one of the biggest drags on our economy, as many smaller firms know all too painfully. The restructuring of the Royal Bank of Scotland and the work that Ross McEwan and his team have done since have brought us to a decision point. This Government were not responsible for the bail-out of the Royal Bank of Scotland or the price paid then for shares bought by the taxpayer, but we are responsible for getting the best deal now for the taxpayer and doing whatever we can to support the British economy.

As the Chancellor set out, there is no doubt that starting to sell the Government's stake in RBS is the right thing to do on both counts. That is not just our judgment—it is the judgment of the Governor of the Bank of England, whose views the Chancellor sought and whose letter on this issue we published last night. In the Governor's words, "it is in the public interest for the government to begin now to return RBS to private ownership."

He goes on to say that this

"would promote financial stability, a more competitive banking sector, and the interests of the wider economy."

Indeed, he adds that

"there could be considerable net costs to taxpayers of further delaying the start of a sale."

That is also the conclusion of the independent review that we commissioned from Rothschild and that was published last night. It says that beginning sales now, and increasing the free float, will improve the marketability of our remaining stake, and it means that we can expect to see larger sales on better terms in the future—but only if we start now. This independent report confirms that taking into account all the sales we have authorised of our bank assets, and the fees we have received, at the current valuations taxpayers can expect to make £14 billion more than they paid out.

In the coming months we will therefore begin to sell our stake in RBS. It is the right thing to do for British businesses, British taxpayers and the British economy. Taking all the bank interventions in total—Lloyds, Northern Rock, and the scheme fees—we are making sure that taxpayers get back billions of pounds more than they were forced to put in. Of course, given the size of our stake in RBS, the sales will take some years and are likely to involve all types of investors. With such a complex investment case, we have to start with institutions, but, as the Chancellor said, there is no reason why ordinary investors—in other words, members of the public—should not take part in due course.

I now turn to Royal Mail. As the Chancellor set out last night, the first sale of our remaining stake in Royal Mail has begun. The Government have today sold half

of the 30% stake they retained in Royal Mail plc at a price of 500p per share. This sale has raised £750 million, and that money can be used to reduce public debt. We have said that we will dispose of all our shares in Royal Mail in this Parliament. We will continue to review the options in the light of our stated sale objectives, but there is no rigid timetable. Value for the taxpayer remains the priority. The Chancellor also announced last night that the Government intend to gift up to 1% of the shares of the company to Royal Mail's UK employees, in recognition of their work in turning Royal Mail around.

Finally, the fair and effective markets review yesterday published its final report. The report sets out 21 recommendations to help to restore trust in the wholesale fixed-income, currency and commodity markets. The review was established by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governor of the Bank of England in June 2014 to help to restore trust in those markets in the wake of a number of recent high-profile abuses. The review is centred on four principles: first, individuals must be held to account for their own conduct; secondly, firms must take greater collective responsibility for market practices; thirdly, regulators should close gaps in regulatory coverage and broaden the regime holding senior management to account; and fourthly, given the global nature of these markets, co-ordinated international action should be taken wherever possible to improve fairness and effectiveness. As the Chancellor set out in his Mansion House speech last night, there is no trade-off between high standards of conduct and competitiveness. Implementing the reforms set out in the review will ensure trust in our markets and strengthen London's global leadership position.

This Government have a long-term plan to make the UK economy the most prosperous of all the world's major economies in the coming generation and for that prosperity to be shared widely across our one nation. The steps we are announcing today are a key part of achieving a new settlement for our public finances and for our financial services industry, and they will help us secure that bright future for all. I commend this statement to the House.

12.40 pm

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the new Minister to her role, but where is the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Should he not have the courtesy to come to House of Commons and answer questions on what might be one of the most important financial decisions of this Parliament? Taxpayers deserve to know more about what is going on here. Why is it that when there are difficult questions, the Chancellor always blames someone else or sends someone else?

Taxpayers who bailed out RBS during the global financial crisis want their money back and will rightly be suspicious of any rush to sell. When RBS is still restructuring the business and awaiting a US settlement for the mis-selling of subprime mortgages, would a premature sale not pose a risk for the taxpayer? The Chancellor said two years ago that he would countenance a sale of RBS only when

"the bank is fully able to support our economy and when we get good value".

Does the Minister really think that those tests have now been met?

[Chris Leslie]

Although we have always supported the eventual return of RBS to the private sector, is it not essential that the Treasury get back as much money as possible to help pay down the national debt? Why the rush when the share price is so far below the break-even point? RBS had to be bailed out urgently, but it does not have to be sold off at the same speed. The Minister should not give the impression, either, that the Governor of the Bank of England is telling Ministers that the price is now right, because he makes it very clear in his letter that questions of valuation are entirely for the Government.

Before Government Members start pretending that the RBS rescue was somehow not a matter of consensus at the time, we are not going to let them re-write history. The truth is that the Chancellor did not oppose the urgent rescue of RBS at the market price back in 2008. The National Audit Office says that the rescue price was “justified” and the Institute for Fiscal Studies says it was

“not obviously unfavourable to taxpayers”.

They know full well what the consequences would have been if the bank had gone under.

On the specifics, will the Minister clarify for the record exactly what the Government accept the break-even share price for the bank to be? The figure of a potential £7.2 billion loss might be understating things, because the Rothschild calculation she mentioned nets off the fees the Government have received from the bank since 2008.

On Lloyds, the Treasury has already pledged that shares sold through the Government’s trading plan will not be sold for less than 73.6p—the price the Government paid for them. What is the equivalent red line below which the Treasury would not sell an RBS share? Why can the Minister not give us more detail about precisely when the sale will commence and what impact she predicts it will have on debt reduction?

As for the extremely dodgy claim that if we roll everything together, stand on one leg and squint a bit, losses at RBS do not really look that bad after all, is not that a bit like saying, “I’ve sold the house and lost a fortune, but don’t worry because I got a great deal on the car”? Come off it! The Government cannot pretend they are not making a loss on RBS just because they are making a gain on completely separate assets elsewhere. At a time when the Chancellor is reportedly on the brink of axing £5 billion from tax credits for children of working parents, should not the Government be far more careful not to lose billions more by rushing a sale on RBS? Everyone knows that when it comes to getting value for money, they have poor form: just look at the fire sale of Royal Mail.

We have to ask what the real reasons for this hasty sell-off are. We saw in the March Budget that the Chancellor rushed forward asset sales in order to just about meet the Treasury’s debt target. Is he repeating the same thing before the emergency Budget, regardless of the best price for the taxpayer? Or perhaps this is the Chancellor trying to prove his ideological credentials as part of his leadership bid, to impress all those new Conservative Back Benchers. Taxpayers need to know that there are sound reasons for this and that he is not doing it just to suit himself. We have a hidden Chancellor

and a hidden agenda. It is now for the Government to justify the claim that they are putting taxpayers’ interests first.

Harriett Baldwin: Clearly, the Chancellor is not dodging any difficult questions because I did not hear any difficult questions from the hon. Gentleman. It is a bit rich that the new shadow Chancellor has chosen to make his first attack on the Government’s economic policy by drawing attention to his party’s woeful track record on bank regulation and by publicly disagreeing with the advice of the Governor of the Bank of England.

Last week the hon. Gentleman told this Chamber:

“I have had plenty of time to reflect on the result of the general election. Obviously, we are disappointed with it and we will review our policies accordingly”.—[*Official Report*, 4 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 789.]

Clearly, that reflection does not include apologising for the lax regulation of our banking sector or realising that the British people do not want a Government who are committed to borrowing more, spending more and nationalising more. Above all, the hon. Gentleman’s reflection clearly does not include recognising that his mentors, Gordon Brown and Ed Balls, paid a high price for their intervention in the Royal Bank of Scotland. I will take no lectures on economic competence from an Opposition party that in office sold off the country’s gold reserves at an all-time low, crashed the banking system and the economy, and left us with the biggest peacetime deficit in our nation’s history.

I will answer the hon. Gentleman’s questions. He asked whether the Government will publish a break-even share price for RBS. I do not know whether he is Mystic Meg, but I do not know exactly at what price the sales will be made. The hon. Gentleman will have seen the Rothschild report that we have published today. Under his Government, it was forecast in 2009 that the bank interventions would result in a total loss of between £20 billion and £50 billion. We have turned the economy and the banking sector around, and as of this week the Rothschild report estimates that the overall sum total of the interventions will benefit the taxpayer by £14 billion.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): First, may I warmly welcome the Minister to her new role? She has a great job and I congratulate her on obtaining it. May I also warmly welcome her statement? We need to grasp that the loss has already occurred: it took place in 2008. It was made possible by poor regulation and it was made certain by shocking incompetence by the RBS board.

The Rothschild report was made available in the Vote Office only a few minutes before the end of the previous statement, so I have had only a brief chance to look at it. The overall surplus identified from the total sales of financial sector interventions is £14 billion, but a footnote makes it clear that that excludes the cost of funding. I gave the Minister only a few moments’ notice that I would raise this issue, but I would be extremely grateful if she could say what the cost of funding is and what the number would be, were it included in the table.

Harriett Baldwin: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his unopposed re-election as Chair of the Treasury Committee. That he asks a question about the footnote illustrates his forensic reading of the published materials.

As he knows, at the end of 2009 the estimate was that the cost of bank interventions would range between a £20 billion loss and a £50 billion loss. As of last week, the Rothschild report estimates that that situation has completely turned around, and that the overall recovery from the bank interventions is in the order of a £14 billion magnitude. The overall cost of funding on our Treasury issuance is at record lows thanks to the prudent economic management of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I welcome early sight of the statement.

The Government are fond of talking about long-term economic plans—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] Absolutely. However, a sell-off is not a strategy, and a strategy for the banking sector is completely missing from the statement. My first question is this: is it not the case that there remains scope for a proper review of the options for the future of RBS, such as the consideration of creating challenger banks out of it? Secondly, yesterday I asked the Secretary of State for Scotland about the branch closures the length and breadth of the country that are being announced by RBS. Is that part of the price that people are expected to pay for this rushed sell-off?

Thirdly, the statement mentioned concern about the drag on the economy and the poor performance in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, so will the Minister explain precisely how the policy will further strengthen the SME sector?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome the new hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin). What a refreshing change it is.

The hon. Gentleman asks about Royal Bank of Scotland in particular. I gently point out that if the Scottish National party had won the independence referendum, there would be no ability to intervene in the banking sector in the way that the UK Government intervened.

The role that Royal Bank of Scotland plays as the most significant lender in the SME sector is critical. It has not been able to play its full part because of public ownership. The Bank of England letter states that a phased return of RBS to private ownership would promote financial stability and lead to a more competitive banking sector, in the interests of the wider economy.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend to her long-overdue promotion. Will she confirm that any cost calculation will have to take into account the fact that the sale will reduce the deficit, and therefore prevent any extra debt interest that would otherwise be incurred by this country? Will she tell the House that putting the banks into the private sector is not a matter of ideology, but simply because, as previous privatisations have shown, when companies are free in the private sector they make more profit, pay more taxes and serve their customers better?

Harriett Baldwin: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I thank him for his kind words of welcome. He is correct to say that we are not doing this purely for price reasons. It is important to take into account the wider economic impact. That is why I am grateful to the Governor of the Bank of England for highlighting

the ways in which a banking sector free of public ownership will allow more capital, more restructuring and more competitive characteristics in our economy.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Minister to her post. In her statement, she rightly draws attention to the scale of the bail-out of RBS. For the avoidance of doubt, will she give the House a quote from the Chancellor, who was shadow Chancellor at the time, criticising either the bail-out in principle or the share price paid by the Government of that time?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words.

As the Chancellor made clear in his Mansion House speech last night, he was responsible for the decision point yesterday and for articulating a future path away from the situation he inherited. The right hon. Gentleman will remember that the Treasury predictions at the time of the interventions were that they would cost the taxpayer between £20 billion and £50 billion overall. The situation has moved on and the economy has recovered substantially from the largest recession in our peacetime history. It is time to put the banking sector into a new settlement, and to have a new settlement for our financial services.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Sir Mervyn King, the former Governor of the Bank of England, said:

“Why...did the Bank of England not do more to prevent the disaster? We should have. But the power to regulate banks had been taken away from us in 1997. Our power was limited to...preaching sermons.”

Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Bank of England now has the power to do more than just preach sermons?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House and congratulate her on an excellent question. The tripartite arrangements for bank regulation put in place by the former Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath let the country down. The work of the last Parliament was to reframe our financial services regulation, so that the Bank of England could take responsibility, and so that we have a single point of regulation for the financial sector overall, supplemented by the important work of the Financial Conduct Authority on behaviour, and by the Prudential Regulation Authority. It is incredibly important that we have moved on from the tripartite arrangement. We do not want another situation in which the British taxpayer has to bail out a bank.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Is it not just conceivable that this mad rush is being perpetrated because the Government know that, with more than 50 rebels on the Back Benches, they are likely to lose their majority sooner rather than later, and lose credibility in the process? This is coming from a Chancellor who has added more in five years to the national debt than all the Labour Chancellors put together. He has been blaming Labour for bailing out the banks, but he supported it. He is now bailing out his friends in the City.

Harriett Baldwin: What can I say? It is extraordinary. I do not suppose we heard that kind of rant when the former Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath was

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intervening in the banking sector. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not noticed that, in the single vote on legislation on Second Reading we have had in this Parliament, the Government won by a majority of 491. [*Interruption.*]

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): When the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) has finished, may I welcome the Minister to her place? She brings with her a great wealth of experience from the City. Part of that wealth of experience is a full knowledge of the sunk cost fallacy. Does she agree that it is completely ludicrous to say that an investment decision made in 2015 should be based solely on the information known in 2008, and that that view betrays a staggering lack of knowledge about the investment process among those opposed to selling the stake in RBS at potentially a loss?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for his question, which shows his depth of knowledge. He is right. In my years of managing portfolios, what I paid for investments in the first place was a fact, but managers also have to factor in the future. None of us has a crystal ball. My hon. Friend's words are wisely taken.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Lady to her new role at the Dispatch Box. Everyone agrees and understands that the RBS shareholding needs to be transferred to the private sector. The Rothschild report states that if shares were sold at the current share price there would be a paper loss of £7.2 billion, which by anybody's standards is a lot of money. What the report does not show, however, is why the public benefits add up to £7 billion. Could the Minister explain that please?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank the hon. Lady, who has great knowledge of these matters, for her question. Any estimate—and the one in the Rothschild report is no different—will be based on the current market conditions. The number that the report cites is, I think, as at 5 June. I note that the share price of RBS has performed well today; there will be different prices in the years to come. The Government have made it very clear that this will not be a quick process; it will take time. We can only project as at today's prices the £7 billion figure, but it may or may not be a bigger number in the future.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the only reason we can start selling off our stake in the bank is the growing demand in our economy thanks to our long-term economic plan?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. I know he has a great deal of experience in these matters. He is absolutely right that this is a key part of the long-term economic plan. We cannot have a healthy economic recovery without a healthy financial sector. I do not think that anyone in this place would argue that we can have a healthy banking sector when a large chunk of it, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said, is in taxpayers' hands.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Does the Minister think it would be prudent to have pre-scrutiny by Parliament, either through the National Audit Office or

the Treasury Committee, of the Government's objectives in the sale and the money they could be seeing? Will she also say a word about RBS's liabilities? For example, there is currently a mis-selling inquiry into the enterprise finance guarantee scheme, which my constituents are facing. Who will ultimately be responsible for those liabilities?

Harriett Baldwin: The right hon. Gentleman asks a good question. I am sure the relevant Committees will take a close interest in this matter, because it is obviously a very large public investment. In terms of the liability side of the equation, he will be aware that there are a number of different pending regulatory matters that affect RBS. He will also be aware, as I think it says in the Rothschild report, that the market is aware of these things and will factor them into the price of the shares.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): May I, too, welcome my hon. Friend to her post? I also welcome the shadow Chancellor, although I think we rather miss the more rambunctious approach of his predecessor. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) illustrated the fundamental investment fallacy of not selling things on the basis of an historic price. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that the only reason the Opposition can take this foolish position is that clause IV may be out of their rulebook but it remains within their hearts?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my hon. Friend for a very good point, very well made. It is absolutely the case that we are responsible for ensuring that, as we go forward from this decision point, we get the best possible value irrespective of what the previous Government paid, which was, in retrospect, too high.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to her post. One would expect that the duty of the Chancellor would be to sweat the assets as his disposal, but with the fire sale of Royal Mail and now RBS, the taxpayer is being let down, having had to endure all the pain of the worldwide economic crash caused by the banks with none of the gain in this case.

Harriett Baldwin: I really will not take any lectures on letting the country down in terms of economic management. The people who suffer the most when the banks fail, the regulatory system fails and the economy fails are the very poorest in our society. It is outrageous for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that the economic recovery, the clear turnaround in this portfolio of legacy assets and clearing up the mess that his party left behind is anything other than progress.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It is right for the shadow Chancellor to say that the taxpayers want their money back. It is also right, and I hope my hon. Friend agrees, that people should listen to the Governor of the Bank of England when he warns that delaying the sale of our stake in RBS would lead to a considerable net cost for the taxpayer.

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. I agree with her. She points out an important passage in the letter from the Governor of the Bank of

England. He believes, for all sorts of reasons from where he sits as our overarching economic regulator, that it is important that we come to this decision point and staging post. I also emphasise that this process will take some time. It is not something that will happen today, tomorrow or the next day. The process of clearing up the mess left behind by the previous Government is a lengthy one.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I, too, welcome the hon. Lady to her post. Will she tell us whether the Chancellor intends to make a habit of announcing policy to a roomful of bankers, based on a secret review by an investment bank with no public consultation? Did he even consider the alternatives, such as turning RBS into a network of local stakeholder banks, like they have in so many other countries, as a perfect example of localism in practice?

Harriett Baldwin: I think my right hon. Friend was delighted to be invited back to the Mansion House to make a speech again this year. The question the hon. Lady asks about locally owned banks indicates that she favours a system of public ownership of our banking sector which, overall, the Government disagree with.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Having worked on the sale of Northern Rock—I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—may I congratulate the Government on their successful asset sale programme to date? As referenced in paragraph 2.2.2 of the Rothschild report, the benefits of these sales are not just direct for the taxpayer; they are indirect as well. They may result in increased lending and more mortgage approvals. Will my hon. Friend confirm that those indirect benefits will be taken into account when we judge the success of this programme?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place, and also welcome his wealth of experience and knowledge in this matter, which he ably demonstrates in his question. The sale will bring wider benefits to the overall economy. It will help us to continue to make progress in making the banking sector more competitive, and may result in a more competitive financial services sector and mortgage sector. That position is echoed not only in the Rothschild report, but in the Governor of the Bank of England's letter.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): May I take the Minister back to page 11, table 2 and the footnote, because we did not get an answer when this was first asked? The table lays out not the forecast recoveries but just a statement of where we are at the moment, which could change. It does not include the cost of the funding of the interventions; in other words, the cost of the Treasury paper that was created to buy the assets in the first place and on which interest is being paid. Will the Minister please answer the question—what was the cost of funding the interventions?—so that we know the true cost, not the £14.3 billion?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the table is a snapshot of a moment in time. As time progresses, we will no doubt be able to pin down exactly the overall costs of clearing up the mess that Labour left behind.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I welcome today's statement and the steps being taken to return RBS to private ownership. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the steps set out in the markets review will help to tackle what the Governor of the Bank of England has called a "culture of impunity", which has been too prevalent in investment banking?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight a very important part of the Governor of the Bank of England's announcement last night—the "Fair and Effective Markets Review"; bringing a range of fixed income, currency and commodity markets within the regulatory perimeter; and aspiring to be not only the most competitive country in the world in which to locate a financial services business, but the one with the best, cleanest and most competitive regulatory system.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I join others in welcoming the hon. Lady to her new role. The sale price of Royal Mail shares last night—£5 per share—totally vindicates the cross-party conclusion of the former Business, Innovation and Skills Committee that Royal Mail shares were underpriced in the original sale. One reason was the over-reliance on institutional investors and the under-participation of the public. Will the Minister assure us that that lesson will be learned in the sale of RBS?

Harriett Baldwin: I have to disagree with the hon. Gentleman. A long time has passed since the initial flotation, during which the markets have done a lot better. The markets have welcomed the re-election of a strong Conservative Government who have turned the economy around and made huge improvements in our public finances. It is largely due to that that the price is so much higher.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): As we return RBS to the private sector, there are three alternatives. One is for the Government to hold on to the shares for as long as possible in the hope that the share price increases. The second is to sell the whole lot in one go and hope that we get the right price. The third is a phased sale that maximises the income for the taxpayer. Which does my hon. Friend believe is the right option?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend ably summarises a range of options. Today's statement clearly illustrates that we have rejected his first option of doing nothing. The Government have never shrunk from making difficult decisions that are in the right interests of the country's economic future. On the second option of selling everything in one go, it is not our opinion, given the size of the holding and as the reports make clear, that the sale can be done in short order; it will take a period of time—which leaves us with the third option.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): Has the Minister read, "Freeing Britain to Compete", produced by her party in 2007 and endorsed by the Prime Minister and, I believe, the Chancellor, which called for a vast range of regulation in financial services to be abolished or watered down, including in relation to money laundering? In particular, has she read the part that says that the Labour Government "claims that this regulation is all necessary. They seem to believe that without it banks could steal our money"?

Harriett Baldwin: No, I have not read that report.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Is not the reason it is difficult to get our money back from RBS that, other than the Greek banks, no other major bank in the world is in such a parlous, unprofitable state, the root causes of which go back to the last Labour Government—a poor loan book, terrible misconduct, resulting now in catastrophic fines, and ill-judged mergers? Even if we sell the shares at a loss, would that not merely be a tragic reminder to the British public of the failure and economic incompetence of Labour?

Harriett Baldwin: I could not put it better myself.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): As I understand it, the stake was originally acquired for £5 a share and the Government are selling them for about £3.50 a share and claiming that the taxpayer is making a profit. On that basis, with the weekend approaching, is the hon. Lady prepared to lend me £20? I will give her a tenner back next week.

Harriett Baldwin: I have just been informed by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell) that the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) still owes him a fiver, which he lent him last week.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Having spent the last seven years working on the Lehman Brothers unwind and repaying creditors in full, I pay tribute to the thousands of RBS staff across the nation, including those at Cotton Street, Bolsover, for returning the bank to health. Will the Minister confirm that selling the initial stake will make it much easier and more efficient to sell the remainder of the stake?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend, who has a wealth of experience in insolvency practice that he has clearly put to good use in his first question. Rothschild and the Bank of England Governor have said that one of the challenges facing this stake is the illiquidity of the float—the stock is not liquid enough to be in any of the major indices, for example—so there are liquidity benefits and potential price benefits from putting an initial float in the private sector.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): May I welcome the hon. Lady to her post and say how much I agreed with the measured, sensible and absolutely correct points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner)? I can confirm to the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) that the old clause IV is certainly alive in my heart. In 1983, I was pleased to stand for election on a manifesto that called for the nationalisation of the banks. Had the banks been nationalised—in public ownership and accountable to the public—all the profits would have accrued to the public purse and they might have been shielded from the world banking crisis. By giving RBS back to the private sector, are we not simply inviting more gambling, more greed, more irresponsibility and more crises in future?

Harriett Baldwin: May I express my thanks to the British people for ensuring that we have a Government focused on the economic future of this country, not on the failures of the past and the longest economic suicide note in history?

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I am delighted to welcome my hon. Friend to her place. Will she remind the House who gave Fred “the Shred” Goodwin a knighthood for services to banking?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my hon. Friend for a good question that reminds us not only of the failure of the banking regulatory system under the previous Government, but of the rewards for failure. Labour allowed Fred Goodwin to walk away with an enormous pension and a knighthood.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Lady to her new role, but gently remind her that the current debt to GDP ratio is 80%, which is 20% higher than it was after a global economic crisis and our recapitalisation of the banks. On the current RBS share price, there would be a loss to taxpayers of £13 billion, if all the shares were sold today. Is this not incredibly insensitive to the millions of disabled people waiting for personal independence payments and to the carers who have seen £3.5 billion cut from social care and who are really struggling in this, carers week, and will she confirm that the Government will sell RBS only at a profit to the taxpayer?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Lady’s question started off very well by acknowledging the risks of high public debt. It is incredibly important for those people whom she rightly draws our attention to that we have a strong and healthy economy, and a strong and healthy financial sector is part of the solution. I am not sure, however, whether she is arguing that we should borrow more for longer by holding on to the shares for longer.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that just prior to the financial crash, the then Labour Government were running an underlying fiscal deficit equivalent to 6% of GDP—twice the level recommended for the EU? Is it not a bit rich, therefore, for Labour Members to dish out advice on both the management of the banks and government finances?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place, and he is right that I am not prepared to take any lectures on bank regulation, fiscal responsibility or economic management from the Labour party.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Lady to her position, but only the Conservative party could come here and say that this is a benefit to the taxpayer when it is selling this bank at a cost to the taxpayer. This may represent another cash injection, but on this occasion there is nothing left to get taxpayers’ money back further down the road. Can she recall any time when her party criticised the price paid for those shares at the time we bailed out HSBC?

Harriett Baldwin: I simply do not accept the hon. Gentleman’s line of argument. If he is such a Mystic Meg, perhaps he will tell me the date on which the price of this bank, which has been completely restructured over the last few years, will change. Rothschild has provided an estimate of the current state of the overall portfolio of bank interventions. I remind the hon. Gentleman that while in 2009 everyone—including Her Majesty’s Treasury—expected that these interventions

would cost the taxpayer between £20 billion and £50 billion, evidence today suggests that it will be of overall benefit to the taxpayer.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I remind Members that if they want to ask a question, they need to stand. I am not always sure whether Members have changed their minds when they sometimes stand and sometimes do not stand. It also helps if we have brief questions and shorter answers, which should allow everybody into the debate.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): It strikes me that the concern is about the process at the beginning of the sale. All the advice—from the Bank of England and Rothschild—is about phasing, which is part of the journey to return to profitability. May I suggest a rebranding exercise? Perhaps we should call this something different—I know what: a long-term economic plan!

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend and her excellent question. She is absolutely right that today's statement announces a decision point on the journey of implementing our long-term economic plan. Part of that is returning the financial sector to its normal state of health.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): The £3.50 share float price relies on pension fund managers who run Abbey Life, Aberdeen Management, AXA, Clerical Medical, Scottish Widows, six councils, Whitbread, Lloyd's of London, BAE, Boeing and, of course, Legal and General and the university superannuation schemes, which have already ruled out buying any RBS shares. What they all share is litigation with RBS. Why would they use their customers' money to buy shares in a company or a bank such as RBS, against which they are taking litigation?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman points out something that appears in the Rothschild report—that the bank still faces a range of uncertainties, particularly regarding regulatory action from America. The price today therefore reflects that information.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I welcome my friend and parliamentary neighbour to her new role—she has a tremendous wealth of City experience. My constituents would like to know whether the Government expect the share price to go up, in which case they ought to buy some, or whether it will go down, in which case we should sell considerably more.

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my constituency neighbour for his question. As he rightly acknowledges, neither he, his constituents, the Government or the market have perfect foresight into whether the shares will go up or down. They will go up or down, and it will be a phased programme for reducing the holdings. Today we are announcing the decision point and the potential for an initial sale.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the Minister on her appointment. The Government have consistently talked about banking

reform. I am particularly concerned about the small start-ups that find it difficult to access credit, especially in areas such as Hull where there is low private wealth. With the return to the institutional investors, will the Government now decide to have a national investment bank with a regional base that focuses specifically on small and medium-sized enterprises?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words. She is absolutely right to highlight this country's challenge on access to finance, particularly for the small and fast-growing sector for which bank finance might be appropriate, but it might want to move on to something else. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is looking at a package of measures to make sure that businesses in Hull and elsewhere are able to have a wider range of choice in accessing finance.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): As far as I can make out, the position of the Opposition is that if we delay this sale, the shares might go up by 35%, and they might break even, which would be a good thing. Of course, though, they might go down. Does the Minister agree that they have no right to speculate with other people's money, particularly when financed by an overdraft? If they believe this, they should buy some shares themselves.

Harriett Baldwin: There seems to be no pleasing Opposition Members. They are not happy when Royal Mail shares go up and we sell them for more money; and they are not happy when the RBS share price is where it is today. They seem to argue that the best thing to do, in all these situations, is to borrow more, spend more and invest more in the banking sector.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Minister to her post and offer a sobering thought to the Chancellor, who might need it after his Mansion House speech. Given that the nationalisation of RBS was in response to an unforeseen sub-prime debt crisis in America, does the Minister agree that changes to the law to require a budget surplus every year might reduce the fiscal flexibility we need to respond to such a crisis in the future—even by renationalising the banks, if necessary?

Harriett Baldwin: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's invitation to yesterday's dinner got lost in the post—or perhaps he was not invited. What I do not understand about his question is why he seems to argue for ongoing fiscal irresponsibility, which is what got us into this mess in the first place.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment as Economic Secretary, and I congratulate the Government on further recovering our economy on behalf of taxpayers. Mention has already been made of the Governor of the Bank of England saying that, for the sake of the taxpayer, we need to get on with the sale sooner rather than later. Mark Carney also mentioned the need for stricter custodial sentences for those convicted of financial mismanagement. Although this is not my hon. Friend's brief, will the Government consider it?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend's question, and he is absolutely right that the Governor made a powerful speech yesterday, outlining the steps he and

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the regulators are taking to end the age of irresponsibility. The Government welcome the recommendations of the FEMA—fair and effective markets—review and hope that they will be taken forward internationally via the Bank for International Settlements and under the Governor's leadership.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I warmly welcome the Minister to her new post. In a week when he have heard that the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank is planning to refocus its investment and attentions away from Europe to the far east, what implications does the Minister think this sell-off could have for the long-term headquartering of the Royal Bank of Scotland in Edinburgh?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank the hon. Lady for her warm words. The Government noted the points made by HSBC in its report this week. We are proud of the fact that the UK remains one of the most attractive and competitive places in which to locate a financial services company and a bank. It is essential, in making us fully competitive in that regard, that we take the steps we are announcing today.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the hon. Lady on her appointment. She said in her statement that the Government were not responsible for the bail-out of RBS, but does she not agree with the Governor of the Bank of England that public ownership “prevented enormous financial contagion at a time when the UK financial system was extremely fragile”?

Will she also confirm that the Chancellor is on record as insisting that the money spent on saving RBS from collapse would be recouped in full? Can she explain why he has changed his mind, by telling us how the perceived public benefit from the sale to which she referred will exceed the £7 billion quantified loss that has been calculated in her own report?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman has failed to apologise for the regulatory system that allowed us to get into this position in the first place. The letter from the Governor of the Bank of England is on the record. The hon. Gentleman must accept that this is part of the improvement in the overall long-term economic outlook—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Mr Gardiner, you must come back and wait for the next Member to speak. You know the courtesies of the House. Members must not do that. It is all about respect, and we must have tolerance as well, on all sides.

If the Minister has finished her answer, I will call David Nuttall.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The Minister experienced the singular disadvantage of being my Whip in the last Parliament. I am pleased to welcome her to her new position.

I regard this share sale as a tremendous opportunity for the Government to widen share ownership, just as the Government of the late Lady Thatcher did in the 1980s. May I urge the Minister to make as many shares

as possible available to small investors, to make the application process as simple as possible, and to set the minimum level as low as reasonably possible?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend back to this place. Let me say what a joy it was to be his Whip for so many years. One always knew where one stood with him, and that also applies to the very sensible question that he has just asked. I think, though, that he needs to hold his horses in relation to RBS. As he will know, the manifesto on which he stood committed us to a wide retail offer of Lloyds Bank shares at some time in the not too distant future, and we will be dealing with that sale first.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): Will my hon. Friend assure me that we will never return to the system of light-touch regulation that was advocated and encouraged by the former shadow Chancellor when he was City Minister?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House. He is right: over the past five years, we have taken painstaking steps to establish a system of regulation in the financial services industry that will ensure that never again will the taxpayer be forced to bail out a bank.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): As my hon. Friend will know, there is a direct connection between the tolerance of reckless and illegal activities in financial institutions and the destruction of valuable banks such as RBS. Will she confirm that she will allow the Government to give full force to any recommendations concerning the fair and effective markets reform that was announced by the Governor of the Bank of England yesterday? Will she also confirm that unlike the last Government, who showered honours on bankers who were reckless, this Government will bring the full force of the law to bear?

Harriett Baldwin: I am pleased to welcome my hon. Friend back to the House. He has made an important point. In his speech, the Governor said that it was right to fine many financial services organisations that had behaved badly in both the recent and the distant past, because such behaviour reduces banks' capital. Responsibility needs to fall on the individuals who are culpable, and also on the management of those individuals. Reducing the capital that is available through regulatory actions contracts the supply of lending to small businesses.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): May I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests? I am a former Royal Mail employee, and a small shareholder.

How does my hon. Friend think posties up and down our great country will have responded today to the announcement of a 1% gift in shares, and the announcement of the continuation of our universal service obligation?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House. He speaks with great knowledge and eloquence about the real experience of the hundreds and thousands of men and women up and down the land on whom we rely every day for our post. I am delighted to be part of a Government who have enabled them to own shares in the organisation for which they work.

European Union (Finance) Bill

Second Reading

1.35 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a short but important Bill. Let me begin by explaining the background to it. A little over two years ago, at the February 2013 European Council in Brussels, the Prime Minister secured an historic deal. On the expenditure side, it meant that the EU budget was cut in real terms for the first time, and on the revenue side, it protected our rebate.

As Members will recall, under the financing arrangement that was agreed in 2005 and is currently in force, the then United Kingdom Government gave away part of the UK rebate. That has had, and will continue to have, an impact on the UK's contribution to the EU budget. The European Commission estimated the cost at £6.6 billion over the previous seven-year financial framework, and in future it will cost us about £2 billion a year.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I was one of those who complained bitterly about the supposed renegotiation of the British rebate, which was actually a giveaway. What is the cumulative cost, and will the Government seek to reverse the position that was negotiated in 2005?

Mr Gauke: As I have said, the estimated cost over the previous seven years was £6.6 billion, and in future it will be about £2 billion a year. I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making: he want us to clear up yet another mess that was created by the last Government, although I acknowledge that he was as disappointed by his Government as we were. As for what the UK Government can do about the financial position, let me explain what we did in the 2013 negotiations. Whereas the last Government had agreed to an 8% increase in the spending ceiling, we proceeded with an agenda that was in the UK's interests. This time, the two sensible things that we could do to protect the British taxpayer were to get the overall budget down and to protect our rebate, and that is precisely what we achieved.

The agreement that the Prime Minister secured back in 2013 was good for Europe and good for the United Kingdom. At the time, some argued that it was not possible, and that the interests of the UK were in some way incompatible with the wider aims of the European Union, but the Government showed them that they were wrong.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does the Bill not endorse a system that takes £12 billion of our taxpayers' money and spends it elsewhere on the continent, while we receive not a penny of benefit? If the British people voted "out", they could presumably be given a £12 billion tax cut to celebrate our leaving the European Union.

Mr Gauke: My right hon. Friend has taken me in the direction of the wider issue of our EU membership. As became clear this week, the people of the United Kingdom will have an opportunity to vote on that, but this is the system that applies while we are members of the

European Union. My right hon. Friend may wish to present his argument during a future debate, but what cannot be in doubt is that the Prime Minister's achievement during the 2013 negotiations constituted a huge improvement on the record of the last Government. It protected the rebate, and it ensured, for the first time, that we were able to reduce the overall expenditure of the EU over the multi-annual financial framework period.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) rose—

Mr Gauke: Before I give way to the hon. Lady, may I welcome her to her position in the shadow Front-Bench team?

Barbara Keeley: The hon. Gentleman is very kind. I just wonder whether he intends to mention the debate in the House and the votes, particularly by Labour Members, that gave the Prime Minister such a strong negotiating position and played an important part in strengthening his hand at that time. Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that?

Mr Gauke: It would be a bit rich for the Labour party to claim this success as its own. We have a record of a Conservative Prime Minister who was able to protect the rebate in full as it stood, and also managed to reduce EU expenditure. That is in stark contrast to the record the previous time this process was undertaken in 2005, when part of our rebate was surrendered at significant cost, as I have already set out.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does my hon. Friend remember that at that time the House was sold a pup on the basis that Mr Blair said reform of the common agricultural policy would mean it would be cost-neutral, which turned out to be completely false?

Mr Gauke: As usual, my hon. Friend's memory is correct. That was the argument; we were told this was part of some wider deal, but we did not see the benefits of that, as he rightly highlights.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): The issue of the CAP has just been raised. By 2019 Scotland's pillar one per hectare payment rate will be the lowest in the EU. Will the Minister ask the Secretary of State for the full pillar one convergence uplift that was received, as was called for by the Scottish Government and supported across the parties in the Scottish Parliament?

Mr Gauke: The Conservative-led Government have a very good record in protecting the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom. Indeed, in terms of some of the changes we might have seen in the structural funds, we ensured all parts of the UK were treated fairly, which would not otherwise have been the case. So all I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that of course the Government are determined to protect the interests of all parts of the UK, and, looking at the longer term future of the EU, the CAP does need the type of reform that was once promised and not properly delivered by the last Labour Government.

Stephen Gethins rose—

Mr Gauke: Let me make a little progress.

This Bill relates only to agreement reached on the revenue side of the EU budget. This is an area that receives much less interest, but is no less important—nor any less of a success for the UK—than the cut to the EU budget. I would like, however, to first remind hon. Members of the details of the deal reached on expenditure, before moving on to revenue, the nub of the Bill.

When others argued that the EU would never reform, and certainly would not cut its budget, we argued that a cut in the EU budget was the right thing to do, especially at a time when so many countries had had to make difficult decisions in their own budgets. We argued that EU spending should be focused on where it could provide real growth, in areas such as high-value research and development, and tertiary education—from which Britain's universities are particularly well-placed to benefit. We made sure that the UK would not be overly disadvantaged by reductions in spending: so, for instance, we ensured that structural funds would continue to flow to our less well-off regions. Above all, we argued from the point of the view of the British taxpayer, who expects and deserves good value for money—and I should add that the British taxpayer is not unique in this respect. So the seven-year EU budget deal—2014 to 2020—secured by the Prime Minister represents a real-terms cut to the payments limit to €908 billion in 2011 prices. Overall spending on the CAP over this period will fall by 13% compared with the 2007-13 EU budget period. At the same time, spending on research and development and other pro-growth investment will now account for 13%, a 4% increase on the previous budget. That is a good deal for Britain, a good deal for the taxpayer, and very different from the previous time round.

Kelvin Hopkins: Returning to the issue of the structural fund income to Britain, would it not be easier if we had control of those funds? We could allocate them better, and we would be better off by not having to contribute to the budget. Would it not be more sensible to have regional funds repatriated to Britain, so our Government can decide what and where to spend?

Mr Gauke: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point and I think there is a case for particularly some of the wealthier countries in the EU determining their own priorities with the structural funds. Indeed, that has been looked at in the past.

Stephen Gethins: Since the Minister struggled with my first question, I will ask him another, this time on pillar two. If Scotland is getting such a fair deal, why will Scotland's pillar two per hectare rate remain the lowest in the EU at about €12?

Mr Gauke: The deal Scotland gets includes support from the structural funds which have been protected as a consequence of decisions made by the UK Government in the last Parliament.

Turning to the deal secured on the revenue side, as hon. Members may be aware, the system by which EU member states finance the annual EU budget is set out in EU legislation known as the own resources decision—ORD for short. At the 2013 February Council, there was strong pressure from some member states, the Commission and the European Parliament to reform

the way member states finance the EU budget. These included proposals to introduce a financial transaction tax and do away with the UK rebate, or at least change the way it works.

The Prime Minister stood his ground and made it clear that the UK would not agree to such proposals, nor agree to anything that changed the way our rebate worked. It was a specific objective for the UK that this new financing system would require no new own resources or EU-wide taxes to finance EU expenditure, and no change to the UK rebate, and that is precisely what we achieved.

The political agreement at the 2013 February European Council was accurately reflected in the financing arrangements which all EU member states agreed unanimously at a meeting of the Council of Ministers in May 2014. Under the agreement, which this Bill will implement, the Prime Minister protected what is left of the UK rebate, and this is maintained without any change throughout the life of this agreement.

The agreement also ensures there will be no new types of member state contributions and no new taxes to finance EU spending over this period. The new ORD does not make any changes to the way that the EU budget is financed. There are some changes in the detail of the ORD compared with the previous one, however. For example, it reintroduces reductions in the GNI-based contributions of the Netherlands and Sweden, and introduces small reductions in these contributions for Denmark and Austria. The UK will contribute to these small corrections, which will mean an additional £16 million in contributions from the UK per year compared to the last ORD; that is around 0.1% of our total gross contribution in 2014. Moreover, this will be largely offset by changes in other corrections.

John Redwood: I congratulate the Prime Minister and the Minister on defending Britain's interests against a far worse settlement, but is it not also the case that under the pre-existing agreements if Britain grows more quickly than the euroland, which it is doing and appears that it will carry on doing, we will get caned by having to pay more tax?

Mr Gauke: Part of the calculation of member states' contributions is based on the size of their economy. That means that bigger economies pay more and smaller ones pay less. As an economy becomes relatively bigger, it makes a bigger contribution. That is the factual situation; that is how it works.

I referred earlier to the corrections and the small reductions in the contributions from Denmark and Austria. The UK has always supported the principle of budgetary corrections set out at the 1984 Fontainebleau European Council, which gave us our rebate. In the absence of any meaningful reform on the expenditure side of the budget, we believe that those member states that make disproportionately large net contributions to the budget in relation to their prosperity, such as the UK, should receive corrections.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Further to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), will the Minister explain whether there has been any change as a result of the recalculation of gross national income as the European

Union has moved from the European system of accounts known as ESA95 to the later ESA2010, which I believe includes more of the black market? Has that move had the effect of making our economy bigger?

Mr Gauke: That is not a matter that is related to the Bill. The own resources decision uses the same formula for this financial framework as it did for the previous one. The revisions to GNI to which my hon. Friend refers are a separate matter. The element relating to the hidden economy has on occasions been somewhat overstated in this debate, but yes, there was a correction of our GNI estimates and that did require an additional sum. He will be aware of how this Government negotiated to ensure that we did not have to pay that sum up front—we were given much more time—and that the rebate applied to it.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I would be grateful if the Minister could clarify that this own resources decision is based on ESA95, as the last one was, rather than on ESA2010, which has been adopted for other purposes.

Mr Gauke: The own resources decision—the ORD—contains an element that is based on GNI. There may be different ways of calculating the GNI as it is updated. This is not related to the Bill, however. The formula remains essentially the same, and the element that comes from GNI has not changed, although there may be changes to the way in which the GNI works. Indeed, there are changes on an annual basis, because there are revisions to the number.

This new ORD requires the approval of each member state, in accordance with their own constitutional requirements, before it can come into force. The Bill will therefore give UK approval to the Council decision. The passing of the Bill will be the final action necessary in delivering the deal secured by the Prime Minister in 2013. As a result of the deal, EU spending was cut in real terms and UK contributions are forecast to be lower in every year compared with the final year of the Government's seven-year deal, by on average around £1.3 billion. In addition, our rebate, which is worth around £5 billion per year, is protected. This agreement is in our national interest. It represents a good deal for the taxpayer now and over the coming years.

I would like to draw the House's attention to what the Prime Minister said in 2013. After the EU budget negotiations, he said:

"Working with allies, we took real steps towards reform in the European Union."—[*Official Report*, 11 February 2013; Vol. 558, c. 571.]

Hon. Members will need no reminding that reforming the European Union is one of the key objectives of this Government. The Prime Minister has already had constructive talks with EU leaders on how best to address the UK's concerns about how the EU is run. These concerns are not unique to the UK. Many in Europe agree with us that the EU is too uncompetitive, too democratically unaccountable and too inflexible to the concerns of citizens in its member states. They agree with us that reform is needed, and the Prime Minister, in turn, is confident that he can and will succeed in negotiating to reform the European Union and our relationship with it.

In February 2013, we saw the positive results of working with partners to achieve real change in Europe. We saw what can be done when we are tough, positive and determined in negotiations with our European partners. Our vision of an open, prosperous Europe can be achieved only on the back of financial discipline. That was the principle on which we negotiated in 2013, and that is a principle we will continue to apply. The agreement that will be implemented by the Bill will be good for Britain and good for Europe, too. I commend it to the House.

1.55 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his welcome. The Opposition will not oppose the Bill, but we will table some amendments that we suggest will improve it. Of course we welcome the fact that a cut was agreed on the seven-year payment ceiling for the European Union budget. This was made clear when we debated the agreement reached at the European Council in February 2013. I remind the Minister of the point I made earlier. The House had voted for a real-terms budget cut in October 2012, which of course helped to create a strong negotiating mandate for the UK. Labour votes in that debate, combined with a Conservative amendment, helped to force a rethink. It was clear at that time that the EU budget could not have continued to rise, year on year, when national Governments were implementing such difficult and deep cuts to public spending.

We all need to work to ensure that the European Union better reflects people's concerns and that the people who pay for our budget contribution understand and approve of this use of their money. Most people probably do not understand how the EU budget is set or, within that, how our contribution is decided. The language used to describe EU finance is of course technical—the Minister has just used some of that language in his speech. We speak of financial perspectives, own resources decisions, resource ceilings for payments and enlargement-related adjustments. Over the coming months, in the lead-up to the EU referendum, we need much greater transparency in relation to how the EU uses our funding and how the multi-annual financial frameworks and annual budgets are agreed.

An area of concern that has been raised with the Prime Minister is the growing gap between the ceiling on spending commitments and the ceiling on payments. That gap, as agreed in the settlement of February 2013, is between €960 billion on commitments and €908 billion on payments. The gap has crept up from an average of 2.6% to the current 5.4%, and it is projected to rise to 5.7% from 2014 to 2020. When questioned on this during the 2013 statement, the Prime Minister said that the gap was "not untypical", but we feel that it is important that the public can be reassured that this gap is actually manageable.

We believe that there must be a regular review of the level of EU budget spending and that the process of commitment and payment appropriations—and the gap between them—must be kept under review. There must also be a review of whether alternative arrangements may offer stronger budgetary control and improved transparency. It would help if the European Commission thought it was important to give more and better information on the budget and the budget process, and in language that members of the public could understand.

John Redwood: Is there any extra tax demand that the EU makes on us that the Labour party disagrees with?

Barbara Keeley: We are actually supporting the Bill—

John Redwood: So the answer is no.

Barbara Keeley: Yes, indeed. I am making the point that we need to make this process clearer, and I would have thought that the right hon. Gentleman and the Minister would agree with that. It is a difficult technical process, but the people outside this place need to be able to understand it. In my view, they do not.

John Redwood: What do people not understand? The EU is taking £12 billion of our money, and this Bill is going to give it more.

Barbara Keeley: I think people do understand that. The point is that the benefits are not understood. [Interruption.] The right hon. Gentleman has his view, and other people have a different one. The process could be made clearer, and it is my contention that we will have to do that. As we put this important decision in front of people in the coming months, they will have to be able to understand this better than they do at the moment.

Interestingly, the European Commission recently sent hon. Members a document promising to tell us “How the European Union works”. We have a host of new Members with us today, and I do not know whether any of them have seen that document in among the mountain of material that has landed on them recently. It is a 40-page document, but it contains only two short paragraphs—indeed, 10 lines—about the EU budget. It does not give figures for that budget, nor does it describe how the money is spent. Yet in the months ahead, as I said, that will be a key aspect of the debate for the people of this country.

The debate in the House in February 2013 and other debates since have focused on the fact that substantial reform of priorities is still needed in the EU budget. We have had questions about the balance of agriculture spending, but the Labour party believes that growth and jobs should continue to be prioritised by cutting back even further on agriculture spending and other similar priorities. Spending on the common agricultural policy fell as a proportion of the budget from 55% in 1997 to 46% in 2010. We welcome the continued decline in agriculture spending as a share of the European budget; it will drop from 41% of EU commitments in 2014 to 35% in 2020. The difficult reflection for people outside Parliament, however, is that with agriculture making up only 1.6% of the total output of the European Union, why does it still account for 30% to 40% of the budget? There is still much more to do.

Kelvin Hopkins: I welcome what my hon. Friend is saying, but although the proportion of the budget commanded by agriculture is falling, in money terms over the past eight years there has been a fairly significant increase of 26%—so agriculture is still increasing in money terms.

Barbara Keeley: Indeed, and that is why I am making the point, with which I am sure my hon. Friend would agree, that if we want more of a focus on growth and jobs in a smaller budget, which we do in the Opposition, there have to be further cuts and changes in priorities.

In the debate on the settlement in February 2013, the modest increase in funds targeted towards growth, infrastructure, research and development, and innovation was welcomed, but we also expressed concern that the balance away from agriculture spending towards the spending on growth and jobs was not sufficient. We need constantly to remind ourselves about unemployment—24 million people are unemployed throughout the EU, including 4.8 million 15 to 24-year-olds. In the UK, of course, we still have 735,000 16 to 24-year-olds who are looking for work. We want to see greatly increased investment in the funds targeted on growth, infrastructure, research and development, and innovation. We need the European Union to provide a better framework and strategy to achieve the growth in jobs. Our missions go further than that, however, and we also need the EU to act as a guardian of rights and protections at work. The Opposition want to talk about creating jobs and to focus on the right type of jobs and on the quality and security of those jobs.

We have supported a cut in the EU budget, but we will continue to press for a reform of budget priorities. During the passage of the Bill, therefore, we will call for a fundamental review by the end of 2015 of the budget priorities and of waste and inefficiency in the EU budget. Debates in the House have included many references to outdated practices such as relocating the European Parliament to Strasbourg each month, which costs €200 million a year. There are a number of other areas where savings can be made.

In previous debates, hon. Members from both sides of the House have suggested many ways in which money could be saved and inefficiencies prevented in the European Union, ranging from cutting spending on the House of European History Museum, costing a reported £137 million, to cutting export refunds. Hon. Members repeatedly raised the need to reform the CAP—today is no exception—and a number have also mentioned the levels of salaries and benefits for EU staff, including their differential tax rate and housing allowances.

Mr Bone: The hon. Lady is making an interesting speech with many good points, but does she not think it strange that we are joining a club, paying all those billions of pounds, when for 18 or 19 years the auditors have not signed off its accounts? What other institution would the Government go anywhere near if they could not get the accounts? Do we not have to start with the basics, with that problem?

Barbara Keeley: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman’s point, and I will come on to that. Within the smaller budget that we will have, if we want to have different priorities and get new things done, clearly we will have to deal with inefficiencies and find savings.

Another suggestion for where savings could be made is to reform or repatriate EU structural funds. There are different views on that in the House, but it has been mentioned, as has reforming a number of EU quangos and agencies.

I have made a short list to show the level of pressure in this House for changes to be made to the EU budget and the wider EU institutions. The question of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) showed that we are now expecting future action on the review of

such matters from within the EU. As my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has said in the past, an effective EU budget review means having

“a relentless focus on the justification behind detailed expenditure.”—*[Official Report, 31 October 2012; Vol. 552, c. 304.]*

In the debate on the multi-annual financial framework in October 2012, we called for a more effective and independent EU auditor—exactly the point made by the hon. Gentleman. We would then be able to examine the different programmes and their impact on the EU economy. It is time we had that. An auditor could also improve the accountability of spending on pro-growth activities, bringing together all Commission priorities under the auspices perhaps of a single Commissioner for growth.

Those are just some of the ideas. The feeling in this House now is that it is time for action on such things. We will call for improved transparency and accountability in the EU budget process to assist in developing what we see, which is a relentless focus on EU expenditure in future.

2.5 pm

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley). She reminded us of a number of things. She reminded us of the first flip in Labour’s European policy, when her party chose to join a small group of Conservative Members who were concerned about EU spending, which was perhaps the foundation for Labour’s flip in policy on the EU referendum that we saw this week.

I very much welcome the hon. Lady’s words about trying to look at future EU budget spending and the need for significant control of that budget and the checks on it. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) talked about the accounts not being signed off for two decades. For 20 years there has not been a positive statement on or assurance of the EU accounts being signed off. I have to remind the hon. Lady that in all the time that her party was in office, not once did her Government ask a question about the EU accounts not being signed off. It was only when the previous, Conservative-led Administration came to office that questions were first asked.

Barbara Keeley: The hon. Gentleman refers to what he described as the “flip” in the 31 October 2012 debate, but at the time we were referring back to a Labour position adopted on 12 January 2012 in a motion that ended, that we called

“on the Government to strengthen its stance so that the 2013 Budget and the forthcoming Multi-Annual Financial Framework are reduced in real terms”..—*[Official Report, 12 July 2012; Vol. 548, c. 523.]*

Chris Heaton-Harris: Excellent. If we are going back in history, I guess I should share with the hon. Lady the fact that from 1999 to 2009 I was not in this House, but in the European Parliament. I sat on the budget and budgetary control committees, watching Labour Members of Parliament and Labour Ministers at the time not particularly bothering at all about EU spending, so I am delighted with the change of heart, because there is a need for focus on this area.

I do not intend to speak for too long because I know that a number of hon. Members want to make their maiden speeches. Small though the Bill is, it is, however, important and it deserves to have a decent amount of scrutiny by the House, which I am pleased to see that it will receive. The sole purpose of the Bill is to approve and implement the EU’s own resources decision, setting into legislation how the EU budget is to be funded, including the EU rebate. That is a big deal for us, because we stick in a massive contribution to the European Union. The Office for Budget Responsibility’s March 2015 economic and fiscal outlook report gives the net contribution figures for our country to the European Union. I had a debate in the Tea Room with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who thinks that the figures are downplayed slightly, but they are the ones that I have to hand at the moment.

The net contribution for 2013-14 from Great Britain to the European Union was £10.2 billion; for 2014-15 it was £9.2 billion; and for 2015-16 it was £9.9 billion. Those are significant sums of money.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I wonder whether my hon. Friend thinks it is right to use the net figure, or the gross figure after rebate, because with the net figure the spending that is netted off is spent according to the requirements of the European Union; it is not necessarily spent in the way that a British Government would wish to spend it.

Chris Heaton-Harris: My hon. Friend is completely right about that, so I thought I should also share with the House the gross contribution figures given by the Office for Budget Responsibility in its March 2015 economic and fiscal outlook report. The gross contribution figures were £14.1 billion for 2013-14, £14 billion for 2014-15 and £14 billion for 2015-16. We are talking about massively significant sums and this Bill therefore needs some scrutiny, because it is the one that tells us how the EU budget is funded.

Kelvin Hopkins: These annual sums bear a striking similarity to the amount the Chancellor is proposing to cut from welfare spending. I would much prefer to see welfare spending increased and spending on the European budget reduced.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I hope the hon. Gentleman is able to spread that message far and wide across the Opposition Benches. What he says is true: wherever we have a cost in our finances, we make choices in other places. This is a significant sum, but it is one we have chosen to pay over. We must therefore ensure that we allow ourselves, as this decision on the own resources decision rightly does, to keep a check on how our money is being spent.

The European Union Act 2011 requires this House to give approval to own resources decisions. There has always been an Act of Parliament that does that, but the 2011 Act was a good piece of legislation—again, Labour Members came to it late in the process. It allowed greater scrutiny of how the Executive choose to act in European matters; it introduced the referendum lock on certain things; and it made sure that we get a debate on significant matters such as the one before us today. Although we have always had an Act of Parliament in place to do this, I welcome the greater scrutiny.

[Chris Heaton-Harris]

I should remind hon. Members of what the “own resources” of the European Union actually means. What are these figures for and where do they come from? Well, 12% of the own resources budget is comprised of customs duties, including those on agricultural products; a tiny sum, less than 1%, is sugar levies; there are contributions based on VAT, which comprises about 13%; and the remaining 74% or so is based on gross national income-based contributions. A significant mix of different things goes into our £14 billion gross contribution to the EU.

Actual European spending is set by the annual EU budget, but, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, the annual budget expenditure is governed by the ceilings set by the EU’s multi-annual financial framework. I was pleased to be reminded by him of the good job our Prime Minister did to ensure that the last MFF gave us an unprecedented real-terms cut in EU spending ceilings for 2014 to 2020, which was welcomed by Members on both sides of the House—it was eventually believed by the then Labour economic team.

Unlike the own resources decision, under EU treaties the multi-annual financial framework does not need the national approval of member states in accordance with their conditional requirements. Thus, it is already in force and this Bill deals only with the own resources decision. Alongside the agreement of the new MFF, we had this new own resources decision, which was formally adopted by unanimity by the Council in May 2014, and the Bill approves it for UK purposes. As the Minister said, the rules governing the UK rebate remain unchanged compared with the existing own resources decision. Alas, they do, however, repeat, and this answers a point mentioned earlier by the hon. Member for Luton South—

Kelvin Hopkins: North.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I mean the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins). They roll in the old rebate loss that the former Prime Minister Mr Blair negotiated in return for common agricultural policy reform that we never achieved.

I have a couple of questions for the Minister, one of which has been raised previously by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). The Minister mentioned the minor additional costs that this might bring to us, because there do seem to be some compared with the existing own resources decision. He talked about their being offset by other corrections and I wonder whether he could detail what they are, because I could not find them in the explanatory notes. I also seek clarification on the answer he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset on the change in the European system of accounts. I did not quite understand the answer and I would appreciate it if he could go into a tiny bit more detail.

I welcome the Bill and the scrutiny it is giving to EU accounts, and I welcome the opportunity to talk about this in greater detail when we go into Committee next week.

2.15 pm

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): It might be considered a trifle unorthodox to give a maiden speech leading from the Front Bench of your party, so I trust Members will forgive me but I am in fear of the Whips.

The Scottish National party will not oppose this Bill, and I would commend it rather more than my friend the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) would. As I am sure Members appreciate, the SNP takes a broader and more positive view of being a member of the European Union and, therefore, of funding it. As far as I could tell from her contribution, Labour wants to be tough on Europe without wanting to be tough on the causes of Europe.

Congratulations are due to the Government. Interestingly, if we look at the contributions the UK has made to the EU over the past 43 years, we see that the five years in which the UK made the largest contributions were the past five years. The £42 billion to £43 billion sum that the coalition contributed net to the EU in the past five years was roughly the same as the previous Labour Government had contributed in 13 years. The coalition therefore managed to double what it gave to the EU, which slightly contradicts the official position of the Government, which is to be tough on Europe. I can feel for some Conservative Back Benchers who are more anti-Europe in thinking that the line the Government take in public is not actually what they are doing in reality on the EU.

I am somewhat in awe of being here to make my maiden speech in front of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), as I recall that many years ago when I was teaching I used one of his books as a textbook, so I always treat what he says with great concentration and concern, but SNP Members are positive Europeans and we therefore will the spending for the European Union. The way I look at what we are proposing today and going to vote on later is that we are willing our contribution to the European Union to tackle austerity—quite the opposite of what the Chancellor is doing.

Interestingly, too, if we read the papers that come with the Bill, we find that the OBR reckons that in the seven years of the next spending period the UK will make much the same net contribution as it did in the previous five years. Although the Prime Minister has made much of the fact that he has got the formal budget of the EU for the next period down, Britain’s contribution in cash terms will be much the same. [Interruption.] Inflation will have reduced the real value, possibly by about 7%, depending on the outrun, but there is no cash reduction. We are going to be providing much the same contribution as we did in the past five years, so what has happened to the money that has disappeared with the reduction in the overall contribution limits? The answer is: other countries, such as Denmark and Austria, have negotiated smaller net contributions, in real terms and in cash terms. I can feel for the right hon. Member for Wokingham, because his Government are hardly managing to be as tough on the EU as they are pretending to be.

As this is my maiden speech, I cannot go home without saying a few words about my constituency. Given how technical this debate is, perhaps a few words of diversion before we get back to the serious business will not go amiss.

I have reached the age that we in Scotland call the age for “getting your bus pass”. I had expected that I would be spending most of my time after the referendum writing a few more obscure books on economics and tending to my improbably ambitious vegetable garden,

but suddenly the good folk of East Lothian sent me here to represent them. I could not be more pleased. My first and foremost duty—I have to put this on record—is to represent all of them whether or not they voted for me.

It is a pleasure to be in this august Chamber. Many, many years ago, as a small boy in Drumchapel, I fell in love with history. In those days, the history we studied in school was not the history from below but, by and large, the history of this Chamber. It was, as some Members may remember, the Whig interpretation of history, which was that all history was about the ever greater improvement of the British constitution—now, there are not so many Whigs left.

I appreciated those lessons, because this Chamber has always been kind to people of my persuasion—Scottish nationalists, people who want self-determination for Scotland. Though most parties here have disagreed with us, we have always had a fair hearing. Whether it was the radicals of the Highland Land League who came here in the 19th century, the Red Clydesiders of the Independent Labour party, or Members from the Scottish National party—we have always had a fair hearing. We may have taken issue with the Executive over the years, but never with this Chamber; we have always had a fair hearing. Indeed, in the past there has been conflict between the Executive and the Speaker. I am sure that if that happens in the future, the Speaker can expect our support.

Let me say a few words about East Lothian, which is the lovely, beautiful flat plain just to the left of Edinburgh. It is a county of small towns—Musselburgh, Haddington, Tranent, Dunbar, Prestonpans, North Berwick and Cockenzie—where people think hard and work hard. It is not a big metropolitan area; it is a county of radical tradition. From the eastern side of Scotland, the area has for centuries looked out to the North sea, to Europe and to the Baltic. Our outward-looking views on Europe and the rest of the world come, I think, from that geographical position. This idea of building positive links with Europe is what animates me. The trade links between East Lothian and Europe brought in new ideas. East Lothian is the county that introduced Presbyterianism to Scotland. We had the earliest mining communities, which added to our radical tradition.

We are the county that gave the world John Knox and Andrew Fletcher. Fletcher was the person who would lead the opposition to the Act of Union. In this context, I must mention the most renowned MP from East Lothian, John P. Mackintosh, who passed away in 1974. He is still remembered. He was a great constitutionalist and a professor of constitutional law.

Mackintosh sat on the Labour Benches, but I was lucky enough to have an old friend of his and his former campaign manager helping me in my campaign. I have always said that Mackintosh was a hero of mine, because of his genuine commitment to constitutional reform in the UK and to home rule for Scotland. He was very clear that home rule was something different from devolution. Piecemeal devolution—granting a concession here and a concession there, a change here and a change there—has hardly resolved the issue of the Scottish desire for self-government. The moves have been grudging. If there has been tension on both sides of the Chamber and argument, fractiousness and debate, it is because those of us on the SNP Benches feel that we are getting

piecemeal concessions. The majority of people in Scotland want self-government. We voted for self-government in the referendum last year. Home rule within the Union must mean home rule. Mackintosh argued for that. Perhaps if we had had home rule in 1970s instead of the piecemeal drip that we have had ever since, we might have been able to move forward, and we would not be holding this debate.

I have heard Members vie with each other over which is the most beautiful constituency in the UK; they are all beautiful. In East Lothian, we have a saying, which has been current for several hundred years, which is that East Lothian is the garden of Scotland, and it is. In the east of the constituency, lush volcanic soil has created wonderful arable agriculture and great dairy farms. To the south are the dark Lammermuir hills, which keep the wind off and on which the sheep still graze. To the north, there is a lovely sea coast, which has an important fishing industry. We have a wonderful verdant county.

I am here representing our farmers, and let me say to the right hon. Member for Wokingham that those farmers are not fans of the referendum or of withdrawal from the EU. They are hard working, and do not depend on simple subsidy. The uncertainty that will be produced by a referendum and by the possibility of Scotland being taken out of the EU—most Scots will vote to stay in—is the primary worry of our farmers. One reason I am standing here today is to argue in favour of staying in the EU and of defending the ability of our farmers to access the European market. However, I have not been sent to this place to give a travelogue.

I was asked one question time and again on the doorsteps in East Lothian: why is it that in Scotland's garden—the bread basket of Scotland—hundreds of children go to bed every night hungry? If there is any place in this United Kingdom where there is a gap between the failure of this Government's austerity policy and welfare cap and the ability to create food, jobs and economic activity it is in East Lothian. We cannot be the bread basket of Scotland and have children go to bed hungry every night. That is the contradiction. The Government's dogged policy of austerity—austerity here and an attempt at austerity in Europe—is simply leading to social divisions across the UK.

I am talking here to those the Government Benches, especially the right hon. Member for Wokingham—I am using him as a foil, because I have spent many decades reading his economics and I want to respond rationally to him. We on the SNP Benches believe that we must maintain a serious approach to the deficit—that is not in contention—but the Chancellor's austerity policies are an ideological fixation. The Chancellor wants to run a primary budget surplus out of ideological intent. Yes, we must reduce the deficit and the budget, but we can do it in an intelligent and rational fashion that does not lead to the social crises that are emerging in places such as East Lothian.

Why we should not run a primary budget surplus at the moment is quite simply because all the UK is doing is growing roughly on trend, but whether we do that over the next period is questionable. It is foolhardy to try to run a primary budget surplus if we are only growing at trend. What we should be doing is running a more modest deficit, probably at around 2% to 2.5% of GDP, roughly on trend, and continuing that to give ourselves the resources to solve some of the structural

[George Kerevan]

problems in the economy such as our massive current account trade deficit and low productivity. If we do that and grow the economy in a structural sense, that will ultimately give us the resources to pay down the deficit. I would rather do it in that rational, conscious fashion than have an ideological knee-jerk reaction.

I have wandered far, Madam Deputy Speaker, and you have been very patient, so I shall draw to a close. We are in this place to have a rational dialogue, not to demand or to rampage. During my tenure, as well as representing as best I can the people of East Lothian, I want in some sense to help to heal the divisions between the four great nations of these islands. We want our self-government, and my final point to the right hon. Member for Wokingham is that I would like to see an English Parliament voting on English laws. That is what comes from Scotland's having independence. I think that within a generation we will have four independent Parliaments in this Atlantic archipelago. We will co-operate, we will have a common market, we will discuss this and that and we will probably have a common defence policy, but we will achieve that by recognising the right of the four nations, and certainly of Scotland, to be self-governing and independent. The family of nations can then treat each other as equals.

Until we do that, we will continue to have to argue in this place for Scottish self-government and for our rights. Once we are a separate family, we will come together as four nations. What is wonderful about these islands is that we have four separate, wonderful nations, vibrant and creative. Co-operating as separate nations, we will challenge the world. Unless we do that we will continue to be caught up in the constitutional debate that has been going on for the past hundred years.

I commend the Bill, which says that Europe is a family of nations. So is the family of British nations, but for that to be a genuine family Scotland must be self-governing with its own sovereign Parliament.

2.32 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I praise the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan), whose tour de force demonstrated the strength of speaking skills in the northern part of our nation. I am grateful to be called to speak today, because the financing of Europe is a matter in which I must declare an interest. As the husband of a French wife, I know all about foreign powers deciding on British finances.

It is an honour to represent the people of Tonbridge, Edenbridge and Malling in this wonderful House. Our beautiful towns and villages prove that England is today enjoying a bountiful summer. The fruits of our fields are enjoyed nationwide and I hope that this summer you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be among the many who relish the Mereworth strawberries when you go to Wimbledon. I could give you a tour of my wonderful constituency based on the pubs, but for brevity I shall stick to the numerous towns and villages.

In the west, Edenbridge is a wonderful market town that once made cricket balls—indeed, the balls that Lord Cowdrey of Tonbridge smacked out of the ground

to the delight of Kent and England fans. Chiddingstone is home to one of the finest ales in our nation, Larkins, which will, I hope, one day be on tap here. A little further on is Wolf Hall or, as it is known on the maps, Penschurst. Sadly, these wonderful communities are not entirely tranquil. As I reminded my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport this morning, Gatwick's low flights are blighting our days.

A little to the east, our largest town, Tonbridge, is home to some of the finest schools in our country. I declare an interest again, as a governor of Hillview School, which is committed to the arts, to drama, to design and to fashion and through that enriches the lives of many young people. West Malling's High Street shows that commerce and community can combine. The award-winning florists and shoe shops are indeed a delight to all. East Malling is more famous abroad than at home, as its agricultural research has introduced new varieties to farmers around the world, while at Hadlow College those innovations are translated into reality by the teaching of a new generation.

Our community is not cut off from modernity, but communications too often hamper rather than improve lives. Borough Green, for example, is shaken by heavy traffic while many across our area suffer from poor trains and failing phone signals. The response of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and of the Rail Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), has been exemplary, and I look forward to seeing both issues improved with their welcome support.

I am not the first to campaign on these matters. The right hon. Sir John Stanley did so before most people can remember and, indeed, before I was born. In his maiden speech, he tested *Hansard* with the names of some of our wonderfully yclept villages: Wrotham, pronounced "Routem"; Trottscliffe, pronounced "Trozlee"; and Ightham, pronounced "Item". As I say them, I know that I am testing *Hansard* again 40 years later.

The House knows Sir John's formidable legacy. His close links with the councils he served alongside and his dedication to every part of the constituency have left an integrated approach and exemplary work ethic that I am determined to maintain. Furthermore, his dedication to our country saw him serve as Minister for housing, for Northern Ireland and for the armed forces. That connection to the armed forces is very strong in Tonbridge and I am proud to join the line of representatives that our town has sent to this House still holding a commission in her Majesty's armed forces. Sir John continued that tradition of service and his personal courage was clear both from the ministerial offices he held during the darkest days of the troubles and, perhaps most dramatically, as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Baroness Thatcher. That really took courage. I wish Sir John and Lady Stanley well. They deserve our utmost praise and gratitude.

My time in this House is, to be honest, unlikely to match the length of Sir John's, so I shall briefly outline my reasons for seeking a voice in the heart of our democratic Union. The first is the law. As St Thomas More, a former occupant of your seat, Madam Deputy Speaker, once put it:

"I would uphold the law if for no other reason but to protect myself".

Though my learned father invariably displayed the judgment of Solomon, I learnt clearly that the rule of law is not the same as the rule of lawyers. Those are not just words of filial rebellion but a call for the sovereignty of the people—the fundamental principle of British governance reasserted many times since Magna Carta 800 years ago—that finds expression in this House, the court of Parliament, and not through the Queen’s courts nor Strasbourgs’s.

My second reason for seeking a voice is dementia. That silent time bomb is affecting the whole community, both directly and as carers, and that in turn calls for community response. That is why I am working with the whole community to help Tonbridge, Edenbridge and West Malling to become dementia-friendly towns that can offer the support we need across west Kent.

Finally, I come to the armed forces. Having served in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq and latterly as military assistant to the Chief of the Defence Staff, I know that numerical totems are for accountants, not soldiers. It is capability that matters and that is measured in assets and readiness. As we face an uncertain future in a world in which Russia threatens our allies in the east and Islamic-inspired violent extremism is redrawing the maps of the middle east, we must not only have the ships, the soldiers and the aircraft but must be certain that they are ready. Only by demonstrating our readiness on exercises and operations can we reassure our friends and deter our enemies. Deterrence is about much more than the nuclear boats that are the British people’s ultimate guarantee of sovereignty. It is about the morale and training of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines. Like a fiat currency, defence relies on confidence in our ability and only truly works when no one dares test it.

As we continue our debate on financing the European Union, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—the only Prime Minister to have lowered the budget. I am also grateful and humbled to be the voice of my community in this Chamber. I will speak for the thousands who supported me and for the thousands who did not. I pledge to serve them all and the interests of our United Kingdom to the best of my ability, as long as the people of Tonbridge, Edenbridge and Malling will grant me that privilege.

2.40 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Members for East Lothian (George Kerevan) and for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) on their maiden speeches. They are very impressive new colleagues. I welcome them warmly to the House and look forward to working with them in the coming years.

I agree with the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) on the Front Bench that matters pertaining to the European Union budget should be made more clear. EU finances are controversial and we ought to be clear what we are arguing about and make sure that our constituents understand as well.

The problem is that numeracy is not given to everyone, especially when it comes to very large numbers. I used to teach economics, and the first question I used to ask my students was, “What is the difference between a million and a billion?” Many of them did not know, except that a billion was probably a bit bigger than a million. When I put the question in terms of the number

of houses that they could buy for £1 million and £1 billion—perhaps four for £1 million and 4,000 for £1 billion—the students started to get the message that £1 billion is a substantial amount of money, and many billions are even more substantial.

Our net contribution, be it £10 billion or £12 billion—there might be some debate about the precise figure—is a large sum. Rather than talking billions, I tried to work it out in a way that my constituents would understand. For example, it is the equivalent of about 3p on the standard rate of income tax. People understand that. It is getting on for £200 per person per year. People understand that. For a family of four, £700 or £800 a year is a significant sum, and that is what they are contributing net to the European Union. Our net contribution has trebled in the past six years since 2008. That trebling—people understand an amount multiplied by three—is a very large increase in those years. We do not know how much that is influenced by the poor deal done in 2005. Nevertheless, that is where we are today.

Much has been made of the UK rebate, which was reduced, as we know, but even since 2008 it has gone down as a proportion of our gross contribution. In 2008 our rebate was 38% of our gross contribution; in 2014 it was 25% of our gross contribution. In that sense we have lost out even further. The 2005 deal was described by *The Economist* at the time as such a bad deal that no deal would have been better than that deal. I have said a number of times in this House, to the previous Government as well, that if they are so worried about it, why do we not at least try to restore the position pre-2005? That has not been taken up. Personally, I would go further than that.

Our net contribution over 40 years has been on a substantially rising trend. It started quite small but it is now much, much larger. The cumulative effect on our economy, on growth and living standards, has been substantial. My good friend John Mills, who runs the Labour euro-safeguards group, has done calculations to estimate the impact on growth during that period and it is substantial. We could have been a richer country by some way, had we not had to pay a substantial sum net into the European Union budget every year.

Mr Bone: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech on this subject, as usual. Does he remember the only year when we had a net contribution from the EU? Was it not the year we had the Wilson referendum?

Kelvin Hopkins: Indeed. The hon. Gentleman is right. I have the Library note. The only time we had a net receipt from the European Union, or Common Market as it was then, was in 1975.

The major problem for us has been the common agricultural policy, which has been the major drain on the EU budget and to Britain’s enormous disadvantage over that time. Mrs Thatcher’s negotiation of a rebate was based on the fact that our agriculture was very different from that of most of the rest of the European Union and we were substantial net contributors, which was seen to be unfair so we secured a rebate. That rebate is no longer as large as it should be. Nevertheless, we did secure a rebate, which arose because of the CAP.

The Prime Minister would do well to seek Britain’s withdrawal from the CAP in his negotiations. That is certainly one of my red lines in the negotiations.

[Kelvin Hopkins]

The common agricultural policy is not a good thing for anyone, and certainly not for Britain. Last year I went with the European Scrutiny Committee to Lithuania. Lithuania used to be self-sufficient in food. Now it is being paid not to grow things. Large swathes of the land of Lithuania are being left fallow because the farmers are being paid not to grow things under the CAP, which is nonsense.

If we were outside the CAP we could continue to subsidise our own agriculture at the same level as occurs now, saving vast sums of money for the Exchequer while subsidising our farmers at the same level; or, more sensibly, we could decide how and where we subsidise more precisely, according to our own needs and what is better for Britain. We might want to preserve Welsh hill farms which may not be so efficient but are part of our culture and our environment and it is nice to keep them going, but we would not necessarily want to give such large subsidies to very large grain farmers in East Anglia, and so on. We could target the subsidies more sensibly, according to what we in this Chamber think, rather than what is decided in Brussels.

We should also be free to buy agricultural products on world markets and not have to pay EU duties on such imports. The EU still subsidises the dumping of sugar surpluses on world markets, a nonsense which discriminates against developing and poorer countries that produce sugar. There are many nonsenses in the EU budget and, as was pointed out earlier, it has failed to be signed off by the EU auditors for more than a decade and a half—a scandal. No business could operate having been refused audit approval for 15 or 20 years. It would be illegal to do so, I suspect. I want to see the EU budget substantially reformed.

Barbara Keeley: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he wish to comment on the sheer difficulty of bringing about reform? In the October 2012 debate the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury, now the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), said that the British Government had asked the Commission to model cuts of €5 billion, €10 billion and €15 billion in staffing costs. I know that my hon. Friend took part in the debate, but it is worth looking at the Commission's response to our Government when they asked for that work to be done:

“We declined as it's a lot of work and a waste of time for our staff who are busy with more urgent matters...we are better educated than national civil servants. We're high fliers, not burger flippers”.—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2012; Vol. 552, c. 297.]

If that is the response that we get, is it not time that we took a more robust approach?

Kelvin Hopkins: I agree very strongly with my hon. Friend, who anticipates my next point: you do not go into a negotiation with the other side knowing that you will give way in the end; you go in making them think that if they do not give you something, you will walk away. Before entering this House, I spent many years working as a researcher in the trade union movement. Trade union negotiators do not go in quietly giving way to the employers. They start off with a tough stance and try to get something real out of those negotiations. We should be doing the same.

The new hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), currently the Mayor of London, has made the point that we should be prepared to say to the other side in these negotiations that if we do not get a satisfactory conclusion, we would not be resistant to the idea of leaving the EU. A strong negotiating stance is necessary to win anything at all. I think that should be our position. I have a number of other red lines, which it would be inappropriate to go through in this debate, but the budget and the many irrationalities and nonsenses within it, primarily the common agricultural policy, should be addressed in the negotiations.

2.50 pm

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) on their excellent maiden speeches today.

The greatest prize I won on 8 May was the right to serve. I will do my utmost to repay the trust that the people of South Ribble have put in me. As the first Member of this place of Iranian heritage, I feel a particular weight of responsibility on my shoulders. I have a voice in the mother of Parliaments when there are mothers in Iran who have no voice at all, and I have that voice because of the support given to me by my volunteers, my activists and my friends and family.

My father came to Lancashire in the 1960s to study textiles. He met my mother, who is from an Irish family. I grew up in Iran, but we had to leave because of the revolution. I spent the rest of my childhood in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), which is adjacent to my own. So I am Irish and I am Iranian; my children have the blood of England, of Wales and of Guernsey flowing through their veins; but above all, and particularly in this place, I am a proud Briton. We meet at a time when we are debating historic choices that will be put to our nation and will influence our role in the world for generations.

Some hon. Members have asked me, “Where is South Ribble?” They assume, because the river rises in Yorkshire, that it is in Yorkshire, but no: it is in the red rose county—the one that won the wars of the roses, God's own county. I find myself saying that standing between two Yorkshire MPs—[*Laughter.*] The world has flocked to South Ribble over the centuries. We have a long history of trade and of traffic, including Viking invasions in the 9th century and Irish migration in the 19th, and today we benefit from the hard work of thousands of eastern Europeans who work in our fields. South Ribble has always exported—cars, buses and trucks from the world-famous Leyland Motors, fine salads from Huntapac, and delicious frozen pizzas from Dr. Oetker.

My constituents are open to the world and optimistic for the future, but they want a Europe that works for them, for their families and for our nation. Like many of my constituents, I have never had my say on our role in Europe, and I am delighted that the Conservative victory has meant that we are able to deliver that choice for the British people.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Lorraine Fullbrook. Lorraine was unrelenting in her work to protect and preserve the countryside and village nature of our constituency. She successfully led the fight against wind

farms and was tireless in her commitment to protecting our area from flooding. She was an assiduous member of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, reporting on matters such as female genital mutilation, immigration and counter-terrorism. Her no-nonsense manner and her sense of humour will be greatly missed both in this place and in the constituency. I wish her the very best in the next chapter of her life.

I also pay tribute to the first Member for South Ribble, the right hon. Sir Robert Atkins, who served with distinction in this House and later for many years in the European Parliament. His family's tradition of service continues with the recent election of my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins).

The tradition in a maiden speech is to take Members on a metaphorical open-top bus tour of one's constituency, so, hon. Friends, jump on board a Leyland-made bus and hold on tight. Those of you who have been in my passenger seat, please be assured that I am not driving today.

Leyland is prospering as a result of the grit and resilience of its people and strong local leadership. Lancashire's city deal is one of the largest, and it promises to bring further prosperity to the area through infrastructure investment. That will lead to thousands more homes and jobs being created. The initial investment is already in place and has contributed to the renaissance of the town as a hub for distribution and manufacturing. Companies such as Dr. Oetker and Waitrose are choosing to site operations there, and I hope that many more will join them. The forward thinking of South Ribble Borough Council, under the leadership of Councillor Margaret Smith, has meant that over the past five years more jobs were created in South Ribble than in Liverpool and Manchester combined.

Our bus now enters the rolling hills of Mawdesley and Ecclestone. Ecclestone is home to the first British winner of the Tour de France, Bradley Wiggins. His success in the Olympics is marked with a golden post box, and the villagers justifiably share his pride in this achievement, but for me the site is memorable because it is where I first reversed into a constituent in my car.

The River Ribble shapes the rest of my constituency. The beautiful, rich black soils of the flood plain grow some of the finest salads, tomatoes and brassicas in the country. The industry employs thousands in the villages of Banks, Hesketh Bank and Tarleton, as well as undertaking cutting-edge research. Those people are contributing to our nation's food security, but they can continue to do so only with the right infrastructure. I welcome my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's plans for the northern powerhouse and will do all I can to ensure that it extends up the M6 and into Lancashire so that my constituents can benefit from that great devolution. I will do all I can to ensure that the Green Lane link is built to improve conditions for growers and reduce congestion on village roads.

We now arrive at the northernmost part of the constituency, the town of Penwortham, the site of the final bridge over the Ribble. Hon. Members can now alight from the bus and stretch their legs—no doubt nervous that I might have taken control of the wheel at some point without them knowing. If the promise of the city deal is to be realised, we need another bridge over the Ribble. A new bridge would complete the ring

road around Preston and, crucially, link the two parts of the Lancashire enterprise zone based at BAE Salmesbury and Warton. Those two sites employ thousands of people in the aerospace sectors, building the Hawk, the Typhoon and the F-35, so they are a vital part of our national security. They also have the potential to become hubs for advanced engineering and manufacturing.

The people of South Ribble play a vital role in bolstering our nation's defences and contributing to our nation's food security. As part of the northern powerhouse, they want to play their part in Britain's future in the world. I thank them for the trust they have put in me, and I look forward to being their voice in this place.

2.58 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to deliver my maiden speech. I commend the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) for her very entertaining speech. She spoke about her constituency with great passion and commitment. I also commend the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan) for their maiden speeches. I thank the Whips on both sides of the House for sending most of their Back Benchers home, thereby significantly increasing my chances of catching your eye this afternoon, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I also want to thank—for possibly the first time in a maiden speech—the air traffic controllers at Edinburgh airport, who this morning arranged for two high-altitude aircraft to fly at right angles to each other, presumably not at the same time, thereby creating a vapour-trail saltire that could be seen all across the constituency. How they organised that, and how they knew I would be speaking here today, I do not know, but they managed it somehow.

If I appear a wee bit nervous, I should explain that although I am now proud to call myself a Fifer, I was brought up very close to Cliftonhill, home of the mighty Albion Rovers. I supported the Rovers as a wee boy, and I am not used to seeing quite this number of people in one place—although since I left Coatbridge they have gone from strength to strength, and are now the reigning Scottish League 2 champions and will play in Scottish League 1 next year.

It is traditional to pay tribute to your predecessor, and I am delighted to be able to commend the contribution to the constituency and to Parliament made by Lindsay Roy during his almost eight years as a Member here. Lindsay was elected in November 2008 in a lengthy and often bad-tempered by-election in which I finished second, and it would have been easy for that to put divisions between us. I was leader of the council; Lindsay became the MP. We could easily have ended up on opposite sides, but thanks to Lindsay's willingness to work together, we did so on a number of issues, as he worked with politicians across the political divide. Thanks to that willingness to work together, we prevented the threatened closure of our emergency medical out-of-hours service in Glenrothes.

I will be delighted to carry on working on a number of the campaigns in which Lindsay made a lot of progress but which are not yet completed. Those include reopening the rail link to Levenmouth, the largest

[Peter Grant]

population centre in the whole of Scotland that does not yet have a railway; making the much-needed and overdue safety improvements to the A92 trunk road; and ensuring that the energy park in Methil fulfils its potential to become not only a national but an international centre of excellence in the renewable energy sector, bringing much-needed and highly skilled jobs to an area that desperately needs them.

It is my intention to follow Lindsay's practice and refer to the constituency as Glenrothes and Central Fife, because Glenrothes, although it is the town where I live, and I love it more than any town anywhere, represents only 50% of the population of the constituency; the rest do not like being told they live in a new town. I think it was insensitive of the Boundaries Commission not to take that into account.

It is a constituency that is literally built on coal. Although most of the coalmines had gone before I moved to Fife over 30 years ago, once a town has become a coalmining community I do not think it ever stops being that. The community spirit, the independence of spirit, and the looking out for each other get ingrained into the population, and thankfully stay there.

It is a constituency that has produced genuine working-class heroes who were brought up in difficult conditions, sometimes of extreme poverty, and yet achieved absolute greatness. It was the home of the radical socialist poet Joe Corrie, described by T. S. Eliot as the greatest poet Scotland had produced since Robert Burns. It was the home of Celtic and Scotland goalkeeper John Thomson, whose brilliant career was tragically cut short at just 22 by an accident on the football field, and who, even in that short time, had established himself as possibly the greatest footballer ever to pull on a goalkeeper's jersey.

The constituency is the birthplace of Jimmy Shand, whom these days it is fashionable to mock. Jimmy Shand recorded more tracks than Elvis Presley and the Beatles added together. It was the boyhood home of Andy Thomson, who emigrated as a young man and is now renowned as one of the most successful indoor and outdoor bowlers in English bowling history, with seven world titles to his name. We have also produced great Scotland internationals on the bowling green such as Julie Sword and Lynn Stein, who have represented the nation with great distinction at Commonwealth and UK championships. It is the birthplace of Jack Vettriano, an artist who becomes more popular the more the artistic establishment appear to detest him. There is that rebellious element not only to Jack Vettriano but to most people who have been born and brought up in Fife.

The constituency is home to the mighty and all-conquering East Fife football club—at least they were in 1938, when they became the only team to win the Scottish cup from outside the top division. It is also home to the more recently formed East Fife Ladies football club, whose steady climb through the divisions is worth watching, thanks partly to the contribution of my late and very dear friend Arthur Robertson, but also to Liz Anderson, a coach who is already attracting interest not only from ladies' football clubs but from the mainstream Scottish clubs, which would be very keen to attract her abilities. Watch out for that name—she will be coaching a national squad, I predict, before very

long. Of course, the constituency is both the domestic home and the political home of Tricia Marwick MSP, who will undoubtedly go down in our history as one of our greatest ever parliamentarians.

Although the constituency is named after a new town, it includes sites of great antiquity. Dalgynch is the ancient capital of the kingdom of Fife, which has existed as an administrative and governmental unit since before the days of recorded history. It is possibly the only kingdom that is more ancient than the nation of the Scots itself. The constituency coast is home to the Wemyss caves, home of some of the most priceless works of bronze-age art anywhere and of possibly the oldest existing painting of a real object anywhere in Scotland. Tragically, the caves are in danger of disappearing as a result of the ravages of the weather.

There is a contrast in the local economy, with success stories in some industries and severe problems in others. The constituency, particularly the Glenrothes and Levenmouth area, is still reeling from the loss of the iconic 200-year-old Tullis Russell paper mill, the closure of the family owned retailer Sphere & Turret—which has led to a lot of job losses not only in my constituency but next door in North East Fife—and the closure of the Velux window factory and head office. In the past year, those closures have between them taken 1,000 direct jobs, and a similar number of indirect jobs, out of the constituency.

At the same time, the constituency is also home to the Balbirnie House hotel, which has won the Scottish wedding venue of the year award so often that most other hotels want it to be disqualified from taking part, to give them a chance. It is also home to the Cameron Brig distillery, one of only two places in the world that makes single-grain Scotch whisky that is good enough to drink. I am sorry that the Leader of the House is not here just now, because he mentioned the Epsom Derby earlier. I remind Members who may partake of Gordon's, Tanqueray, Pimms, Archers or Smirnoff at any of the quintessentially English sporting events this season that they will be enjoying something that is produced in the heart of the Glenrothes and Central Fife constituency. So, as well as remembering the huge contribution we make to the sporting culture and social life of our neighbour, do not ever forget the contribution we are making to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's bank account.

I am going to break with tradition and not even pretend that my constituency is the most scenically beautiful in the whole of the United Kingdom. Even on the SNP Benches, I cannot compete with the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) or with the Western Isles, Angus or East Lothian.

What my constituency does have, however, is people of genuine character and absolute integrity who will work tirelessly to give their families a good standard of living and for the benefit not only of themselves, but of others around them. By entrusting me to represent them, these people have given me the greatest privilege and responsibility I will ever carry. They are relying on me to put an end to the obscenity of benefit sanctions being inflicted on the weakest and most vulnerable in our nation. They are relying on me to put an end to the shame of 10,000 emergency food parcels per year in a single constituency—and it is not even the most deprived

constituency in Scotland. They share my belief that, for such extreme poverty to exist in a Scotland that is one of the wealthiest nations on the planet, is nothing short of criminal, and I am determined to change that for the better.

All of us can claim with some justification that we come here with the hopes and dreams of our constituents. I have been humbled and inspired in equal measure by the knowledge that the constituents who have entrusted my hon. Friends and me include a great many who for far too long have been told they have no right to dream. I am proud to speak with the voice of thousands whose voices have never been heard, not because they have nothing worth saying, but because nobody in this place would listen. I carry the awesome responsibility of shouldering the hopes of a people who are now waking up to the fact that the future is something to be faced with hope, not with fear.

The reason the SNP Benches are usually so packed is that one of the four equal partner nations in this Union has once again dared to hope and dared to believe in a better future. “Project fear” may have won the day in 2014. I am proud to stand here in 2015 as a representative of “project hope”, and “project hope” will prevail.

3.9 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): It is a wonderful coincidence—a fortuitous concatenation of circumstances—that I am able to congratulate the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), because I stood as the Conservative candidate in Central Fife in 1997, and I know that what he says is true: it is a constituency of wonderful people. They were incredibly kind to me. As hon. Members may have noticed, I am quite English—I come from Somerset. They could not have been more kindly to a young Conservative who they were pretty sure had no chance of winning. When the hon. Gentleman was singing the virtues of his constituents, I know he spoke the truth.

I now know—I did not know before—that, when I enjoy a glass of Pimm’s during the course of the summer, which I hope to do on occasion, it was made in Glenrothes. It is a wonderful constituency and it has a brilliant representative. I just hope the hon. Gentleman becomes a Conservative one day—the only way we will get a Conservative in Glenrothes is if somebody crosses the Floor.

We have had a cornucopia of excellent maiden speeches today. Sticking with the Scottish National party theme, the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan) made his maiden speech from the Front Bench. I do not know who the last Opposition spokesman to do that was, but I know that the last Minister to do that was Harold Wilson, who made his maiden speech from the Dispatch Box in 1945. The hon. Gentleman is in very fine company, and made a very fine speech, with detailed points on the European Union, which I look forward to cross-examining closely in further debates.

The hon. Gentleman also revealed the extraordinary generosity of benefits in Scotland when he told us that he is eligible for a bus pass. Clearly, the age at which people get bus passes in Scotland is much lower than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom. I will not go on to the Barnett formula and how come bus passes for such relative youths are paid for.

It was a particular joy to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) make his maiden speech. He comes from a most distinguished parliamentary family—his uncle was the Member for the Cities of London and Westminster—but I am very reassured that he will claim the high ground for parliamentarians against paternal judges. Although paternalism is in many ways a very good thing, the supremacy of the House must be reasserted, even in the Tugendhat family.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend thinks he is going to test *Hansard*. He will soon come to know that there is no test he can set *Hansard* that they do not manage to pass with flying colours. However fast the bowling or however good the batting—to go back to the Tonbridge theme of M. C. Cowdrey—*Hansard* always catch the ball or take the wicket, depending which side they are on.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) took us on a charabanc tour of her constituency. I have a slight concern—she referred to the “first” constituent she reversed into. I wait for her further speeches and interventions in transport matters, or perhaps health matters, to discover how many of the hospitals locally have been filled with injured constituents. What a tribute it is to her electability that, despite her mowing down constituents right, left and centre, she has still been returned triumphantly. Even better, when she arrives at the House, she models herself on George III. It may come as a surprise to her, but I was listening to her opening paragraphs, and she said she gloried in the name of Britain. That was exactly what George III said—exactly his sentiments. How nice it is to have his late majesty at least alluded to in this Chamber.

I must not speak for too long, and after these pourparlers I must get round to talking about the European Union, because hon. Members may know that my favourite activity on a quiet Thursday afternoon is making speeches on the European Union. If the House is not debating it, I do it at home and make members of my family listen to my views on it.

Of course, we have to start with the basics. There is a fundamental failing in the Bill in its very title, because it refers to “own resources”. It is not “own resources”; it is our money. It is British taxpayers’ money. It is not some fantastic European lottery win that has suddenly been found, and it is not like the gold that the kings of Spain found in Latin America of old. It is not made-up money; it is real money earned by British taxpayers running to the tune of £14 billion a year.

We have to be incredibly careful about how that money is spent and how willing we are to award it. We have already heard that the accounts have not been signed off for 20 years. One may think, “Well it may just be some minor error that means they have not managed to sign them off.” Actually, it is because they think that about 5% of expenditure has not been properly accounted for; roughly speaking, a third of our contribution is not properly spent, or they do not have the right receipts for it. This House has a duty, one of our most ancient duties, to ensure that the Government spend money properly and, when they give it away to international bodies, those international bodies also spend it properly. On whether it is spent properly, I will give the House a note on how the EU categorises spending given to overseas bodies.

[Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg]

The EU, for the purpose of signing off the accounts, says that if it gives £1,000 to a United Nations project and the United Nations project is worth £10,000, and that of that £10,000 in the project £9,000 was stolen, it will maintain that 100% of the money it has given to the project has been correctly spent, because if a percentage correctly spent is equal to or greater than the EU's contribution, it deems it entirely properly spent. So when the accounts are not being signed off because there is 5%, or just under, of fraud or dishonesty or error, the figure is actually understated. We must push on that continually to make sure our money is properly spent.

There is a lesson for the Government in their success. In the previous Parliament, from time to time—although not as often as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall)—I did not do as I was asked to by the Whips. On one occasion, however, I was loyal. I was the proper sycophantic fellow that people hope I might be and I supported the Government. When the Labour party—in its wisdom, on this occasion—tabled a motion saying that the Government must come back with a reduction in the EU budget, I thought that that was impossible. I thought we were asking the Prime Minister to go and argue for something that simply could not be done, but he did it. He got a reduction in the EU budget which will feed through to a reduction in our gross contributions—a real achievement. This is the lesson for the Government: it was a real achievement because the Government were bold and ambitious, and willing to try something in the European Union that was thought bound to fail. We are coming to a renegotiation and what one hears so far about the width of that renegotiation is not encouraging. Let us hope the Government learn from where they have succeeded. The message to the Government as we consider the Bill must be:

“Ask and ye shall be given. Seek and ye shall find”.

When they try, they can achieve things people do not expect them to achieve.

This brief Bill is actually at the heart of what Governments do. What we take from our constituents to spend must always be spent carefully. The £14 billion that we spend is essentially a reiteration of our overseas aid budget: it is money going from a rich country to a poor country. It is not going to subsidise the Germans, for example; it is going to the poor countries in the European Union. We are now looking at a total for overseas aid in the order of magnitude of £26 billion. We have a duty to make sure that that is spent correctly. We have a duty to try to reduce it if possible and the Government must be encouraged by their past successes.

3.18 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Thank you ever so much, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) is a difficult act to follow, but I will try.

I have been a bit slower than some of my fellow 2015 intake at getting around to making my maiden speech, but as a former university lecturer who is used to speaking in one-hour bursts, and with 43 years in Ealing behind me, I wanted to do justice to the magnificent seat of Ealing Central and Acton. With this being a Thursday, I think I might get the time to do this. All hon. Members have assured us that their constituency

is the best one in the world, but in my case it is true. As a lifelong local, I am honoured and humbled to be serving its people in this place.

My immediate predecessor was Angie Bray. Although we did not always see eye to eye politically, we did get on, and it was a mark of her generosity of spirit that when my two sisters—both constituents—and I lost our father last September, she handwrote a note of condolence to me. I wish her well.

Before its boundaries were redrawn, my seat included areas now represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and my hon. Friend the irrepressible Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound). I therefore succeed and join Bray, Slaughter and Pound, which sounds like a vaguely pugnacious firm of solicitors. I am happy now to be Huq in the mix.

Previous Conservative MPs for my seat include Kenneth Baker, immortalised for a generation of school users back when teacher training days were known as Baker days. Then came Sir George Young, “the Bicycling Baronet”, from whom I received an 18th birthday card reminding me of my newly enfranchised status and politely suggesting that I might want to vote Conservative. Members will not be surprised to learn that I did not take his advice.

I never imagined in those days that I would be one of three Ealing Labour MPs supported by a council of the same complexion. A leading Tory at Ealing town hall remarked the other day that we were living in a one-party socialist super state. If only! On the subject of mixing, which I referred to, I can now claim to be the only one of the trio of Ealing Labour MPs to have been a DJ, and, interestingly, I am the only one of the three of us who has never been a bus conductor. In part, that is a function of my age—but hey, never say never.

Transport is a key issue for my constituents. In fact, large parts of my constituency would not have existed without the electrification of the railways. Ealing, Acton and Chiswick feature strongly among the stops on the London tube map. I want to use my position to speak up for the suburbs, which are neglected parts of our nation. If our great cities drive our nation, the suburban districts fuel it.

To sketch a pen portrait of Ealing Central and Acton in 10 minutes is no mean feat. As well as the two towns in its title, it comprises bits of NW10, bordering Harlesden in Brent, near the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), and bits of W4 in Chiswick. Madam Deputy Speaker, you have probably seen my seat before without even knowing it. In the opening titles of “Only Fools and Horses”, the tower blocks of Del Boy's Peckham were actually the South Acton estate. For sci-fi fans, it featured in several episodes of “Doctor Who”, including the classic 1970 episode, “Spearhead from Space”, which depicts zombies taking over tranquil Ealing green. I think they were called Autons, or something like that.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): They were called Tories.

Dr Huq: Yes, Tories. That's it.

The whole episode, with people marauding over Ealing green, eerily prefigured the events that unfolded in August 2011, when rioting sadly hit parts of London and further afield. It hit almost the same spot as depicted in the episode.

The seat's cultural footprint goes wider than onscreen; it also covers musical matters. If Members exit Ealing Broadway station, they will see a blue plaque marking the club where the Rolling Stones played their first concert, and The Who formed at Acton County Grammar School, now known as Acton High. At the University of West London in my constituency, there is a Freddie's Bar, named after Freddie Mercury, who studied at its former incarnation, Ealing Art College. I was reminded of that by Brian May, from the same band, the week before last in this place when he came to lobby against animal cruelty.

The cumulative effect of 43 years in Ealing meant that the 18 months I spent as a candidate knocking on doors in some ways felt like watching my whole life flashing past me. I never knew who I would get behind those doors—would it be my mum's friends from the swinging Ealing of the '60s, or my own teachers from the '70s and '80s who I never even dreamed had first names, or people I see every day nowadays as a mum on the school run?

The constituency has seen pioneering social experiments. In Bedford Park suburb W4, we had the world's first garden suburb, while in W5 we have the Brentham estate, which was the birthplace of co-operative housing, where Fred Perry learned to play tennis in the communal facilities. I know that MPs have been fond of the so-called John Lewis list, but they might like to know that its offshoot Waitrose opened its first branch in 1904 in Acton High Street.

Although we witnessed riots in 2011, the spontaneous broom army that came together in the aftermath of the disturbances demonstrated the resilience of what is a mixed community. It is a seat with lush suburbia of Victorian, Edwardian and 1930s-style varieties at one end and the more post-war urban densities and high-rise properties at the other.

My 18 months as a candidate opened my eyes to things I had never seen before in 43 years there. Some of my visits were to places such as the Ealing food bank, the Ealing soup kitchen, the Ealing churches' night shelter and the Ealing Samaritans—all of whom report an unprecedented take-up of their services. In this day and age in Ealing, which was once known as "Queen of the Suburbs", that cannot be right. While our victory in Ealing was a great result against the tide, it was tempered with sadness that my dad never lived to see it and disappointment at the broader national results.

I note that my predecessor's maiden speech pledged to campaign for keeping local A&Es open. She will have been disappointed that we lost Central Middlesex and Hammersmith in September. Maternity at Ealing hospital—we are talking about the London borough with the third highest birth rate out of 33—is about to go at the end of this month, with the last projected birth on 24 June. That can be only a precursor to the A&E going, and Charing Cross A&E is also under threat. With west London's population going up, not down, that is just plain wrong.

The two immediately preceding maiden speeches for my constituency both praised its multi-faith, multi-ethnic nature. Of course, I shall do the same, as I am a product of it, as can be seen from looking at me. Old and new Europe live side by side and have done for a long time in this seat. I went to school with kids—and teachers—from the immediate post-war Polish ex-servicemen generation,

who long predated the 2004 EU expansion. The seat, then, spans tradition and modernity; continuity and change; urban and suburban: it is a microcosm of London at large. Enormous opportunity is coming our way with the regeneration of the Old Oak district, with some 24,000 dwellings, which is being touted as the Canary Wharf of the west; the Crossrail link, which will have two stops in Ealing and Acton; and HS2 is planned to come through, too. It is important that these opportunities serve local people. We do not want to see unaffordable flats being bought off plan by absentee overseas investors. That is buy to leave, not buy to let. As the area's MP, I will press for the UK to maximise EU funding for these major infrastructure projects, as it is needed to support them. That seems an appropriate point for a debate on EU finance—I did get it in somehow—and the subject of today's Bill.

3.29 pm

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and the contributions of many Members making their maiden speeches over the last couple of weeks. It is terrific to be able to follow the tutorial from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) who, as ever, delivered an incredibly impressive speech. I have often watched his speeches from afar on the television, but it is quite something to witness them in person.

It is an enormous honour and privilege to be the Member of Parliament representing Corby and east Northamptonshire, and to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate on EU finance.

Mine is not only a geographically large constituency, but one whose make-up varies considerably. The town of Corby was at the heart of steel production here in the United Kingdom, and during the second world war it provided the steel for Operation PLUTO, when an underwater pipeline pumped fuel to our allied forces who were invading Normandy. Today's operation focuses on tube production, and many examples of Corby's production prowess can be seen at the Olympic Park, the Wembley Arch and the London Eye.

One of the most striking features of Corby is the strength of the local community. As one who grew up in north Northamptonshire, I never cease to be amazed by the fact that people are so willing to dig deep, to look out for others, and to support good causes. There is no better example of that than the way in which the local community came together to support the family of Lance Corporal James Ashworth, VC, a young man who was tragically killed in Afghanistan. Lance Corporal Ashworth made the greatest of sacrifices, and was killed while trying to protect his comrades. We owe our brave armed forces the greatest debt of gratitude, and it is fitting that a square has been named in his memory in the heart of our town.

East Northamptonshire is very different from Corby, in that it consists of four market towns and many beautiful villages dotted around in the mix. Irthlingborough, Raunds, Thrapston and Oundle are thriving market towns that were underpinned by the boot and shoe trade. As a youngster I grew up in those towns, swimming in Corby, but losing many a game of cricket in villages in East Northamptonshire. In Oundle, I am currently

[Tom Pursglove]

supporting a local campaign to save the playing fields at Oundle Primary School—although I did momentarily hesitate before agreeing to support it, having witnessed a quick-fire double hundred being scored there two or three years ago, most of the runs coming off my bowling!

In east Northamptonshire, Conservatives have led the campaign for the Rushden Lakes development at Skew Bridge. The development will transform our area, bringing it new jobs, shops and leisure facilities, as a result of a multi-million-pound investment in the area which will build on the 60% fall in unemployment that we saw in the last Parliament. This very morning, I attended a meeting at which we talked about the development, and I heard plenty of good news about the progress that is being made in getting started on site.

The constituency was created in 1983, which was a good time for my party but also, I believe, for our country. During my campaign, I was occasionally told that I was a little young to be standing for Parliament, but it is worth remembering that Margaret Thatcher was just 24 when she first stood for Parliament, in Dartford in 1950. As a Thatcherite, I feel both proud and humbled to be following in her footsteps in becoming a Member of this place. I am under no illusions, however: I am pretty confident that that is where the comparisons will end.

In the last five years, Corby has had four Members of Parliament, probably more than any other constituency in the House. I hope to bring some much-needed continuity to the role over the next five years. My predecessor, Andy Sawford, was a hard-working and diligent local Member of Parliament, and I am proud that we kept to our deal. On day one, we said that we would always stick to the issues and battle hard on them, but would never make it personal. We stuck to that, and I think Andy too can be very proud of that. He will undoubtedly be a tough act to follow, and I am very grateful to him—as are local people—for the huge contribution that he made to our area during the last two and a half years.

Before that, Louise Mensch served as the Member of Parliament. She was a fierce member of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, and was a more glamorous MP than I could ever hope to be. William Powell and Phil Hope—the latter would become a Minister serving in numerous Departments—also proved themselves to be hard-working local Members, and both are still warmly talked about locally. I thank them, too, for all their efforts in our constituency.

My “Listening to Corby and East Northamptonshire” campaign is all about finding out what issues matter most to local people, and campaigning on them. Indeed, that is exactly what I did during my two years as the Conservative parliamentary candidate. As the local MP, I intend to continue doing exactly that. I want to be Corby and east Northamptonshire’s voice in Westminster, not Westminster’s voice in Corby and east Northamptonshire. That is exactly what my hon. Friends the Members for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) and for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) do so successfully, and I am so grateful to them for all their help, encouragement and support over the years.

My Corby and east Northamptonshire journey started when I helped our excellent candidate at that time, Christine Emmett, in the 2012 by-election. Early in the

campaign, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) visited, and I was tasked with driving for the day. Imagine the look of horror on her face as my car clanged into a huge metal gate, causing hundreds of pounds-worth of damage to the car but also great embarrassment to me. The pundits described the Corby by-election as a car crash for the Conservatives. I literally had a car crash. I think it is fair to say that I had at least made an impact.

I know that some in this place will be surprised to hear me say this, but the issue of the European Union and the UK’s membership of it came up time and again on the doorsteps of Corby and east Northamptonshire. One of the key reasons for that is the issue of EU finance—the concern local people have about British taxpayers’ money being sent over to Brussels and how that money is spent. Like them, I am concerned that, despite my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister securing a historic EU budget cut, the cost of the EU to UK taxpayers continues to spiral out of control. We cannot continue to write bigger and bigger cheques to remain a member of an unreformed and uncompetitive EU at a time when domestic budgets are being squeezed. What local people tell me very clearly is that they voted for a common market, not the political superstate that we see today. It is for exactly this reason that I support the Prime Minister in his endeavour to renegotiate our relationship with the EU and then put that to the British people in an in/out referendum for them to decide, because this really is a simple matter of trust.

Another referendum was also of great intrigue in my constituency: that on Scottish independence. We have a proud tradition of generations of Scots coming to Corby to live and work, and the highland gathering and Burns night suppers are very significant events in the social calendar. The desire locally to keep the United Kingdom intact is very strong: 72% of Scots at the highland gathering last year voted to remain part of the UK. Local people were delighted when Scotland opted to stay and chose to be “better together,” but as the Corby MP I am in no doubt about the role local people expect me to play in fighting off the modern-day yellow peril.

In concluding, may I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the staff of the House and MPs on all sides for their warm welcome to this House? It is an enormous honour and a privilege to be the Conservative Member of Parliament for Corby and east Northamptonshire.

3.37 pm

Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my first contribution to this House, and may I take this opportunity to commend all the excellent maiden speeches we have heard today on both sides of the House?

It may surprise my hon. Friends to learn that part of me is a little sad to be here, because the fact that I am standing here means that this Chamber has said goodbye to one of its finest parliamentarians, my predecessor the right hon. William Hague.

William enjoyed a distinguished career over 26 years. He oversaw a landmark Bill to improve rights for the disabled, led our party and served as Foreign Secretary. But his true mark can be found at home in Richmond. He was an outstanding local MP, as well as an outstanding Yorkshireman.

I once arranged a visit to a tiny, remote village and imagined that, for once, I might outdo my predecessor. On arrival, I was told that not only had he held a surgery in the village recently, but that the Foreign Secretary had arrived in a Harrier jet having flown in from a meeting with the President of the United States.

Some have wondered about William Hague's future. Perhaps he will heed the advice of his Prime Minister who suggested he ought to become the new James Bond. In the Prime Minister's own words:

"he's fit, he's healthy, he does Yoga, he can probably crack a man's skull between his knee caps."

That is hard to beat, but I did find a scintilla of encouragement on the campaign trail. Wandering through an auction market, I was introduced to a farmer as "the new William Hague". He looked at me, quizzically, then said, "Ah yes, Haguey! Good bloke. I like him. Bit pale, though. This one's got a better tan." [*Laughter.*]

In today's debate on Europe, we should remember that, as leader, William Hague campaigned to prevent Britain from joining the single European currency and instead to keep the pound. His judgment looks even more excellent today than it did then.

We will miss his oratory, wit and intelligence, and I know that the whole House will join me in wishing him well. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

Sadly, William Hague's predecessor, the late Lord Brittan, is no longer with us. Fortunately, however, Lord Brittan's predecessor, Sir Timothy Kitson, still lives locally and his years of dedicated service are remembered fondly.

The constituency of Richmond is known for its remarkable natural beauty. In the east lie the North Yorkshire moors and in the west sit the Yorkshire dales, with their distinctive dry stone walls, stone barns and softly rolling valleys. In fact, admiration for my constituency has even spread to the other side of the English channel, which is why, last year, the remote splendour of Wensleydale and Swaledale became part of the Tour de France.

Interlaced with this natural beauty is a constant reminder of our nation's heritage. Richmond castle sits magnificently at the heart of the constituency. Built by William the Conqueror, it has witnessed centuries of our nation's history unfolding. Further afield in Great Ayton, Captain James Cook grew up and left Yorkshire to explore the world.

I am also deeply honoured to represent our soldiers, airmen and their families living at RAF Leeming and at Catterick garrison, our largest Army base. We are home to the historic Green Howards, who served in the Napoleonic Wars, the Normandy landings and Afghanistan. I will never forget that so many of my constituents have risked their lives to protect our nation so that we may debate here in peace today.

In spite of all this, the most remarkable aspect of my constituency is the strength, warmth and independent spirit of our communities. I am fiercely proud to represent them. And although I am not from Yorkshire, they were immensely relieved to learn I was not from Lancashire either! [*Laughter.*]

I intend to be a champion for the causes of the countryside. I want my hard-working rural constituents to have the strong public services they deserve and every opportunity to prosper.

Our excellent hospital, the Friarage, serves a sparse area of 1,000 square miles, with some patients travelling over an hour and a half to reach it. I shall be a loud voice for ensuring that our local hospital remains strong.

Our rural schools require fair education funding so that they can remain the beating hearts of our villages. I shall be relentless in pushing for better broadband and better mobile phone coverage. The farmers who feed us, proud stewards of our landscape, are too often taken for granted and left alone to battle regulation. Many of our small businesses are making significant exports, and I am determined to help them to give Yorkshire an even bigger place on the map of the world than it already has—if that is possible!

My grandparents arrived in this country with little. My parents, now a GP and a pharmacist, grew up wanting a better future for their children. Today, I have the enormous privilege of standing here as a Member of Parliament. I owe a great debt to our country for what it has done for my family: showing tolerance, providing opportunities and rewarding their hard work.

A great man once remarked that "some of you might not be here in 30 or 40 years" before reminding his audience that decisions made today shape the future for the next generation.

I believe in a compassionate Britain that provides opportunity and values freedom. I hope I can play a small part in ensuring that our great nation continues to hold to those enduring values.

3.43 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): It is a personal privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), as my grandparents come from Yorkshire, albeit from a different constituency—Beverley and Holderness. It is also a privilege to follow all the other esteemed colleagues who have been lucky enough to win their constituencies.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate and to make my first speech in the House of Commons. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the thousands of fellow Bath residents who voted for me at this election. To say that the past few weeks have been anything less than a whirlwind and one of the most humbling experiences of my life would be an understatement. I am forever grateful to the people of Bath for entrusting me to represent them to the best of my abilities in the House of Commons. I am still in a state of shock, and I do not think it will ever quite settle in.

Several hon. Members have already asked me why I have chosen this debate for my maiden speech. Many of my colleagues who have already made their maiden speech know that it has nothing to do with the time limit set in more popular debates—graciously set by the Chair—but more to do with my commitment to champion Bath to the rest of Europe and the world at large and with the fact that we have the EU Environment Commissioner coming to Bath in the next week. I hope very much to encourage additional European funding to be spent in Bath.

I am well aware that maiden speeches are not expected to be controversial. Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will be delighted to hear that after reading Chris Patten's maiden speech, I will not be spending any time

[Ben Howlett]

on UK or EU trade union reform—in all honesty, I do not think I could quite control myself. I will therefore start with an uncontroversial statement: both my predecessors as MPs in Bath have been political titans in this place and in the city. I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Don Foster, who has been a superb champion for Bath for 23 years. Many in the House have shared fond memories of his time here and of his work in the Department for Communities and Local Government, as well as of his time as Lib Dem Chief Whip—although I understand that that is a much less difficult job these days. We share a passion for Bath rugby and support for the most disadvantaged.

I have already dedicated myself to reducing the number of children living in poverty in Bath, which, in areas of deprivation in the city, has been estimated to be approximately one in five. I intend to spend much time espousing the Conservative case for social justice in the coming years, which is a particular passion of mine given my mother's own disability and my work alongside the national health service for seven years.

Don's dedication to the people of Bath over time has been second to none. I wish him and his family the very best for the future—if Don is watching this, I am looking for that statue spot for him even now.

I could not make my maiden speech without making a special reference to Lord Patten, a man of immense intelligence and charisma. Many Members will remember that evening in 1992 and the shock felt in the Conservative party at his loss of the seat. I know that many were pleased to hear that after 23 years Bath is blue again.

Bath's reputation as an internationally renowned city is clear. In the interests of the Bill, it is important to explain Bath's European significance. Some of my predecessors have not wished to take people on a tour of Bath, but I shall positively relish the opportunity to do so, given the debate. I am incredibly lucky to represent the only city in the UK with UNESCO world heritage site status, with a history of European influence spreading into our culture, architecture and language for centuries.

Many will know the beautiful Roman baths in the city, but many will not know about the Roman curse tablets—recently added to the UNESCO Memory of the World register of outstanding documentary heritage—which are tablets that visitors to the bath would throw into the water inscribed with a curse. One reads:

“Docimedis has lost two gloves and asks that the thief responsible should lose their minds and eyes in the goddess's temple.”

As someone who values my mind and sight, I vow to the people of Bath that I will be one of the hardest working constituency MPs.

On our Roman spa, I recently learned from my good friend and previous Conservative candidate for Bath, Fabian Richter, that Bath's spa waters were not only a perfect cure for consumption and gout—how he knows this, I do not know—but renowned the world over as a cure for infertility. After all, that is why we have thousands of people tasting the waters every day in the Pump Room. If hon. Members do not believe me, James II's wife Mary visited Bath when struggling to conceive. A convenient nine months later, the future Old Pretender was born—at this point I shall forget the bit about the Tory Jacobites losing in Bath and being removed by the Whigs until a more convenient time.

Since the time of Roman Bath, links with Europe have grown ever closer. Today Bath boasts a twin relationship with Aix-en-Provence, Alkmaar, Braunschweig and Kaposvar. I pledge myself to champion our superb tourism economy in the coming years. In fact, Bath Tourism Plus will be happy for me to suggest to hon. Members that they should do two things: first, book a stay at one of our wonderful bed and breakfasts or hotels—for longer than two nights, by the way—and, secondly, bring a swimming costume and visit our wonderful Thermae spa. That is a subtle hint for Members to have a relaxing experience after a long, successful election campaign—please bring wallets.

Bath is not only a tourist city, however. We are industrially famous for our range of engineering firms. Chris Patten rightly explained in his maiden speech that Bath is not just “a museum piece”. We have some of Europe's leading electrical parts companies, and design and research and development firms. Our universities are world-leading centres of design and engineering, leading the way on sustainable energy production and renewables, as well as the lowering of vehicle emissions.

My second point to make in the debate on this Bill is that I shall be using this opportunity to call for additional funding from the European Union for the west of England and the south-west. Whereas other areas of the UK have received substantial amounts of infrastructure spend, the west of England is all too often overlooked. Of course we all know of the Chancellor's success with the northern powerhouse in recent months, so I am very happy to lend my support to the west of England powerhouse, just as so many of my colleagues have espoused such support so eloquently in their maiden speeches. I want to lend my backing for additional funding to be spent in the west of England.

Every Bath resident is aware that Bath's No. 1 issue is, of course, transport. During the election campaign, we set out our transport manifesto, and I will reiterate to residents in Bath the fact that I will be fighting for funding to deliver a solution to our stalling transport system. I am very pleased that the European Environment Commissioner will be visiting Bath next week to help make Bath a special case study for air pollution levels. That will enable our city to get on and build that long-overdue A36-A46 link road to the east of Bath, which I mentioned earlier to the Secretary of State for Transport. I will also be working alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) to help open that long-awaited Corsham railway station. Other matters I am campaigning on include the lack of affordable homes in Bath, the UK's third least affordable city. More than 5,000 people are on the social housing waiting list, so we need more affordable and social homes built in the city.

Bath has a long history of MPs who have fought the British corner, with none more famous than the only Bath MP to become the Prime Minister—the Earl of Chatham, William Pitt the Elder. I will forgive him for his liberal leanings, as he led Britain through the seven years war with France, with victory cementing Britain's place in the world. He was renowned for his antagonism towards the chief enemies, France and Spain, and had a lifelong concern to protect the balance of power on the European continent. I can, of course, recommend a good book called “Pitt the Elder” to the Prime Minister when he undertakes his renegotiation strategy with European nations.

As the new Member of Parliament for Bath, I will never shy away from championing our city's achievements, just like my immediate predecessor Don Foster. In his maiden speech, he quoted Chris Patten's maiden speech, stating that before 1979 the unemployment figures had, sadly, risen and that 13 years later Bath was still not "quite as busy" as he would have liked following rises in unemployment in 1992. In stark contrast to my predecessor, I am pleased to report that as a result of this Government's long-term economic plan, in April the claimant count in Bath fell to one of its lowest levels, at 1.8%, which is an overall drop of more than 40% since 2010. With more than 215 new businesses set up in Bath between 2010 and 2014, and almost 1,800 new apprenticeships, this is a superb story to be told and it shows how important it is not to put this all at risk.

Bath has always been at the forefront of innovation, and I intend to champion the causes of businesses such as Polamco, Rotork, BMT and Cross Manufacturing as they grow. I am a strong advocate for the reform of the European Union through the renegotiations, but I would like to place on the record my belief that our country is better off inside the European Union than outside it. As I have explained in the past few minutes, Bath's culture and heritage are based on strong links with Europe. I do not want to put jobs and investment at risk in the west of England.

In conclusion, it has been traditional for Bath MPs to stand up for progressive values and reform, and I stand for a continuation of that tradition. I finish by saying that Bath has sometimes been called the graveyard of ambition. I stand before this House as the grandson of someone who used to drive Margaret Thatcher, and the son of parents who never went to university and worked hard all their lives. This fundamental belief in aspiration has enabled me to become the MP for Bath, and I hope that others around the country will look to this comprehensive schoolboy's result and think that one day they could sit beside me. I am proud to represent my home of Bath, one of the best cities in Europe and the world.

3.53 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to speak for the first time under your chairship, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that I will enjoy doing so and it is great to see you in your place.

This afternoon, we have heard no fewer than eight maiden speeches. All have been brilliant and eloquent, and each Member has given a great exposition of their constituency. It is no surprise that they should have been so brilliant, and let me say why. I say this to the hon. Members for East Lothian (George Kerevan), for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), for Corby (Tom Pursglove), for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) and for Bath (Ben Howlett), and my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq): it is no surprise that each one of them has made a fantastic first speech in this House because they chose to make their first contribution in a debate on European affairs, as I did five years ago, so welcome to the club, folks! They all did absolutely brilliantly, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton. It is good to see that we are welcoming another fellow DJ to this place. I know that she will add great things to our debates.

Several Members mentioned their diverse backgrounds, and how proud they were to represent their home towns. The hon. Member for Bath made that point particularly well. He said that Members in this House come from all parts of the world and have diverse family backgrounds. Our country is at its best when it appreciates its wide history and shows its tolerance, which is one of the finest of British values, and I support everything that he said on that point.

On the Bill at hand, this debate has highlighted many important issues, which will undoubtedly be discussed over the next few months as we continue to debate Europe. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) has already stated, we will not oppose this Bill.

The Bill, although short, will give effect to the new financing system of the European Union, which equates to a net contribution from the UK of £9.8 billion for the year 2015-16. We will seek to improve the Bill in a number of ways. First, we need to review the EU budget. At the moment, 6% of the EU budget is spent on administration costs, and we need to ascertain whether that money is being spent efficiently and effectively. If it is not, we need to consider what we can do to change it. We have a collective interest in ensuring that European resources are used efficiently. Indeed, there are so many areas in which we have a collective interest with our European friends and neighbours. We will seek agreement from the Council of Ministers to undertake a review of budget priorities, waste and inefficiency within the EU budget.

There also needs to be an improved process for agreeing the EU budget. My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South has already highlighted the convoluted process that we go through and some of the difficulties. To increase transparency and accountability, it is vital that this House expresses its opinion on the budget, and we should seek to meet budget representatives in advance of EU budget negotiations. I urge the Government to consider what more they can do on that front.

We also need to revisit how the budget is set and how we spend the money. To set a different ceiling on spending commitments and payments seems odd, and we ask for the process to be reviewed to ensure that the gap is manageable.

I am sure that Members would not feel too insulted if I suggested that the EU budget can be difficult to understand. It involves complicated decision-making processes. Set out over a seven-year cycle, it covers everything from spending on research and innovation to public health and even pensions for staff, but it is precisely because of its wide scope that it needs such careful attention.

We have heard Government Members wax lyrical about their achievements on reducing the UK's contribution to Europe. Labour welcomes the fact that the UK has achieved that real-term cut in spending limits, and I remind the House that we played an important role in pushing for that cut.

We called for a real-term cut in spending in 2010, and pushed for a better deal for Britons in the following years, but a reduction in spending is just one part of the reforms that we need. The budget also needs to be more focused. We need to concentrate on areas that will enhance economic growth across the EU. I was struck

[*Alison McGovern*]

by the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South about the level of unemployment in parts of Europe. We need to improve productivity, support the creation of new jobs, and, ultimately, enhance living standards within our Union.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The hon. Lady is being characteristically generous in paying tribute to the Prime Minister for securing that reduction in the budget. Given that the Labour party is now indulging in various changes of opinion, not least on Europe, does she recognise that the way so much was given away in the mid-2000s by the previous Labour Government was a great mistake, and will she pledge that no future Labour Government would ever do such a thing in that way?

Alison McGovern: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention and for his kind words. Given the comment I just made about when I chose to make my first speech at this place, I can assure him that I have never changed my mind about Europe. I shall say more about that.

Spending on research, innovation, infrastructure, education and training, and enterprise development is very important and can help us better to promote the European Union as a facilitator of growth within the UK. Of course we recognise that we must also finance all aspects of the EU, but I would question whether continuing to spend so much of our money on areas like the common agricultural policy demonstrates the right priorities. It accounted for 40% of EU expenditure in 2013 yet contributed just over 1% to total EU economic output.

George Kerevan: Labour Members have twice now criticised how much is spent on agriculture in the EU. Surely the hon. Lady is aware that over the years there has been a significant shift in and reform of what the agricultural fund is for. It is no longer primarily an agricultural subsidy for production and excess production but is focused on protecting the environment. Surely that is something that we should encourage.

Alison McGovern: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about protecting our environment, but my point is that in these times we need to ensure that each part of this spending is focused in the right place. At a time when the European Union has serious deprivation and so on within its borders, it is right to question each part of its spending.

I know that any discussion of Europe strikes fear into the heart of those on the Government Front Bench, especially because it stirs such joy on their Back Benches. The issue of Europe holds no such fear for me, however, and in the coming referendum I shall campaign to stay in the European Union, because we should not underestimate the benefits we receive from being part of it.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): In the light of the hon. Lady's comments about fear on respective sides of the House, will she tell the House why her party was so fearful of the views of the British people for so long when it came to a referendum on Europe?

Alison McGovern: I have no fear of the views of the British people and I only endeavour to listen to them.

Seven out of ten of the UK's largest export markets are in EU countries, amounting to 42% of the UK's total exports or £122 billion every year. Some of those exports are made in my constituency, and I see the vital importance of the European market to the whole of the UK and to my constituents no less than to anyone else's. Of all the investment spending in the UK over the past 20 years, 21% has come from foreign direct investment, and we should not underestimate the importance of that. We have access to 500 million customers in the single market, and in my role as shadow City Minister. I must raise the point that in my opinion the financial services sector benefits enormously from remaining within the EU.

Graham Stuart *rose*—

Alison McGovern: I will give way, because I am feeling generous.

Graham Stuart: The hon. Lady is being very generous. A lot of the debate on this in the past has been a bit overdone, as though there would be no trade between the EU and the UK if we were to leave. What assessment has the hon. Lady made of what the impact would be? I am sure that there would be costs, but perhaps we need to avoid exaggerating or suggesting that somehow all trade would cease or that there would be massive walls put up when there will not. What is her assessment of the likely impact on trade if we did depart?

Alison McGovern: I am not always this generous, so the hon. Gentleman should perhaps make the most of it. I have looked my constituents in the eye, especially those who work at General Motors in Ellesmere Port, and I have seen in them a dedication to make things in this country to be sold abroad for the good of our economy. Their dedication in working so hard for our country deserves our commitment to ensuring that our borders are open to our biggest customers. When they sell their cars to Europe, that is good for our country and I think that my job is to stand by their side.

We must work hard to make the EU better for everybody, and the Bill presents us with an opportunity to do that. The multiannual financial framework has already been agreed by the European Council. We should use this process to strengthen budgetary procedures for the future and enhance political and public understanding of how the EU budget works, and we should re-prioritise how EU money is spent so that it works for the benefit of each and every person in Europe, not just for a wealthy few. I look forward to strengthening the Bill as it moves through the House.

4.5 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): What a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to respond on behalf of the Government to the debate on the European Union (Finance) Bill. I welcome the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) to her position as shadow Economic Secretary.

We have had a good-humoured debate today on this important topic. I have noticed that a large number of former university professors chose to speak in the debate.

I welcome the eight new Members who made their maiden speeches during the debate. As my opposite number pointed out, they have been shrewd—they know that Thursday afternoon business on a Bill that takes up all of one page and has general cross-party support is an excellent opportunity to enjoy less stricture from Madam Deputy Speaker in respect of a time limit.

We were privileged to hear a range of maiden speeches, first from the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan), who shocked us by revealing that he already has his bus pass. He tempted us all with the information that his vegetable garden is ambitious and painted a delightful picture of East Lothian. My grandmother, Flora Maclean Macleod Morrison, was born in Dunbar in his constituency, so he will forgive me if I take an entirely different view from him of our United Kingdom, but I enjoyed his maiden speech very much none the less.

We then had the pleasure of hearing from my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), who emphasised the fact that his interest in European finance was related to the fact that his wife is French. He took us on a very interesting tour of his constituency that involved Wimbledon strawberries. He also spoke of his valuable and important tours of Iraq and Afghanistan, for which the nation is deeply grateful.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) who, I think it is fair to say, is the first person of Iranian-Irish heritage to serve in this place. She took us back to the wars of the roses. The atmosphere seemed to get quite heated on the Conservative Benches at times during the afternoon, but my hon. Friend made a very funny speech and took us on a metaphorical open-top bus tour in a Leyland bus around South Ribble. The House was alarmed to hear that she reversed into her first constituent. We would all like to hear in her subsequent contributions what happened to that constituent. I was left worrying about what happened next.

We had an excellent speech from the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), who complemented the strawberries from Tonbridge and Malling with some Pimm's from Glenrothes to add to our summer delights. We also heard from the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), who has been not only a university professor but, I understand, a DJ. She took us around the musical highlights of Ealing Central and Acton. She clearly knows her area extremely well from having lived there for so long, and she paid a well deserved tribute to her excellent predecessors, Angie Bray and Sir George Young. I only regret that Sir George Young's letter to her when she was 18 failed to persuade her of the virtues of voting Conservative, but a place is reserved for her, should she ever wish to cross the Floor.

We heard a remarkable speech from my hon. Friend the new Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), who enchanted us with his description of some of his perhaps less successful outings on the cricket pitch. I think it fair to say that he is already one of the most famous new Members, as his name has been mentioned on numerous occasions by his constituency champion, our hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). We are delighted to meet him in the flesh. He was elected as the youngest councillor in the country in 2007, which we in Malvern Hills were slightly annoyed about, as we had only the second youngest. None the less, I congratulate him on being here so early in his life and look forward to his being here for many years to come.

We then heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), who has a very tough act to follow. Not only has his predecessor left a lasting legacy in this nation's politics by ensuring that we kept the pound and remained strong in our approach to a wide range of foreign policy issues, but he turned up at his advice surgeries in a Harrier jet—a tough act to follow indeed, but the new Member for Richmond (Yorks) clearly shares the oratory, wit and intelligence of his predecessor. I am sure that his speech today gave us the first inkling of the great contribution he will make.

Today, the House has also had a picture painted for us of a spa. What could be nicer on a Thursday afternoon in the House of Commons than to hear about the city of Bath and its place in European tourism? It was an enchanting picture of an historic and famous place. My hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) shared his pride in the fact—we all agree with him on the great news—that, after 23 years, Bath is once again a blue city. He told us about the innovative and prosperous place that he represents. He, too, will be a great champion for his area in the years to come.

A stable, prosperous society is possible only if the Government spend citizens' money wisely. We have before us a Bill that is an eloquent rebuttal to all those who claim that we cannot get a better European settlement. Back in 2013, people said we could never do something as ambitious as cutting the EU budget—it was unheard of. But we worked with our partners, we negotiated hard and we did not give in, and that work paid off handsomely. The seven-year deal we secured represents the first ever real-terms cut to the EU budget, at the same time as protecting our hard-won rebate. That is what happens when we stand our ground, fight hard against unwelcome proposals and defend the interests of the British taxpayer. That is exactly the sort of leadership that is needed in Europe.

Barbara Keeley: I want to ask the hon. Lady a question that is important for the next stage of the Bill. Does she think that “standing our ground” will be extended to what the Labour party has suggested and Labour Members have talked about today, which is cutting the CAP and funding for agriculture even further and spending more on growth and jobs? Does she think that that switch of priorities is possible?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Lady mentioned that earlier and I was going to get to that point in a moment, but yes, we do accept that expenditure on the CAP is still too high both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the overall budget. As she will know, this settlement reduces the amount we spend on the CAP by 13%, but as the Prime Minister said at the time of the deal, reform of EU spending is a long-term project. I will say more later in my speech.

Before I reply to points made in the debate, let me remind the House what the Bill covers and what it does not cover. It relates to the mechanism by which member states finance the EU budget. The mechanism was agreed unanimously by member states in 2014, in a Council decision that fully and accurately reflects the historic deal that the Prime Minister secured. The Bill therefore gives UK approval to that Council decision, finalising the Prime Minister's historic deal in 2013,

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

which the Government worked hard to achieve and which received widespread praise from both Houses as delivering a good deal for taxpayers.

The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South made a number of points, including on the common agricultural policy and the overall enthusiasm her party now feels for reform of the European Union. We welcome that new-found enthusiasm, but I encourage her to induct into that feeling her colleagues in the European Parliament, who play a vital role every year by scrutinising the European budget. I look forward to her being able to engage with them and ensure that there is a good deal of scrutiny, and not only on the points she raised about the common agricultural policy, but on the payment gap, because clearly the Commission has committed to publishing more frequently its analysis on payment forecasts. We welcome the greatly enhanced level of information on the budget but recognise that there is still a great deal more to do.

Barbara Keeley: It is worth saying for the record that in the latest round of CAP reforms, covering the six-year period from 2014 to 2020, Labour MEPs voted against the final outcome, because we believe that the reforms were not far-reaching enough. The Minister mentioned talking to those MEPs, but they have already voted against it.

Harriett Baldwin: As I said, I welcome the hon. Lady's European colleagues' new-found enthusiasm for rigour and reform in the European Union, and I look forward to working closely with them to ensure that happens.

My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) made an excellent speech that revealed his deep knowledge of the subject. As a former MEP who sat on the Committee that scrutinised the European budget, he has been assiduous in his scrutiny of this legislation—no doubt the Whips will have noted his enthusiasm to take part when the Bill goes to Committee. He asked a range of questions about the ESA reporting and the accuracy of the EU budget. The UK agrees that more can be done to improve compliance, including simplifying the rules that member states have to comply with to release their funds. We believe that the Prime Minister's deal on the multi-annual financial framework shows that EU spending can be improved, but that will require a strong UK voice to be heard.

George Kerevan: Again, does the Minister understand that the OBR analysis shows that in 2020 the net contributions in cash terms from the UK will be similar to what they are now? When the Prime Minister negotiated a reduction in the EU budget, it was a reduction in the global budget, not in the British contribution in cash terms.

Harriett Baldwin: I accept that the OBR has published figures that clearly show that there is a real-terms reduction in the overall envelope for the settlement period.

My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry also asked about the additional costs compared with the existing decision and any offsetting benefits. He raised a number of technical points about the VAT-based contributions,

which are calculated by applying a call rate to a hypothetical harmonised VAT base—are not we glad we have him in this House, knowing all the information and all the right questions to ask on the details of the financial settlement? He also asked about the impact of the switch from ESA 95 to ESA 2010. It was taken into account in the own resources decision, but it does affect all countries' GNI, so the effect on the contribution depends on how all countries' GNI is revised. For the UK the key determinant of contributions is, in fact, the VAT base, thanks to our rebate, which the Labour party did not succeed in giving away fully in the early 2000s. Changes in the UK's GNI are corrected in the rebate calculation.

The hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) mentioned a number of negotiating red lines that he has, although he is in a slightly different position. He asked what are the Prime Minister's red lines. The Prime Minister has clearly set out areas where he wants change, including reforming welfare to reduce the incentives that have encouraged such mass migration from Europe; increasing economic competitiveness to create jobs and growth for hard-working families; and protecting Britain's interests outside the euro. They also include halting the constant flow of powers to Brussels, including by ensuring a stronger role for national Parliaments, and dealing with the concept of ever-closer union. That may be what some others want, but it is not for us.

In 2010, this Government took the tough decisions that were needed to pull this country back from the brink. We can have a stable, prosperous society only if a Government spend their citizens' money carefully, and it is right that we took that approach to the European level of government as well.

Alison McGovern: Can the Minister confirm how the deficit is going?

Harriett Baldwin: I would be delighted to confirm that. When we took office in 2010, the deficit was the largest in our peacetime history, at well over 10%. It has more than halved over the past five years and will be eliminated during this Parliament.

Alison McGovern: The Minister says that the deficit has halved. Will she confirm the Government's pledge in 2010?

Harriett Baldwin: The deficit halved—more than halved—over the course of the previous Parliament. Is the hon. Lady now arguing that she would like to have cut spending more? I have not heard that from Labour Members in this Chamber over the past five years. I have heard constant bids for more borrowing, more spending and more taxation, and nothing at all about reducing the deficit.

Alison McGovern: The Minister challenges me on what I would pledge. I did not write the Chancellor's emergency Budget that set the Government on the wrong course. So let me ask her this: how did the pledge to get debt falling, not rising, for most of the previous Parliament go?

Harriett Baldwin: I must be living in a parallel universe. I have walked through the opposite Lobby from the hon. Lady on numerous occasions when we have taken

the tough decisions on spending that we needed to take in order to clear up the mess that her mentor, Mr Gordon Brown, left behind.

In the negotiations on the European budget in 2013 we achieved real, historic change. We got a great deal for the United Kingdom, we proved that we can achieve reform in Europe, and we protected taxpayers' interests. That historic agreement will be formalised with the passing of this Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCE) BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the European Union (Finance) Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Proceedings in Committee, on Consideration and Third Reading

(2) Proceedings in Committee, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed at one day's sitting.

(3) Proceedings in Committee and any proceedings on Consideration 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.

(4) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(5) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee and on Consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(6) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of any message from the Lords) may be programmed.—(*Margot James.*)

EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCE) BILL (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 European Union (Finance) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the charging on, and payment out of, the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund of any sums which, by virtue of the amendment of the European Communities Act 1972 made by that Act, fall to be charged on or paid out of either of those Funds.—(*Margot James.*)

Mental Health (Higher Education Institutions)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Margot James.)

4.23 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election to your post.

I thank Mr Speaker for granting this Adjournment debate on an extremely important issue that is of growing concern—how to support our most precious young people on the thresholds of their lives. I want to set out the background to the issue, the evidence that shows that it is an area of growing concern, what is good practice, and what can be done for the future.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House may have seen the recent examples of students who are putting mental health and counselling services at the top of their agenda for change. In March, students from Goldsmiths University occupied Deptford town hall and demanded the recruitment of more counsellors. Also in March, students from the London School of Economics called for the removal of the standard six-session cap on counselling sessions. In April, students from King's College, London included in their provisional occupation demands a call for mandatory training for their personal tutors in giving advice on mental health, and they wanted an additional cognitive behavioural therapist to be employed, to cut down on waiting times.

Members will have seen recently that two students from the same Oxford college committed suicide—one in December 2013 and the other in March 2014. Across the House Members are agreed and have accepted that the Government are going to pursue parity of esteem between mental health and physical health, which is welcome.

Why is this becoming an issue of concern? There are a number of reasons. We expect the many students who have left home for the first time to get into college, set up a household, learn how to budget, form new relationships and get involved in their academic courses, but at the same time they are separated from their usual support networks. Some may come from another country, while others, because of widening access to higher education, including vocational qualifications, may also face particular challenges. I am concerned that the Royal College of General Practitioners says that tens of thousands of 15 to 34-year-olds are suffering from depression, stress and anxiety.

Another issue is study pressure and the continuous annual examinations that young people face from the age of 13—sometimes even younger—to 18. Now their CVs have to be bulging with placements and work experience. They say that they have climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, that they play three instruments at grade 8 and that they have a string of A*s—and that is before they even get to university.

Another possible reason is financial pressure. We talk of paying down the debt, and yet we are saddling our young people with, on average, a debt of £44,000 at the start of their working lives, which they then have to carry through. That is the estimate of the House of Commons Library, based on Student Loans Company statistics for 2013-14. It is notable that Germany has

[Valerie Vaz]

abolished tuition fees: Lower Saxony was the last federal state to abolish them, and that was in October 2014. Perhaps we can learn some lessons from that.

After graduation, some find it difficult to find well-paid work, or they have to work a long-hours culture. The latest figures from the Student Loans Company showed that 30% of new graduates were working but not earning enough to be liable to pay their loans. That was the figure for 2012, so it will be interesting to see the new figures, which will be released on 18 June.

What of the evidence? A 2013 survey by the National Union of Students found that 49% of students had felt depressed during their studies; that 55% had felt anxious during their studies; and that 20% considered themselves to have a mental health problem. In 2011, 6,000 students had a diagnosed mental health condition, compared with almost 9,000 in 2013—that is a 58% increase in three years, even though the student intake actually fell by 16% during the same period.

A freedom of information request in 2014 revealed that the number of undergraduate and postgraduate students accessing counselling services at Oxford University went up by 136% and 172% respectively between 2003-04 and 2013-14. For undergraduates, there was a rise from 4% to 9%.

Happily, we are moving on to a different track, because we are now able to track the student academic experience. The Higher Education Policy Institute and the Higher Education Academy have produced two consecutive reports. The 2014 report states that students generally feel lower levels of wellbeing than the general population, which is of some concern. They may require further support from institutions, not only through dedicated support services, but through peer networks and mentoring programmes.

The 2015 report concludes that students are less happy and have less of a sense that the things they do are worthwhile than the general population, even compared with people in the same age group. That shows the need to improve student support services, including counselling, even in challenging financial times.

What can be done? There is good practice from the Open University, a non-campus university that supports lifelong learning. The OU contacts students about their adjustments to ensure that they are supported, giving advice about staying on track, prioritising work and having flexibility with deadlines, and about other adjustments.

Students are encouraged to apply for disabled students allowances so that they can access the support of a mental health mentor. They all have access to the guide “Studying and staying mentally healthy”, which the Open University states has lots of practical guidance. As a result, the Open University found that evidence showed that disabled students who received DSAs have higher completion rates and are more likely to progress in their studies. However, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, a professional body for counsellors and psychotherapists, is concerned that counselling is no longer viewed as an essential element of student support. It says that more generalised wellbeing support and advice offered by non-clinically trained staff is increasingly seen as the way forward.

Dr Ruth Caleb, head of counselling at Brunel University and chair of Mental Well-being in Higher Education, has written a timely article entitled “Student Mental Wellbeing: whose responsibility?” She makes many points, but the two most important ones are that ignoring student wellbeing support costs the university or higher education institution a great deal of money when student retention is very important; and that it is the responsibility of the Government and senior management to ensure that students are supported to stay until the end of their course, to help them to achieve the best they are capable of. The more compelling reason is the need to behave morally and ethically for our students.

Dr Caleb has published a guide—“Student mental wellbeing in higher education: good practice guide”—and makes important recommendations, including on guidance structures, and training and awareness raising activities to help institutions to work towards a much more collaborative model. I suggest to the Minister that that might be a good blueprint for a policy or guidance note that can be rolled out to higher education institutions.

Ben Lewis, from the Cardiff University student services organisation, has said that students are forced to rely on support from their institutions, which is finite and resource-limited, so the NHS has a collaborative role. However, BACP has said that there might be a temptation for universities to hand over responsibility to the NHS. If it is more difficult to see a counsellor, people are referred to the NHS, which has longer waiting times. That also means more pressure on the NHS.

BACP has cited data showing that, of 5,500 students from 65 universities, 81% considered that counselling helped them to stay at university; that 79% said that counselling helped them academically do better in their work; and that 78% said that counselling helped them to develop employability skills. That is all pointing in the right direction if we continue to embed those services.

I have a number of questions to ask the Minister. First, will he ensure that there is a Government-led review of higher education counselling services to formulate a policy before the situation gets worse?

Secondly, as Higher Education Policy recommended, will the Government ensure that counselling services are funded even at challenging financial times, that students get the appropriate service of higher or lower-intensity counselling, and that those are embedded in higher education institutions’ policies?

Thirdly, will the Government stop the proposed changes to DSAs? As the Open University has found, many students benefit from support tutors to stay on the course. I was at a round-table discussion at the Royal Society of Chemistry last year. The Royal Agricultural University stressed the importance of DSA for their students, two thirds of whom are on DSAs. That helps the university to give them the support they need to stay on. If they did not have those students—they are graduating with science degrees—the university might have to close. That is why it is important to ensure that DSAs are retained.

Fourthly, will the Minister work with the Department for Health to ensure that clinical commissioning groups and university counselling services work together in areas with a high student population, and that services are complementary, not duplicated, so that students do not fall between the two and miss out on the services they need?

Fifthly, will he publish guidance so that students who interrupt their studies for mental health reasons, as two students did, are properly supported by higher education institutions during that period? A period of intermission should not simply be a means for the institution to avoid addressing a problem a student may be facing. Students should be supported back into their studies.

I hope the Minister will agree with what I believe are reasonable asks. Above all, I hope they will be embedded in any Government policy he sets out to protect our students. Students are our most precious assets and our hope for the future. We must support them so they can discover and unleash their talents, and fulfil their potential for the good of us all.

4.35 pm

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to have the chance to debate this important topic.

Ensuring the wellbeing of students is very important for our higher education institutions. I know that they take their responsibilities in this area exceptionally seriously. As the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) made clear, students have also highlighted how important this issue is for them. But, tackling mental health is a priority not just for higher education. The Government will continue to take mental health as seriously as physical health. It is estimated that funding for mental health will increase by £302 million in 2014-15. Total mental health spending is rising from just over £11.3 billion in 2013-14, to just over £11.6 billion in 2014-15. That is an increase of 0.6% in real terms. We have made it clear that spending on mental health should increase in real terms. NHS England has published planning guidance for 2015-16. This makes the expectation clear that each clinical commissioning group should see spending on mental health services increase in real terms in 2015-16.

It is right that higher education institutions, as autonomous bodies independent from the Government, have the responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of their students. This includes their mental health. They have clear legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to support their students, including those with mental health conditions. Institutions are best placed to determine what welfare and counselling services they need to provide to their students. That will vary according to the needs of each particular student body. Students who, as the hon. Member for Walsall South mentioned, are paying up to £9,000 in fees should be able to access the high quality support they need to sustain and complete their studies. Our universities are in sound financial health. We have, and will continue to have, a world class higher education system. This has been achieved and maintained during a period when higher education has been opened up both to greater numbers and an increased diversity of students.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend and brother for giving way. On diversity of students, is it not absolutely vital to maintain this country's high profile in those vital markets, particularly India, where we have seen a sad falling away in the number of students coming to Britain?

Joseph Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. We do, of course, encourage diversity of students. We encourage diversity in all groups that are under-represented: people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from the most disadvantaged sections of society. We also welcome the diversity that comes from international students and hope that the numbers from the country he mentioned stop declining in the years ahead and begin to rise.

Universities are adult environments, where the expectations on students are different from those at school. As such, it is only right that students take responsibility, working with the institution, for their own welfare. However, I know that universities are very mindful of the fact that many of their students, particularly those who have moved away from home for the first time to study, will be undergoing a significant transition and may need extra help. Universities provide a wide range of support. In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness in higher education of the need to offer support services to students, and I welcome the efforts the sector has made to develop guidance and support materials, including from a range of sector and medical bodies.

The hon. Lady mentioned the Open University. We must indeed spread good practice, which is why I welcome the recent publication by Universities UK of a good practice guide on student mental wellbeing in higher education, published in February. This is a practical resource for senior higher education leaders and managers and aims to support institutions in building and improving their provision for students with mental health problems.

There are many examples of the support that universities have in place. They have induction systems to help students understand university life, and support is available to reassure students that there are people to turn to if they are experiencing difficulties.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I wish to make a point relevant to the debate. Does the Minister think that some work ought to be done in secondary schools to prepare people for higher education in terms of wellbeing and mental health?

Joseph Johnson: It is important throughout the education system that proper attention be given to mental health issues, and that includes the secondary education system as much as higher education.

I was mentioning some of the examples of good practice across our higher education system, and I want to cite work by the University of Wolverhampton, close to the hon. Lady's constituency, which has recently appointed a mental health adviser. It also offers a counselling service that runs "dealing with students in distress" workshops as part of the university's annual staff development programme. This is available to all staff, including front-line staff.

The University of Salford works with a number of services in the community, including mental health teams and charities, such as Mind in Salford, Self Help in Greater Manchester and early intervention teams. The University of Sheffield has developed postcards on which is written, "Worried about another student?". These are aimed at supporting mental health and wellbeing

[*Joseph Johnson*]

and are distributed through their residences, timed for when students return in January and at the start of first semester exams.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Those are excellent examples of university initiatives, but Bristol University saw a 64% increase in mental health diagnoses in the five years between 2009 and 2014. It recruited a new psychotherapist, and the local psychiatrist now visits twice a week, whereas he used to have to visit only once a fortnight. It needs specific funding to help them cope with the increased demand. Will the Minister speak to his colleagues in the Department of Health to secure some of that funding?

Joseph Johnson: As I said, universities are in sound financial health. Students paying up to £9,000 in fees should be able to access the high-quality support they need to sustain and complete their studies.

The Government are providing extra support for disabled students on an individual basis through the disabled students allowance. This can provide support to students with mental health issues. In the academic year 2012-13, just over £127 million was paid in DSA to about 56,000 full-time students. All students applying for DSA undergo a needs assessment interview to ascertain their specific requirements with regard to their chosen course of study. Students with mental health difficulties can apply for the full range of support available through

DSA, including specialist mentors, equipment and assistive technology, to help them overcome the barriers they face.

The proposed changes to DSA, which the hon. Member for Walsall South mentioned, will be subject to a public consultation. It is vital to remember that the changes are not about removing support, but about rebalancing the source of that support and ensuring that universities and other higher education institutions play a full role in delivering their legal duties under equality legislation. The aim will be to set clear guidelines on what the Government expect from institutions to ensure that students receive a consistent level of support and that the sector is clear where DSA is the most effective source of support. This is intended to improve the levels of support overall, including for students in receipt of DSA and disabled students who do not claim it. Under the proposed changes, students with mental health conditions will continue to have access to DSA-funded specialist support such as mentors.

The higher education sector has much to be proud of in its work to ensure the wellbeing and mental health of its students and to fulfil its duties under the Equality Act 2010. I expect the sector to continue to meet its obligations in this area and to build and develop the support it provides.

Question put and agreed to.

4.45 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 11 June 2015

[MR ANDREW TURNER *in the Chair*]

Voter Engagement

[*Relevant documents: Fourth Report from the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Session 2014-15, Voter engagement in the UK, HC 232, the Government response, HC 1037, and the Sixth Report from that Committee, Session 2014-15, Voter engagement in the UK: follow up, HC 938.*]

1.30 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered voter engagement and the franchise.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner.

I have the great privilege of representing an area that, throughout history, has served as a hotbed for new and often radical ideas about democracy, justice and representative government. Mary Wollstonecraft lived in Islington for many years and established a school for girls at Newington Green. Thomas Paine began writing his “Rights of Man”—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”]—at the Angel in 1790. And Lenin—let us also have a cheer for Lenin, please—worked in Clerkenwell Green during the early 20th century, publishing several issues of his communist newspaper from the site now occupied by the Marx Memorial library.

My constituency has often been described as a citadel for constitutional reform, and it is not hard to see why. One of my predecessors as MP for Finsbury, Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, presented the second, and by far the largest, Chartist petition to Parliament in 1842. The petition is said to have been signed by 3,315,752 people and was so large that it could not fit through the doors of Parliament without being unrolled. The Chartists sought radically to reform the way that hon. Members were elected to this House and called for an extension to the franchise, a secret ballot and the abolition of property qualifications so that wealth was no longer a precondition to vote. Of course, the Chartists called only for the enfranchisement of men, but we have since moved on.

Unfortunately, Islington’s recent history has, at times, had a more troubling side, and its elected officials have not always taken such an expansive view of the franchise. During the many years in which the local authority was under Liberal Democrat control, the council tended to draw most of its support from more affluent voters. Registration remained stagnant in the most deprived parts of the borough, where many ethnic minority people, in particular, live. In 2006, the Labour group tabled a motion asking the council to do better, and particularly to work hard to ensure that black and minority ethnic voters register to vote and are included on the electoral register. The Liberal Democrat majority voted down the motion and, after the vote, one of the leading Liberal councillors shouted across the council chamber, “That’s how we win elections!” Fortunately, there has been a significant improvement in voter registration over recent years, which is largely attributable to the proactive measures taken by the Labour majority

that took the council in 2010. Islington has gone from being the area with the second-worst voter registration rate in the entire country to being a model for other local authorities that seek to maximise registration.

Voter registration is not a partisan issue, or it should not be. Anyone who wholeheartedly supports a healthy democracy should start from the principle that both registration and turnout should be as close as possible to 100%. Our current system is wholly inadequate for making that aspiration a reality. We have had a lot of counterproductive talk over the years from politicians of all parties who suggest that the vote is some sort of privilege that should be proactively seized by voters on an individual basis. That tendency was markedly on display when the coalition Government introduced the Electoral Registration and Administration Bill, now the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, in the last Parliament. They announced their intention to implement individual electoral registration, dropping the existing plan for a phased introduction purely as a cost-saving measure. Ministers in the last Government spoke of giving people the opportunity to register to vote and of people being removed from the roll only if they failed to do so. On Second Reading in the other place, the Bill’s sponsor, the noble Lord Wallace of Saltaire, claimed that its goal was

“to give people greater ownership of their own registration”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 24 July 2012; Vol. 739, c. 616.*]

It is as if what was needed at the time was for people individually to seize their right to vote, but the Bill did not address the fact that more than 6 million people who were entirely eligible to vote were missing from the electoral register.

Who are those 6 million people? Members may be familiar with a report produced by the Electoral Commission in July 2014. The report lists the groups who are most likely not to be on the electoral register. This list will not surprise hon. Members: young people under the age of 35, especially students; private tenants; black and other minority ethnic groups; Commonwealth and EU nationals; and those classified as social grades D and E or, to use plain English, low-skilled and unskilled workers and the unemployed. If the Government have a genuine interest in maximising participation in the political process, I would have thought they would see that as a serious problem and seek to address it, but that is not happening—the exact opposite is happening. It is abundantly clear that the excessively hasty introduction of individual electoral registration has had an even more detrimental effect on voter registration and engagement, particularly among those groups, and we should all be alarmed.

It is appropriate at this point to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), under whose chairmanship the Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform produced a report on this vital issue, “Voter engagement in the UK”. The report stated that the 5.5 million voters who were not transferred to the new register following the initial implementation of individual electoral registration included “disproportionate” numbers from particular groups: private tenants, students and attainers—16 and 17-year-olds who will attain the age of 18 before the date of the next general election. The Committee recommended that “every effort is made by Electoral Registration Officers to reach all registered voters who have not been automatically transferred to the new register”.

[Emily Thornberry]

I do not understand why people are not automatically registered. If we are all true democrats, we should wish for everyone who has the right to vote simply to be on the electoral register. Putting unnecessary hurdles in the way of people exercising their democratic right to vote is entirely counter-democratic, and I do not understand it.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend, like me, is a London Member of Parliament, and she will know that in recent months there has been a significant increase in the number of people evicted from their property because of the impact of benefit capping, which has resulted in people moving from one London borough to another. People are moving to my outer-London borough of Redbridge from Westminster, Kensington and other inner-London boroughs, and our own people in Redbridge are now being placed in bed-and-breakfast hotels in Hounslow, Staines, Heathrow or other parts of England. What can be done to ensure that those people do not lose their democratic rights?

Emily Thornberry: It is particularly important that such people exercise their democratic rights, because many of the difficulties that they face are the direct result of decisions made by politicians. Such people should make it clear what they think about those decisions, so they must be able to exercise their democratic right to vote. They must be able to make their views clear about such decisions, and the chaos among certain groups in London, with people having to move around because of caps on benefits and the shortage of social housing, is yet another reason why we should be proactive.

When the Chartists handed in the petition, my predecessor was asking for every man living in Finsbury to have a vote. This is not my party's policy, but he would be turning in his grave if he knew that more than 8,000 people in my constituency are on the electoral register for European and local elections but are not allowed to vote in general elections. They are here, they pay taxes and they play a full role. A man came into my surgery last Friday who was very exercised by the fact that his Japanese wife, who has lived and paid taxes here for seven years but cannot get dual nationality for cultural reasons due to her Japanese background—I do not understand it, but they are firmly of the view that that is the reason—cannot vote and will not be able to vote. At what stage do we reach a tipping point? In an increasingly international world, and particularly in a world city such as London, what proportion of the population can be excluded from the ballot before we lose our identity as a democracy?

At the moment, there are perhaps 12,000 or 15,000 adults in my constituency who cannot vote. They turn up at my surgery and want a proper service from their Member of Parliament, but they do not count because they are not allowed to vote. The title I originally wanted for this debate—I understand that it is not the sort of title that one is allowed to have, but it seems to me entirely the right title—was: “Who counts?” In a democracy, who counts? Who is and is not a citizen? Whose voice should be listened to, and who should be flatly and determinedly ignored?

We are so proud of this city of London, and one of the things that we are proud of is that we have a mixture of people from all over. I would like to represent the

whole of my constituency and everyone in it, and I do my best, but it seems profoundly wrong that those people are not allowed to vote. They might all vote Tory. We might end up with a Tory MP in Islington—I would take that on the nose—but they should be allowed to vote. They are here, they are people and they participate. They walk our streets, use our services and pay their taxes. Why are they not allowed to be involved in decisions about how politicians act on their behalf?

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee recommended that electoral registration officers make every effort to reach all registered voters who have not been automatically transferred to the register. In the absence of anything resembling leadership on this issue from the coalition, local authorities have been left to their own devices. Of course, results have been decidedly mixed. To its credit, Islington council has made strenuous efforts to get as many people on the electoral register as possible. This year, EROs in Islington went knocking on doors of unregistered households right up until election day. They did four rounds of door-knocking, more than any other borough. Thanks to those efforts, turnout in my constituency increased from 54% in 2005, when I was first elected with a majority of just 484 votes, to 65% this year, when my majority grew to 12,708 votes, more than the total number of people who voted for me in 2005.

I applaud the hard work and dedication of those EROs, and it is welcome to the extent that registration and turnout reached much higher levels this year than they would have if the council had been as complacent as Ministers in Whitehall have been, but there is something perverse about it. My local authority is suffering enormous cuts. It will lose nearly half its budget in the next few years, yet we have spent £326,000 and who knows how many hours of public servants' time knocking on doors again and again. Would that money not be better spent on public services? Would it not be a better use of public servants' time if, instead of knocking on doors trying to get people to register to vote, they visited the elderly, the marginalised and the vulnerable, who are often not seen enough?

It seems to me to be the wrong way to do things. We should have automatic registration, including for students. Why are student halls of residence not included? There are many thousands of British students living in my constituency. Why must they all register individually to vote there? It is perfectly obvious where they live. The university knows and the council knows. There is no possibility of fraud, so why are they not on the voters' register? Why must we knock on their doors individually and get them to register to vote? If we are true democrats, what is the problem?

We know what the problem is: the fear of voter fraud. However, we must consider the difference between perception and reality. The Minister formerly responsible for this issue, when asked about it, referred to reports saying that some 30% of the population believe that election fraud is a real issue. Perception is one thing, but reality is something else: the total number of people who have been prosecuted successfully for voter fraud is, I believe, three. However, in order to counter the perception that there is voter fraud, we are creating obstacles to people's exercise of their democratic right. More voter fraud may be occurring, and more work should be done on that, but it does not seem to me that

we are starting from the right place by beginning with, “We are worried about election fraud, so we’re going to make sure we make it very difficult for a lot of people to come to the ballot and vote.” That seems wrong. It is about time that we addressed that point.

The constituencies affected most by the changes to individual election registration are those such as mine: inner-city seats where, although there might be a lot of differences between people, on the whole they vote Labour. I am sure that there is no conspiracy, but the fact is that, if we get a shrinking Labour vote at the same time as the Government keep redrawing the boundaries to reflect so-called fair constituencies, Labour constituencies will shrink, there will be fewer Labour MPs, there will always be a Conservative majority and we will always have a Conservative Government. That would not be democratic, because we would be excluding large numbers of people.

We would also end up in a situation where our Members of Parliament did not know their constituencies. For the past 10 years, I have been putting down roots in my constituency in order to be the MP for the south of Islington. Everybody knows me. I go everywhere; I am at everything. Open an envelope and I will be there. Everybody knows who I am, and I am absolutely honoured. However, if I believed that every five years my constituency would move from here to there to somewhere else, my engagement with my area as a Member of Parliament would change.

Are the Government going to proceed with the so-called fair constituencies or not? If so, are we talking about 650 constituencies or 600? That is important to know—the newspapers have given completely contradictory reports—so I would be grateful for the Minister’s answer. We need to know where we are going on this issue. We need to stop the nonsense about people seizing the opportunity to vote, ensure that they can vote and make it easier for them. It is not right to put barriers in the way of people’s exercise of their democratic right.

Hon. Members will forgive me if this is too radical, but maybe we could do this with boundaries: we could take the decisions out of the hands of politicians and give them to another group that could not be criticised for exercising self-interest, for instance a non-partisan group of experts. We could call it something like “The Boundary Commission”, and we could ask it to look at communities and take an objective view about what the most sensible divisions might be throughout the country to ensure that communities are properly reflected.

We could have had such a body since 1944, and of course we have. It is indeed called the Boundary Commission, and that is what its job is. The Conservatives want to take a partisan view of the issue and introduce a strict cap of 600—or not; who knows? They want to make a rule that the population cannot deviate more than 5% in either direction. Will that be the new plan? Will fair constituencies be less than 5% one way or the other? When the Conservatives tried to introduce that in the last Session, as they will remember, it resulted in complete chaos.

Removing the Boundary Commission’s historical ability to take local authority borders and other natural dividers into account resulted in bizarre constituencies, such as the infamous Devonwall constituency with Cornish voters, over which a few hon. Members were up in arms. I was to represent the City of London, which I was

happy to do—I thought that “Islington upon Thames” had a certain ring to it, and that it was about time that the bankers were represented by somebody radical; they had not been represented by anybody radical since John Wilkes—but unfortunately the City of London had a different view, which I thought disappointing and not very open-minded.

The issue has serious ramifications as well, as changes have added up to a system that simply stacked the decks against Members representing densely populated urban areas with highly mobile populations and large numbers of people from overseas, who tend to be represented by Labour. The truth is that allowing the Boundary Commission some latitude in determining the shape and size of constituencies is necessary, precisely because it allows the commission to take into account the huge variations that exist up and down our country.

Let me take one example at random; let us compare my constituency with Weston-super-Mare. Weston-super-Mare has a population of 105,300, compared with 105,820 in Islington South and Finsbury. So far, the two constituencies have much in common. However, in my constituency the electorate is only 68,127, whereas in Weston-super-Mare it is 80,309. Guess whose constituency falls within the magic 5% of the electoral quota and whose does not?

Of course, there may be a number of reasons that might account for the difference between the two constituencies. We know that the level of electoral registration is significantly higher among older people, and there are more older people in Weston-super-Mare than in my constituency, forming 19% of the population there compared with 9% in my constituency. However, I also represent a much more diverse constituency than the Minister does, with 48% of Islington residents identifying themselves as white British, compared with 97% of people in north Somerset. More than a third of my constituents were born overseas and many of them are not on the electoral register because our current law does not allow them to be. They would love to be on the electoral register; they are terribly political and I can tell you that they are not invisible to me.

Therein lies the most insidious implication of the boundary rules, as they stand. The rules quite literally tell every single person who is not on the voters’ register that they do not count, and that for the purposes of determining who represents them in this place they do not matter. I hope we all agree that we should show our constituents, regardless of their backgrounds, more respect than that.

It seems to me that the current Government have kicked this can down the road in this Parliament, but we want answers to some of the questions that I have put today. I hope that I have helped the Minister by preparing a series of questions that I would like him to answer if possible. I have copies of the questions for other Members and I have left helpful gaps at the bottom, so that we can fill them in with the answers that the Minister will hopefully come up with this afternoon.

The questions are as follows. First, at the next general election, how many constituencies will be contested—600, 650 or some other number? Secondly, what does the Minister mean when he says that the Government remain committed to equalising the size of constituencies? Thirdly, will the size of a constituency’s electorate be allowed to deviate by more than 5% from its quota? What would

[Emily Thornberry]

happen if it deviates by 8%, or 10%? Fourthly, how about the Government just doing us all a favour and putting the question back in the hands of the independent Boundary Commission, where it has always belonged? Fifthly, does the Minister recognise the “manifest unfairness”, to borrow a phrase from his own party’s manifesto, of basing the size of constituencies so closely on the number of electors as opposed to the number of people?

There are countries around the world that divide up constituencies on the basis of the size of the population and not just those who are on the voters’ register, and given the number of difficulties and issues that I have raised today—simply in relation to my constituency—surely it is fairer for us to start thinking about constituency sizes based on the size of their population. Does the Minister appreciate that not doing so would put MPs representing diverse, inner-city populations, the majority of whom just happen to be members of the Opposition party, at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to their ability to do their job? Finally, can the Minister explain how on earth reducing the number of MPs to 600

“would result in savings to the public purse of £13.6 million a year”,

as he has claimed, without there being a serious decline in the standards of service that our constituents can expect to receive?

As I am sure Members here can tell, I have a lot to say on this subject and I could say a great deal more, but I will drop the rest of my speech and sit down so that other Members can contribute.

1.53 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Thank you very much indeed, Mr Turner, for calling me to speak; it is a pleasure to contribute to this debate with you in the Chair.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) on securing such an important debate so early in this Parliament. She has covered, very ably and in great detail, the wide range of issues involved in voter registration and the prospective boundary review, and she struck an important note by saying that we should be able to discuss these issues on a non-partisan basis. That is certainly what I hope to do as I focus on student registration. I raise the issue as I represent more students than any other Member of this House—some 36,000, according to the last census—and because I chaired the all-party group on students in the last Parliament. I point out to anybody who is interested that we are relaunching the group on 13 July, so they can put that date in their diary.

Many students live in two homes, but the place where they study is effectively their primary residence. They spend more time there, and many of us who represent areas with large numbers of students make enormous efforts to integrate them into the local community and make them feel that the area is their primary home. That is as important in electoral registration as in anything else.

Members and the Minister, whom I welcome to his post, will know that prior to the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 many universities, though

not all, block-registered students living in university accommodation, effectively acting in their role as head of household. I remain disappointed that the Government rejected amendments to that Act that would have allowed that block registration of students to continue, because it was an established and secure method of ensuring that students got on to the register, and that their identity was validated.

I wonder whether, in retrospect, the Government regret their decision to reject those amendments, given that in the run-up to the last election they spent an awful lot of money through the Cabinet Office pushing student registration, which I welcome. However, they were playing catch-up because they were behind the game. I welcome the fact that £380,000 was allocated to the National Union of Students, which shared it out among student unions across the country, to promote voter registration. That was a good spend; the money was used effectively, and it had a real impact on the number of students registered. We will need to look at that sort of spend in the run-up to key elections in the coming year. There will be many of them. Indeed, that applies to referendums, too; clearly, one referendum is not far away. Will the Minister say whether there are plans to continue that funding in the run-up to the elections and referendums in the immediate period ahead? I ask because that money was used effectively; it could be used again effectively, and it is certainly needed.

The Cabinet Office has worked very effectively on this issue, but I ask the Minister to consider the development of better approaches. When the 2013 Act was passed, it struck me, as someone who represents many students, that there would be an opportunity under individual electoral registration to reach beyond the number of students who registered under the old system of block registration if we could successfully integrate student enrolment and electoral registration.

Many universities have been quite willing—even enthusiastic—to promote the idea of registration, but I thought that we could take a step further than that. I talked to both the universities in my constituency—Sheffield University and Sheffield Hallam University—about the ways in which that might be achieved. We agreed between us that, for the 2014 entry of students, Sheffield University would pilot an integrated system, and that we would have as a benchmark alongside it Sheffield Hallam University, which would simply point students to the Government’s portal. We did all that with a view to introducing the Sheffield University system, if it proved worth while. The project was very successful indeed, thanks to the commitment of the staff at the universities and our local electoral registration officer, John Tomlinson, to whom I pay tribute. We developed a system that went live, as planned, last September. I also thank the Cabinet Office for its support and limited funding for that process.

The system requires students, when registering and enrolling with the university, actively to decide whether they want to register to vote. It was hugely successful, with 64% of eligible students indicating their wish to register to vote in Sheffield. The system then took people to another step, requiring them to give their national insurance number. At that point, two thirds of those enthusiastic, willing voters dropped out of the system because they did not have immediate access to their NI number and did not want to delay their university

registration. The situation was looking a little bit bleak, with only 24% of students registered, despite more than double that number wanting to do so.

Again, I pay tribute to the Cabinet Office, which stepped in with new guidance issued in December, which allowed electoral registration officers to use their discretion to verify an application using any data source that satisfactorily established the identity of the applicant, including student enrolment data. That is sensible, because those data are a good verifier of identity. That meant that all those students who did not have their NI number and were not on the register—some 7,000—were added during December and January. It would be far simpler if, rather than having to seek national insurance numbers at all, we had a simple system, such as that put in place by the Cabinet Office, enabling EROs to register students on the basis of their indication that they wished to register, with their identities verified by their student status. Could not we dispense with the requirement for universities to collect NI numbers? That would make it simpler for everybody, and we would still have the verifiable data.

Whatever the Minister's answer is, it is important that we press ahead with trying to get integrated systems. I have been working, as the Cabinet Office has, with Universities UK and the National Union of Students to encourage universities to make that decision. The Minister will know that many universities are grouped together by the fact that the same system provider writes their student enrolment programmes. The largest provider covers 82 universities, Sheffield Hallam being one of them. This happens across the country. There is an opportunity to get those system providers—I think there are three in all—to rewrite their software with a simple fix, before the September 2015 entry, so that there is an integrated system of electoral registration in the student enrolment procedures. I think active consideration has been given to this, but will the Minister positively consider the Cabinet Office funding these changes, including the rewrite of the software for many universities? Apart from anything else, if that happened the Government would save a lot of money, because we would not need the kind of retrospective funding that was needed when we were playing catch-up in the run-up to the 2015 general election.

Another positive initiative from the Cabinet Office was the establishment of projects trying to co-ordinate voter registration work for the Student Forum, which brought together the NUS, Universities UK, GuildHE, the Association of Colleges, the Academic Registrars Council and electoral registration officers, nationally and regionally. That organisation did some productive work. I hope that the Minister will commit to continuing those projects and forums.

I hope that the Minister recognises that there is a wider lesson to be learned from the experience of student registration, which shows that, with commitment, creativity and resources, IER can be introduced successfully. We can transfer the lessons of Sheffield's system, which is aimed at students, beyond higher education to schools, colleges, housing providers, residential homes and other organisations that collect the data that the Government need to verify identity. We need to make it as simple as possible to get people straight on to the electoral roll. Much more needs to be done before we have a register that is fit for purpose, as my hon. Friend mentioned. Without that, we cannot proceed to a credible boundary

review or the elections that are to take place, or to the crucial decision we will be making about our membership of the European Union.

2.5 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. We shared the experience of sitting on the Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform, which lasted for one Parliament only. The Committee had many enlightening evidence sessions on this matter.

It might be as well to record that in our last meeting with the Electoral Commission, it gave special praise to electoral registration officers in two constituencies—mine and the Vale of Clwyd—for their energetic activity after Christmas until the election date. The result in my constituency was interesting, with a swing of 0.0%, so what it lacks in volatility it makes up for in consistency. The sad effect in the Vale of Clwyd was the removal from Parliament of the person who knew more about electoral registration than anyone else—Chris Ruane, who is greatly missed in this Chamber.

Democracy was started in Greece 2,500 years ago and it has come to us on the instalment plan, in stages and imperfectly. It is still possible to buy a place in the House of Lords and still possible to buy influence and privilege from Governments by putting money into the pockets of lobbyists. We have done virtually nothing to reform that system. It is still possible for retiring Ministers, generals and civil servants to prostitute their insider knowledge to the highest bidder when they leave this place, to get a lucrative retirement job and buy their hacienda in Spain. That is going on and we are doing very little to limit it. The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments is a bit of a joke. It is not the Rottweiler it should be; it is a pussy cat without teeth or claws. We have an imperfect democracy.

The Government's only argument for redrawing constituencies is arithmetical tyranny: doing it entirely on the basis of population. Let me give one example of how things do not work that way. A main area of our work in my constituency office is immigration. In the local authority area I serve, there are at this moment 439 asylum seekers—that is just one group; there are others as well—all of whom require a great deal of work. There are also language difficulties. It is a huge burden on an MP's office. Where is the fairness in this, when in the constituencies of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Home Secretary, there are a grand total of three asylum seekers?

We could talk about many other examples of the unfair burden of work in different constituencies. The Government are planning, again, to undermine the number of constituencies and disturb the system. There certainly are arguments for bringing the system up to date, but there is no argument for doing so at a time when the Government are awarding places in the House of Lords to people who are unelected. Sometimes places are given because of cash.

There is certainly a link between contributions to parties—all parties—and places in the House of Lords. There are also links between those, such as Ministers, whom the Government wish to reward for failure, as a consolation. That is normal now. We have a system of political awards set up by the present Prime Minister. The system has existed only since 2011; it is entirely

[Paul Flynn]

new. Why should anyone want an award? People lust after the same honour that Sir Jimmy Savile and Sir Cyril Smith had. Why anyone would want to be tainted with such a thing is beyond me.

There was something of a triumph in the last election for the Electoral Commission, which gave us evidence on many occasions, as you will recall, Mr Turner. The result of the election showed some remarkable changes. We spent many hours in the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee looking at how we could encourage people to register, particularly those groups that were largely under-registered. Organisations such as Bite the Ballot did a great job on that. Sadly, in spite of my repeated requests, we never had Russell Brand along to give us evidence. We wanted to get hold of him and say, “You realise how badly young people are treated by all politicians. They look after rich pensioners such as me very well indeed, because we are the group who vote.”

Young people have had a terrible deal from the coalition Government and previous Governments because they are not viewed as being of any consequence. Russell Brand made that foolish statement to his 9 million followers on Twitter—rather more than you or I have, Mr Turner—telling them not to vote and not to take part in the election, but instead to march around the streets making demands. He tried to get 1 million people on the street outside here a few months ago; he managed about 200, I think. He took those people out of the electoral process. Although he eventually recanted under the wise advice of my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), it was too late for them to register and get on the electoral roll again. I wish we could have had him before the Committee, where we could have persuaded him that his view was counter-productive and not achieving his aim.

The Electoral Commission reported a record-breaking 469,000 people in one day registering online to vote in the 2015 general election. That is an incredible number. There were 2,296,000 online applications to register to vote from when the campaign began last year on 16 March to polling day. Those are enormous figures. Voting habits have changed. The public are ahead of us in many ways in their willingness to use electronic media to register and to vote, and we have to take into account the fact that people have got into the habit of voting for television personalities and so on in that way. We should look at the success of the Electoral Commission and such organisations as Bite the Ballot, which have done a great deal to maintain the number of people voting.

In my campaign, I spoke to many thousands of voters. I found the contempt for politics distressing; it has not improved since the screaming nightmare of the expenses scandal. One party managed to sell itself as being close to the voters. The man in the pub with a fag and a pint was who they related to, not politicians. That party made inroads in my constituency, but it did not affect my vote in any way, because the sensible Lib Dems deserted their party and voted for me. However, some 6,000 people in my constituency, which has been wise enough to elect me since 1987, voted UKIP.

There is all the other stuff about Europe and so on, but part of the reason why people voted for UKIP—they repeated this again and again—was contempt for the political system and this House. We are trying to do

something about it, but we put on a pantomime every Wednesday—a national embarrassment of exchanged insults and unanswered questions. In one of the last Prime Minister’s questions before the election, the Prime Minister was asked a question on immigration, and in his answer he mentioned nine other subjects, not one of them on immigration.

Last week, the Prime Minister asked the Leader of the Opposition four questions, which is almost more than she asked him. I have usefully suggested that it would be helpful to change the name from Prime Minister’s questions to Prime Minister’s answers, just to give him an idea of what is expected of him and to let him know how the system should work.

The system used to work. We did not like the answers that Margaret Thatcher gave, but she always referred to the question asked. If I asked the Welsh Minister a question about tidal barrages and he told me the price of cabbage in Cardiff on that day, the Speaker would rightly call him out of order, but that does not work with the Prime Minister. Prime Minister’s questions are an object of derision for politics and the system. People show contempt for us, and that contempt is to the advantage of such parties as UKIP. Prime Minister’s Question Time reduces our chance of restoring the trust and confidence that the public used to have in the political system.

A great amount of reform is needed, and it is a lot more urgent than changing the constituency boundaries. The Government wish to do that, and it is to their electoral advantage, but I have always been in favour of proportional representation. We stand in contempt of the country because all parties reach their conclusions on PR based on their party interest. The Conservatives and the Labour party benefit from the current system. The Lib Dems have always taken a principled line on PR, and now we find it coming from UKIP and other parties, such as the Greens, that suffer greatly under the current system. It is a travesty to suggest that the system we have represents the public view, because it does not.

We did a splendid report in the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee last year. One of its suggestions was to have a democracy day, which is a magnificent idea. In my constituency of Newport West, the Chartists lost at least 20 members when they were killed raiding a hotel to release a prisoner, Henry Vincent. They were protesting on principle about the cruel treatment they were receiving and asking for the vote. Every year on 4 November, there are celebrations and commemorations to mark that day, and it is a great way of getting the meaning of democracy across to schoolchildren. Lord Tredegar held the one vote in the town. He decided everything and the working people had no votes at all. We should have a democracy day to celebrate the joys of democracy.

In this place, we have at least 1,000 depictions of royalty. They are everywhere, and include paintings, statues and a tower. What has royalty done for democracy? It has obstructed almost every advance in democracy. It could be argued that they donated one head, but that was grudgingly.

Mr Andrew Turner (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is discussing voter engagement and the franchise, which as far as I know have nothing to do with royal pictures. Will he stick to the topic?

Paul Flynn: The difference between us and royalty is that we have been elected. [*Interruption.*] That is slightly off the subject, I agree, but where are the tributes to the heroes of democracy, who are the reason why we are here and the reason why we exist? Thanks to Mr Speaker, there is a tiny exhibition about Chartists on the top corridor, and that is welcome. There are a few tributes to suffragettes around, but mostly they are outside this building.

The Putney debates were a great celebration of democracy. They were hugely important, but they are hardly known. We hear about Magna Carta, but not about the Putney debates, which took place in 1647 between late October and early November and laid down the whole basis for the Bill of Rights. The Women's Social and Political Union—the suffragettes—had a notable occasion in 1903.

If we are to win back public trust and belief in democracy, we must energise people in the same way as the young people of Scotland were energised when they voted so strongly in its referendum, which was a magnificent piece of democratic action and an awakening of responsibility among young people. It showed them the strength of the vote and the democratic process.

We have a long way to go, but as beneficiaries of the democratic system we should be working towards a system that is by far the best in the world. It is not at the moment. The mother of Parliaments is now a disgraced hag heading for future scandals; we must do something to improve it. We have done nothing to improve our status since the expenses scandal. People do not believe us and they do not trust us. Virtually every story about MPs that appears in the papers is negative. We are being blamed for a pay rise that none of us asked for or wanted.

There has to be a serious campaign by all parties to improve the House's status. That can be done only by changing radically how we behave and appear to the public. Prime Minister's Question Time is the House at its worst. We put on a national embarrassment show every week—it is time we reinvented it as an event that, although still robust and full of questions, is nevertheless conducted in an atmosphere of calm, dignity and mutual respect.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Andrew Turner (in the Chair): Order. We have time for two further speakers.

2.21 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): I want to discuss young people's voter engagement and registration, but first I will quickly say something about boundary changes, particularly the 5% deviation. My constituency, Workington, is in Cumbria, where the 5% deviation is a challenge, bearing in mind the geography and the population. Cumbria has a very large area and a very small population—I know that geography and population in constituencies are taken into account in Scotland. The other issue with Cumbria, in addition to its size, is its height, which, if taken into account, would also make a difference. The last time the Boundary Commission looked at Cumbria, it did not seem to realise that a short six-mile walk included going over the top of Scafell pike and down the other side, which makes things a little more tricky. I would be grateful if that could be taken into consideration.

I am here because improving voter engagement is crucial to democracy in this country—I think we would all agree. We have talked about the decline in turnout in recent years. Turnout in Workington at the general election was 65.6%, whereas as recently as 1992 it was more than 80%. In fact, going back further, it was over 80% more often than not, so something has happened since the late 1990s. I see it as an important part of my role as an MP to engage properly with local people so that they want to take part in the political process. We also need to demonstrate that taking part and voting actually makes a difference. People say all the time that it makes no difference, so we must demonstrate that it does.

One of the most worrying and disappointing responses I heard on the doorstep—this was not unusual—was when a young person told me that they were not registered. Often, they were not registered because they did not know that they had to register, because they had no idea how to go about it, or because they did not think that it was something they should be getting involved in. They felt that it was nothing to do with them—they knew nothing about politics and did not feel qualified to take part and vote. The changes to voter registration introduced by the previous Government have only added to that feeling. It is not good enough for a Government to make such fundamental changes while neglecting young people coming into the system, who do not really understand practically what the changes mean for them.

Important civic duties such as registering to vote and voting should be brought into the school curriculum. That way, children and young people will be given the confidence and understanding required to register and take part, as well as to understand why that is important and the effect on their daily lives. That should be true at all democratic—not just parliamentary—levels. Children and young people should understand the importance of voting in local elections; for police and crime commissioners, and so on, because it all affects them and their families directly.

One of the things I enjoyed the most during the election campaign was taking part in school hustings. I did a number of them and was really impressed by the knowledge and passion that young people had for the subjects they were particularly interested in and cared about. We saw how passionately involved young people were in the Scottish referendum and the difference in turnout there; as the Minister knows, the voting age was reduced to 16 in that referendum, and it was very successful. That has convinced me that the voting age should be reduced to 16, along with the active introduction of children to politics at school, through the national curriculum.

Emily Thornberry: Does my hon. Friend agree that if a young person can be encouraged to vote, so long as they have voted once, they will continue to do so? The challenge for us all is to ensure that they vote the first time. That is perhaps another argument for allowing kids to vote at 16 and 17.

Sue Hayman: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend's point, and there is evidence to show that once someone gets into the habit of voting, they are more likely to continue. One problem is that the children I saw at the hustings were so engaged and excited, but then so disappointed that they could not participate. As my

[Sue Hayman]

hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) said, if they go to university, there is the further challenge of getting registered. Young people all too easily slip out of the system and out of the habit of voting, so that is an incredibly important point.

I urge the Minister to introduce children to politics through the national curriculum and to reconsider the position on reducing the voting age to 16, because children and young people are interested and want to get involved. Such steps should be part of the solution to increasing both voter registration and participation. I urge the Government to look at this issue ahead of the EU referendum.

2.27 pm

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (SNP): Thank you for allowing me to speak, Mr Turner, and for your immense patience in understanding that the 90% of Scottish National party Members who are new are finding our feet with regard to parliamentary procedure.

This is an extremely important conversation, and I thank the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) for bringing it the attention of the House. In Scotland, we have just come out of a referendum process where we had massive engagement. There are huge lessons to be learned about how that process was conducted. Perhaps the House should consider the level of engagement in Scotland.

Our electoral system leads to issues with parliamentary democracy and legitimacy. I am delighted to be here, but, as a democrat, I find it somewhat problematic that the SNP has 95% of Members with only 50% of the vote in Scotland. To me, that is a legitimacy problem. The Tories are in government with the votes of 35% of the overall UK electorate. The system is set up in a very binary way, so that we have a big, strong Government, but that leaves a majority of people voiceless as regards representation. If we are honest with ourselves, as democrats in this House we need to look at why people feel voiceless and why that stops them from getting engaged in the democratic process. I am not a fan of the UK Independence party, but many people voted for it and they have only one Member of Parliament.

In Scotland, we need to have a conversation about the link between poverty and exclusion from society, which is manifested in lower turnouts in areas of multiple social deprivation. My constituency, Glasgow East, is one of the most deprived in the whole UK. The turnout in Glasgow for the Scottish referendum was 75%, compared with 91% in East Dunbartonshire, one of the richest constituencies in Scotland. Work must be done to encourage people in such areas to vote.

There is definitely a link between indebtedness and being on the electoral register. People are terrified about putting themselves on the register if they are worried about debt catching up with them, so if we want to increase participation in democracy, we must make it safe for people. That requires education, but that also leaves a burden on us as parliamentarians to go out and speak to people in our communities and engage with them. If the Scottish referendum showed anything, it was that going into communities and having legitimate, open conversations is a way of encouraging people.

We should have events that allow people to come along and question politicians, because the problem with politics, which was exemplified in the expenses scandal, was the sense of them and us. It should not be them and us; we are all together and there should be no division between the people and their representatives. We have to come from the people and be among the people in order to represent them. That is the type of legitimacy that we get from considering and really engaging with people at community level. In that way, we will grow democracy.

In my constituency, the turnout in 2010 was 52%, but in 2015, following the referendum, it was eight percentage points higher. That is not a huge amount of people coming out, but there is a distinct upward trend that is not replicated in the rest of the UK. We therefore need to use that as a lesson.

The referendum was a binary choice: people understood what they were voting for. Whether they voted yes or no, they knew what the consequences were. We do not necessarily have that in party politics, so people do not feel as engaged in that or the manifestation of that in one person. That needs to be addressed going forward.

We need to look again at the electoral system and be really honest with ourselves. Are we keeping first past the post because it suits the Government of the day, or the Opposition, or is it because people truly believe that to be the best democracy that we can have? I do not think that it is and I strongly recommend that we look again at the type of country that we want to live in and the type of representation we have for people in the House.

2.32 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak to you as Chair of the debate, Mr Turner. I thank the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) for bringing the debate to the House. Two topics that have the utmost relevance are the franchise and voter engagement.

When we consider those issues, it is important to recognise the journey we have been on for a number of years, not least given the pivotal role that the suffragette movement played in ensuring that women not only have the vote, but are adequately represented in the great Chambers of this House. We still have a great deal of work to do to ensure that we continue to promote the most talented and capable women into these Chambers as well as boardrooms and throughout every walk of life.

Thankfully, there is more to the debate than the suffragettes and giving the franchise to women. We have moved on. However, one issue is close to my heart, and I am grateful to the hon. Members for Islington South and Finsbury and for Workington (Sue Hayman)—Cumbria's first female Member—for bringing it up: votes at 16. In Scotland last year, that brought to light the real opportunity we have to engage our young people. We witnessed a political movement unlike any other across these islands and the securing of votes for 16 and 17-year-olds was key to opening up a real conversation on the role of politics and the part that young people can play in shaping their futures and voicing their aspirations and hopes as well as their fears. We must allow them to continue to engage.

Votes at 16 for all elections is the starting point and I thank the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury for addressing that. If we start to give our young people a voice and opportunity, we can expect them to continue to vote and remain part of the process. They will take their vote seriously and—correctly—they will hold us to account. That is exactly what every Member should hope for and aspire to not just for our young people, but for every citizen in our constituencies.

Sadly, that right was not granted to young people for the general election and it has not been during the ongoing debate on the EU referendum. It is vital that our young people are given an opportunity to have their say on that important decision that will not only shape their futures, but have significant consequences for their lives. Their future decisions about their studies and work and their rights and responsibilities as citizens will be affected.

The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury spoke at great length about the disparity in engagement between affluent and more deprived areas. That is also crucial. We can begin to engage our young people, but life dictates that circumstances change. Debt can take hold of people's lives and that can disengage them from a process that they may once have been a part of.

Most crucially, engaging all our young people may be the key to ensuring greater and continued participation in our democratic process. Young people bring dynamism and energy and they have proven that they have the ability to understand and communicate politics in a language that many politicians can only aspire to.

I welcome hon. Members' comments on student participation. We should remember that students are mostly young people—though they are not all young—who take part in this process when in a transient position in their lives that does not fix them to an abode where they can become regular voters. We must find a way to engage with students and young people and, crucially, those who live in areas that are in the main neglected owing to deprivation and poverty and who, understandably, do not feel the need to engage with a process because perhaps at times it may be the least of their concerns.

Edinburgh University highlighted that giving a vote to 16 and 17-year-olds has been a proven democratic success. It is worth noting that 4.29 million Scots were registered to vote, which accounts for 97% of the Scottish population, and 80% of them voted in last year's referendum. If that is not an indication that by giving the widest franchise we can engage our young people and citizens in the process, I do not know what is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Ms Black), our youngest MP and the youngest Member of this Parliament, is a prime example of a young person who was engaged with the political process. She is now a product of that process who can rightly sit in her place in this Chamber. We must ensure that the views of many more people are reflected in our Chambers.

2.37 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. I welcome the Minister to his place and wish him well with his new responsibilities in the Cabinet Office. I also join others in congratulating my hon.

Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) on bringing this extremely important matter to Westminster Hall so early in the new Parliament. We have had an excellent debate, with contributions from across the House. I will seek to address some of them before I focus questions about the main two issues raised by my hon. Friend: individual voter registration and boundaries.

The theme running through every speech this afternoon has been how we can increase participation in our democracy. Frankly, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) has done sterling work on student representation and I will return to that in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) spoke brilliantly today, reminding us about the loss of Chris Ruane, who did so much work in this House to promote voter registration, as well as about the work of the Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform in the previous Parliament on which he served under the able chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen).

Votes at 16 was raised by most speakers in the debate, and that issue will not go away. We have already heard about the hugely positive experience in Scotland; I think I am right in saying that surveys suggested that 75% of 16 and 17-year-olds participated in the Scottish referendum. The Minister should address this issue. I and the Labour party want 16 and 17-year-olds to be able to vote in the European Union referendum and in all future elections.

In the run-up to the general election, I paid a number of visits to schools, colleges and youth organisations and discussed votes at 16. Frankly, there was a range of views—some 16 and 17-year-olds did not agree with the idea—but a common response was that it would have to be accompanied by better education on the matter in schools. I therefore warmly welcome the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman). I am long-standing campaigner for citizenship education in schools. Some schools do it well, but they are a minority. We need to emphasise the great importance of effective citizenship education.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East (Natalie McGarry) made an incredibly powerful speech. I personally agree with her on electoral reform, although I am speaking from the Front Bench so should say that that is not Labour party policy; there is a range of views in the party and mine is, frankly, in the minority. I hope that politicians in all parties will consider the statistics she cited on the representation of different parties.

The hon. Lady rightly reminded us that turnout varies and that a major factor in determining turnout is relative poverty or affluence. As she said, there is a real risk of a “them and us” culture becoming entrenched in our politics. Her colleague, the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), spoke about the importance of women's representation in this place. We have seen further improvement on that but are still a long way from achieving the 50% that we all aspire to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury raised two main issues: voter registration and the linked issue of constituency boundaries. The scandal of under-registration is nothing new. As she reminded us, the Electoral Commission has provided a number of

[Stephen Twigg]

estimates on how many people are missing from the register; its most recent estimate, from last year, is 7.5 million eligible adults. That figure predates individual voter registration.

I echo what my hon. Friend said about the incredibly hard work put in by electoral registration officers and local authorities throughout the country to try to maximise registration over the past year, but, as has been said, there are a number of really important elections next year—for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, local government across the country and, in London, for the Mayor and the London Assembly—so it is vital that that work should be sustained and built on over the coming year.

I will discuss the three key groups—attainers, students and those who rent in the private sector. I echo those who paid tribute to the amazing work of organisations such as Bite the Ballot, Operation Black Vote, Operation Disabled Vote and the National Union of Students. Online registration is a welcome reform by the Government—one that we supported—that has undoubtedly enabled a lot of people to register who might not otherwise have done so.

I would like the Minister to consider the experience in Northern Ireland, where the schools initiative resulted in a higher number of attainers on the register after individual registration was brought in. Under that initiative, a duty was placed on schools and colleges to work with electoral registration officers to deliver high levels of registration. That is a good system and should be adopted across the rest of the country.

Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central spoke about what has been done in Sheffield. He made an important case. Will the Minister consider whether we can work closely, on a cross-party basis, with Universities UK, the NUS and others to see whether the system adopted in Sheffield could be adopted by universities across the country? Numbers of students on the register might then be higher even than under the old system.

Thirdly, we know that private renters, given the nature of their life, move around more. Will the Government work with large letting agencies and others to include reminders to register for new tenants, for example? I want the Minister to address those three specific points in his response.

My final point about individual voter registration is that we are awaiting a report from the Electoral Commission in which it will recommend whether the Government should bring forward full individual voter registration to this year or should stick with the legislative timetable and introduce it next year. If the commission advises the Government not to bring the transition forward, will they accept that advice? That is an important point, partly because we should ensure that we have the best possible register, with the maximum involvement for all the elections happening next year, and then for the EU referendum, and partly for the reason given by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury. As she said, the next boundary review will be conducted on the basis of the register put together this year; if that review is based on an incomplete register, our political boundaries will not be properly representative of the population as a whole.

My hon. Friend put a number of questions to the Minister about the boundaries that I will not repeat—we all have copies of them now—but I will say that the Opposition never supported the reduction in the number of MPs from 650 to 600. We did not think that a case had been made for it, and from the point of view of respect for natural communities and historic traditions, sticking with the number of MPs we have at the moment seems to us to make sense. If the Government are changing their position on that, they will have our full support.

On constituency size, we felt that the 5% variation requirement was simply too tight. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington made a good argument based on the example of Cumbria; others can be made. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury spoke about some of the odd constituencies that would have been created under the proposals the last Government put forward. In Merseyside, the Boundary Commission's initial proposal contained a constituency, Mersey Banks, on two opposite sides of the River Mersey.

Professor Ron Johnston of Bristol University has done some brilliant work on this issue and recommended that the Government simply amend their own legislation so that the 5% variation became 8% or 10%, to avoid many of the difficulties that were created by the process that was aborted in the previous Parliament. I ask the Minister to consider that. Professor Johnston also suggests—although this is a matter more for the Boundary Commission than for the Government or Parliament—that the Boundary Commission for England should split wards, as happens in Scotland. It has been reluctant to do that previously; were it prepared to consider doing so, we might not have some of the manifest problems that arose during the boundary review in the previous Parliament. Will the Minister address that point?

Emily Thornberry: I understand my hon. Friend's reasoning on numbers, but surely that would, again, simply lead to chaos. Within one ward, there would be two Members of Parliament, so people might not know who their MP was. Is that what he is suggesting?

Stephen Twigg: My preference—and the view that the Labour party has taken consistently—is to move away from a variation of 5% to one of either 8% or 10%. Were we to do so, we would avoid ward splitting on any serious scale. Professor Johnston's argument is that we could perhaps do both and that an element of ward splitting might be required in certain communities. I am interested to hear the Minister's response to those ideas.

These are important issues for hon. Members to address, and it is excellent that we have had an early opportunity to do so. We must all be driven—all Members who have contributed so far have said this—by a desire to increase the involvement in our political processes and the accountability of this place. If we get registration and boundaries right, we might be able to do that.

2.48 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): It is a pleasure to have you in charge of our proceedings this afternoon, Mr Turner. As others have, I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) on securing this debate on a very important topic. It is a cross-party

issue; every democrat surely must believe that it is vital that we maintain the integrity, balance and transparent fairness of our electoral system, to make sure that this place and other elected assemblies have the credibility that is essential for the continuing health of our democracy.

The hon. Lady's local area has a proud tradition for her to follow. She mentioned the Chartists, who were crucial democrats, and Thomas Paine, a particularly important and well known radical. I was not quite with her on Lenin, but I appreciate that he has played an important part in the past. She also mentioned important initiatives being undertaken by her local electoral registration officer and others around the country.

The hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) spoke about some of the things that are happening in Sheffield in relation to university students. It is worth while pausing to note the different and, on occasion, radically divergent ways of encouraging registration around the country. There are excellent examples of tailored practices that are designed to address particular local issues. Some of those practices may have a much wider national application, despite having started out as local solutions to local problems, and could profitably and promisingly be shared more widely to drive up registration around the rest of the country. There is a great opportunity to share best practice and copy the examples of Sheffield and Islington.

I thank the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), for his welcome and I look forward to debating with him, unless he is spirited away from us by the House's decisions on Select Committee Chairmen. As he said, the Electoral Commission is shortly due to publish a report, which will be tremendously important for all of us in this room, because it will provide us with an authoritative analysis of what has been going on in registration over the course of the past year or so. It will show which parts of the country are ahead and which are behind. It will provide a fresh update on the hard-to-reach groups that we have heard about during this debate, some of which are particularly low registrants and some of which are particularly high. Importantly, it will shed light on whether the situation is changing and will tell us which groups are getting better and which are falling back, either because they are in different parts of the country or due to demographic trends. It will therefore equip us with vital facts on which we can base our decisions on how to go forward.

Most of us—although perhaps not the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury—agree that individual electoral registration has been a success and has made it easier for people to register to vote online. It has become much simpler as a result of IER to register to vote. The hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) quoted some impressive figures—I have my own suite of figures, but it broadly overlaps with his—on the truly impressive rate of online registration that was achieved through IER in the run-up to the general election. The system held, and it worked. Although some may have been re-registrations or duplications, that showed that it is possible to reduce the barriers to registration and to make it simpler, particularly for younger folk, who are used to living their entire lives online, but also for the rest of the population. Registration is made a great deal more accessible by allowing us to do it online, and we are all becoming used to doing things online in other

walks of life. It would be bizarre and perverse if we did not allow or encourage that to continue. The facts are emerging—we hope they will be confirmed in the Electoral Commission's report—but it looks as though this has made a major improvement to registration and has got rid of some of the barriers in people's way.

Emily Thornberry: The Minister may have misunderstood me. I have no problem with making it easier for people to register to vote, and I acknowledge that online voter registration has made it easier for a lot of people. I started from a different standpoint. It is not that we should encourage people to reach out and grasp their right to vote, but that we should ensure that they simply have the right to vote in as accurate a way as possible. It is then for them to decide whether they want to vote or not. They should not need to take two steps, although they may need to sometimes. As a general rule, we should try to have automatic registration, so that we are all going for the goal of 100% registration.

John Penrose: I was about to come to examples of where that has been achieved already with some success. In the case of IER, about 87% of those who were already enrolled were seamlessly moved across, without their having to do anything. They were automatically verified, and their registration was moved across straightforwardly and simply.

There is a great deal that can be done, which brings me on seamlessly to the points made by the hon. Member for Sheffield Central about other opportunities to prompt people. He used the example of students, but there are many other examples. The shadow Minister mentioned private letting agents, which provide an obvious gateway or portal. There is a prompting moment when people move house. The hon. Member for Sheffield Central talked about universities, and the example of Northern Ireland was mentioned, where work has also been done in schools and colleges.

Paul Blomfield: My point was that it is not simply about the opportunity to prompt—that is what we had at Sheffield Hallam, where it produced a 15% student uptake—but the opportunity to integrate systems in which data are already being collected to verify voters. There should be a seamless process of automatic registration. That is what we did in the other university, where we got 64% registration. That applies more widely than to institutions of higher education.

John Penrose: I agree with most, but not all, of what the hon. Gentleman says. There are huge opportunities to make it easier to verify people's identity, to prompt them and to confirm them as legitimate voters. There are many opportunities, at points at which people intersect with other parts of Government data, when we can do that very effectively indeed.

The hon. Gentleman said that if students were asked to provide their national insurance number and did not happen to have it to hand, they would be discouraged, but there are alternatives, which were exploited in Sheffield. There are other trusted data sources, such as university enrolment data, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Providing the university has the right information—he said

[John Penrose]

that there was an opportunity for software improvement—it could be used to provide the automatic confirmation of people's eligibility to vote.

Where I gently but fundamentally part company with the hon. Gentleman—although I stay in contact with the shadow Minister—is on the notion of IER being part of a conscious choice for people to enrol. Moving away from the old system of household enrolment is a major step forward. I am sure that I am preaching to the choir when I say that the old system of household enrolment was a little patriarchal, if I can put it that way. Expecting people who want to vote to register is not a great thing to ask.

Paul Blomfield: Will the Minister give way?

Emily Thornberry: Will the Minister give way?

John Penrose: I am spoiled for choice. I will give way to the hon. Lady, as it is her debate. I am conscious of time, so I need to be quick.

Emily Thornberry: It would be patriarchal for a man to register his whole family and to vote on their behalf, but it is not patriarchal for someone to ensure that their whole family has the choice to vote.

John Penrose: I find that I am unexpectedly more sensitive to patriarchy than the hon. Lady. That is a phrase I never thought I would utter.

Paul Blomfield: I do not think we are really at odds. What we are saying is that the system we developed at Sheffield requires people to make a decision, but it does not direct them to what that decision is; that is the critical thing. It is about more active engagement.

John Penrose: We are as one on the idea that there is a great deal more that can be done. With any luck, the

Electoral Commission's report will equip us with more facts that show us which avenues it will be most profitable for us to pursue first. It will allow us to prioritise them and make progress.

The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury was extremely organised and asked a series of questions. I do not have time to get through them all, but I will endeavour to. Before I move on, I want to mention the comments of the hon. Members for Glasgow East (Natalie McGarry) and for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley). I am probably misquoting the hon. Member for Glasgow East, but she said—this was a vital comment—that there should be no division between representatives of the people and the people themselves. I am sure that everybody here would echo and agree with that statement.

On the issue of whether the bands around boundaries should be 5%, 8% or 10%, the point is that constituency size must be based on registration to ensure we have genuinely equal representation in this place. The wider the bands, the less fairness there is, in terms of the power of an individual's vote. If there was a 10% band, there could be a 20% difference between the number of people it takes to elect me and the number of people it takes to elect the shadow Minister. That would be getting too wide for comfort.

Sue Hayman: Will the Minister give way?

John Penrose: I am down to my last 27 seconds, so I really cannot.

That is not an acceptable approach. It would not provide the kind of connection with our voters and the transparent fairness that we are all aiming to achieve in this vital area of our democratic life.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered voter engagement and the franchise.

Food Waste

[MR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered tackling food waste.

Back in 2012, I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on food waste. It was a collaborative effort, supported by Feedback—known then as Feeding the 5000—FareShare and FoodCycle, as well as Friends of the Earth and the World Wide Fund for Nature UK. The Bill received strong cross-party backing. I was then, and still am, a proud patron of FoodCycle and wanted to advance proposals that would increase the amount of food available for redistribution.

Although the Bill inevitably fell at the end of the parliamentary Session, I have continued to campaign for its provisions, and it feels timely to revisit the issue now for a number of reasons. France, for example, has just passed a food waste law. Belgium, back in May 2014, was the first European country to pass such a law, but the French law has gained more attention. It started with Arash Derambarsh, a local councillor representing a suburb in Paris, who set up a petition against food waste that got more than 200,000 signatures. The petition was triggered by the fact that supermarkets were pouring bleach on to edible food before binning it in order to prevent people from foraging in the bins to feed themselves. As some may remember, people were prosecuted in the UK for foraging in the bins behind an Iceland shop, which happened to be next to a police station. Although they were caught, Iceland, to its credit, asked the police to drop charges. That situation was similar to the one in France, although it did not involve bleach.

In France, the incident and petition led to the National Assembly passing new legislation that requires French supermarkets to partner with charities to donate food that is approaching its “best before” date. Although many supermarkets in France already do that, the proposals enshrine the practice in law. News reports now say that the councillor in question is hoping to take the issue to the UN conference on the sustainable development goals later this year and to the G20 summit in Turkey in November.

The French move has inspired a number of petitions in the UK calling for similar laws here. For example, one, through 38 Degrees, has garnered just under 180,000 signatures in a very short space of time. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) has tabled an early-day motion calling on the UK to introduce similar legislation. So far, that has attracted 36 signatures.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. Does she agree that as well as dealing with food waste downstream, once it has arrived at the supermarket, we need to intervene higher up the chain? Statistics show that between 20% and 40% of fruit and vegetables are rejected by supermarkets before they even get to the shelves, so it is part of a much longer process as well.

Kerry McCarthy: I am very pleased to see the hon. Lady in her place, not least because at the recent general election, the Greens campaigned in Bristol on the slogan: vote Green to “keep Labour honest”—so if she was not

here today, who knows what nonsense I might come out with? However, she makes a valid point. I will speak later about how there has been so much focus on household food waste, but actually, this issue goes way back through the supply chain, as far as the dealings between farms and supermarkets.

Bermuda has recently passed legislation along the lines of the 1996 US legislation, the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, which protects food donors and recipient organisations from civil and criminal liability when food has been donated in good faith. That was seen as important back then, because many potential donors and potential recipients were deterred by the fact that they might be held accountable if anything went wrong.

The excellent report of the all-party parliamentary inquiry into hunger in the UK, “Feeding Britain”, said that redistributing surplus food better would be the “next big breakthrough” in eliminating hunger in the UK. In particular, it recommended that food retailers and manufacturers should be set a target of doubling the proportion of surplus food that they redistribute to food assistance providers.

Last week saw the launch of the FareShare FoodCloud app, which will enable Tesco store managers to alert charities to the surplus food that they have at the end of each day. If a charity is interested in that food, it can get in touch and collect it free of charge. A surplus food summit organised by FareShare is taking place next week. It will promote the new tool and is aimed at inspiring suppliers to step up their own efforts to redistribute their food.

All that is very welcome, and it is the reason why I wanted to secure today’s debate. However, I want to go back to why reducing food waste is so important. We know that somewhere between 30% to 50% of all food globally is wasted. That surplus has an environmental footprint. It puts pressure on scarce land and resources, contributes to deforestation and needlessly adds to global greenhouse gas emissions. If food waste were a country, it would be the world’s third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases behind the US and China. It is also unsustainable if we are to meet the global challenge of feeding a growing population from an increasingly scarce agricultural resource base. It is, of course, indefensible that good food is thrown away when so many are turning to food banks, because they cannot afford to feed themselves or their families.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for securing the debate; she and I have spoken at seminars on this matter. My take on the issue comes from a slightly different place from hers. She is right to focus on ensuring that good food becomes available to those who need it, but should a lot of the focus not be on preventing food from being surplus in the first instance? Will she acknowledge the role of the packaging industry in that sector in making sure that food is kept fresh for longer? Innovations can be brought in, such as the re-closable cheese pack, which means that once opened, cheese continues to be useable for longer than would otherwise be the case.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and I remember the conference at which we both spoke. One of my critiques of the Courtauld

[Kerry McCarthy]

targets, which I will come on to in a moment, was that food waste and packaging waste were lumped together, in terms of the need to reduce both at the same time. I remember the point being made that although we want to reduce food packaging, and a lot of food items are over-packaged—individually wrapped bananas, for example—packaging can actually play an important role in reducing food waste. To me, that further underlines the need to treat the two issues separately.

On food banks, I wanted to make the point quickly that although I entirely support the work of food banks and think they play a very important role, we do not want to go out of our way to facilitate the creation of more food banks. We cannot allow them to become a feature of our welfare system. When the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, visited the UK a couple of years ago, he warned:

“It is only when government fails that food banks have to step in.”

He said that important as food banks are, “they are not a substitute for social policies that protect people.”

Therefore, although I am arguing for much greater support from supermarkets, manufacturers and other people who are in a position to donate the surplus food to charities, it does not mean that I accept the fact that we need so many food banks and other food distribution organisations in the UK. I would much rather that the need did not exist and that we could find other uses for the surplus food.

Although headlines last month claimed that the UK tops the chart of EU food waste—in other words, we are the worst at dealing with food waste—a fairer per capita comparison ranks the UK as fairly average, coming about 10th out of 28 countries based on the data that were available in 2012. Since I introduced my Bill back in 2012, we have started to see very welcome steps being taken voluntarily by the industry, with Asda, for example, saying that it would donate all its surplus to FareShare. Tesco has led the way by publishing its own independently audited food waste figures and the other big supermarkets are now following suit. There had been calls for mandatory food waste audits, but I am pleased to see that the supermarkets are taking a lead on that. It is an important first step towards the industry, as a whole, publicly reporting on its food waste and then using those data to take much more ambitious action to reduce food waste.

Much more of our surplus could be redistributed. FareShare, for example, currently provides food for 150,000 people a week, saving just under 2,000 charities £20 million a year. However, that is with only 2% of the food that could be donated to it; the vast majority of food waste is still turned into compost, using anaerobic digestion, or is discarded in landfill. FareShare says that if it were able to get its hands on 100,000 tonnes of surplus food—a quarter of the 400,000 tonnes fit for human consumption that are currently allowed to go to waste—it could save the voluntary sector up to £250 million a year. That would make surplus food the second-largest supporter of charities after the Big Lottery, so there is huge potential.

We have touched slightly on the fact that the Government have focused most of their attention on household food waste. Households continue to throw away the equivalent

of six meals a week, although there have been steady reductions, with waste down 21% since 2007. Some of that has been driven by much greater consumer awareness and by the success of the excellent Love Food Hate Waste campaign, which is a treasure trove of ideas and advice on how to reduce household waste.

However, focusing on household food waste, which has also been the food industry’s lobbying position, largely ignores supermarkets’ contribution. Some statistics show that just 3% of food waste in the UK is generated by retailers in back of store, with manufacturers contributing 27%. However, as the food waste campaigner Tristram Stuart has pointed out, there is a big disparity in how food waste is measured by household and by industry. Household food waste includes waste that cannot be used, such as bones and peel, while retailers’ food waste often excludes waste that could be used. In addition, supermarket purchasing policies, such as demanding food free from visual imperfections, as well as forecasting errors and over-ordering, are responsible for lots of the food wasted on farms and by suppliers, although we still do not have an accurate picture of what food is wasted at that point in the supply chain.

Mark Pawsey: The hon. Lady was talking about household waste. A proportion of the household food that is thrown away is perfectly okay to eat, although it may have passed its sell-by or use-by date. Given that there is a lot of confusion in the minds of consumers about how long to keep food for consumption, would some clarification of those terms help?

Kerry McCarthy: I entirely agree. I was about to say that retailers make a contribution to food waste in the home. There is confusion over food that is labelled “best before” or “use by”. Many people do not understand those labels, and they think they will go down with food poisoning if they go anywhere near the time limits. Buy one, get one free offers on perishables, and packaging fruit and vegetables in multiple portions, rather than portions for one person, can also add to food waste.

The current lever for encouraging food businesses to reduce their waste—the Courtauld agreement, which is facilitated by WRAP—is voluntary and industry led. The industry set itself a very low voluntary target under phase 3 of Courtauld, which runs from 2013 to 2015. The target was to reduce household food waste by 5% by 2015 and to reduce manufacturing and retail waste by just 3%. The first year’s results show little change against that minuscule target, although signatories have reported a doubling in the food provided for redistribution. Those targets simply are not ambitious enough to drive the reduction that is needed. It should also be possible under Courtauld to see how well individual supermarkets and manufacturers are performing against the targets. At the moment, a composite result is announced, so we do not know who the good guys and the bad guys are. If companies were named and shamed, that would encourage the worst performers to follow the example set by the best performers.

There is also the problem that Government policies and subsidies, such as the landfill tax, incentivise less environmentally damaging forms of disposal over prevention and redistribution. We are therefore seeing the growth of anaerobic digestion, composting and refuse-derived fuel at the expense of prevention and donation.

I was deeply disappointed that Bristol City Council turned down the opportunity to become one of WRAP's 10 food waste cities—a project that leads on preventing food waste. I am still struggling to find out why it turned that opportunity down, although it did tell me that it wanted to focus on composting. That suggests a worrying direction of travel, particularly given that Bristol is Europe's green capital this year.

Much more needs to be done to enforce the waste hierarchy further up the pyramid, either through measures such as those in my Bill or through a system of financial incentives or penalties, as recommended by the House of Lords European Union Committee. In France, for example, fiscal instruments make it much more expensive for companies to send food to anaerobic digestion than to donate it to food banks. If the industry cannot drive the change that is needed, there is a need for Government action. The landfill tax, for example, was one of the most successful waste policies ever in terms of driving behaviour change and creating markets in more environmental forms of disposal, such as anaerobic digestion. However, there are no similar mechanisms to enforce the waste hierarchy further up the pyramid.

Should the UK introduce a Bill along the lines of the legislation in France? It has been said that the UK retail sector differs from the French sector in having less back-of-store waste, with such waste accounting for less than 2% of total food waste in the UK, compared with 11% in France. On the other hand, France manages to redistribute 20 times more food than the UK.

Concerns have been expressed that the French proposals could place an operational and logistical strain on charities, and questions have been asked about whether they would have the resources to handle any surplus. That is partly because the proposals in France were originally reported and misrepresented as placing an obligation on supermarkets to give away all their surplus. That gave the impression that they would be turning up at charities' doors and forcing the staff to take food they did not want, which is not the case. The obligation is for supermarkets to put their best efforts into donating where there is a desire to take donations. The new FareShare FoodCloud app, which was launched last week, aims to have one common platform for charities, so that they do not have to deal with lots of different, and potentially competing, collection models.

Although legislation along the French lines might target only a small proportion of UK food waste, missing the much larger amount of waste in supermarket supply chains, and although such waste might not be the easiest to collect, it is symbolically important to embed redistribution in legislation. That would respond to the strong moral idea that food should not be thrown away when people are willing and able to take it.

My Food Waste Bill had a number of provisions, including a requirement on large food retailers and large food manufacturers to take steps to reduce food waste and to donate surplus food to charities for redistribution. If waste was not suitable for human consumption, it would, where legally permissible—EU rules prevent this in some cases—be made available for livestock feed rather than disposed of. There was also a good Samaritan provision in my Bill to protect food donors and recipient agencies from civil and criminal liability where food was donated in good faith.

At the time, the then Minister seemed interested in my proposals, but I was subsequently told that his Department had received advice that they would be incompatible with European food safety laws. I have since had a legal firm look into the issue, and it rejected that assessment, saying that any UK proposals would be okay as long as they closely resembled laws introduced in Italy more than 10 years ago. There is now less of a clamour for a good Samaritan provision in the UK, and legal concerns do not seem to be cited as often as a reason for not donating. It may be that the example set in other places—Australia and New York have good Samaritan laws—has set people's minds more at rest. However, such a provision could still play a useful role in, for example, helping charities to access dairy products that, although perhaps one day out of date, would still be very much fit for purpose, or in redistribution from catering surpluses. I have heard from the Sustainable Restaurant Association and others involved in large-scale catering of huge amounts of food going to waste when a big buffet is put on at, say, a wedding, because food safety laws and concerns about health and safety mean that that food cannot be donated.

The Groceries Code Adjudicator has certainly helped to address some of the supermarkets' unfair business practices, which were creating waste further up the supply chain. Those include the notorious take-back arrangements, which forced suppliers to take back produce supermarkets had failed to sell and meant they received no money. However, even though the Groceries Code Adjudicator is in place, suppliers continue to report the last-minute cancellation of orders by supermarkets, which often use cosmetic standards as an excuse, because order cancellations are no longer allowed. That is often done through a middleman, making it difficult for the adjudicator to take action. Indirect suppliers can bring complaints, but those are insufficient to launch an investigation. I therefore ask the Government to review this evident weakness in the adjudicator's power so that supermarkets cannot get round the law in this way.

The details of Courtauld phase 4 are currently being worked out to cover the period 2016 to 2025 and I have some suggestions to put to the Minister. Will Courtauld phase 4 include food waste on farms? Will it require big supermarkets to report food waste transparently—a path that, as I have mentioned, some are already starting down—or will it continue with the current system where data are reported to the British Retail Consortium, which reports a composite figure? What will the targets be? Will we be looking at another 3 percentile, or will they be equal to meeting the challenge of one of the proposed sustainable development goals of halving per capita global food waste by 2030?

We must continue to consider regulation if the industry cannot deliver a more ambitious voluntary target. I understand that at the Stockholm food forum earlier this month the food companies that were present said they would welcome legislation to achieve that goal and ensure a fair playing field in doing so. I will be getting together soon with the various people who were involved in discussions about my Food Waste Bill of 2012, and revisiting it for 2015 to think about its possible revival and potential revisions or additions. I hope that if we decide to present another ten-minute rule Bill the Minister will give it serious consideration.

3.20 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope; I am glad to be back in this place and contributing again. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) on securing the debate, on her long and distinguished campaigning on the issue and on her achievements so far. I am delighted that she is back to continue with it for the next five years.

I do not want to detain colleagues for too long—famous last words, but I will try not to. We often debate food poverty in this place, but too often do not consider how food waste interacts with that. There are numerous aspects to consider. I welcome much of what the Government are doing; the WRAP programme really makes a difference. It is worth reminding the Minister of what Lord de Mauley said in the other place about the importance of funding WRAP: that market failure in the private sector in the matter of reducing food waste justified continued Government funding for WRAP. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind as we approach the spending review.

Much of the debate on food waste focuses on what happens when food reaches the consumer, although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) pointed out, there also is much that the packaging industry can do to reduce food waste. The hon. Member for Bristol East spoke about meals left uneaten in the fridge; I have a difficult bag of cheese in my fridge at the moment, which is at risk of going off. I need to clear it out by next Monday when I get back to London. However, there are more innovative ways than that to address food waste, and I want to highlight one that has potential.

Once upon a time, I was at the cutting edge in talking about the community shop idea. Sadly, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has stolen my thunder by visiting the most recent opening in South Norwood earlier this month. With his Mayor of London hat on, he has given £300,000 to try to spread the development of community shops across London. It was the second one to open, after a trial example in Goldthorpe in South Yorkshire. The concept is an offshoot of Company Shop.

High quality, wholesome food from leading supermarkets is sold at a substantial discount in the community shop. In addition, customers are offered what one might call a personal development course: literacy, numeracy and ensuring that people are job-ready. There are strict qualifying criteria for membership. The people in question need to live in an area of recognised deprivation according to the Government's deprivation figures. They need to be on particular qualifying benefits. In return they are given a six-month membership card and access to the courses. I think that the idea is superb. In the Goldthorpe trial, 20% of those who had access to the community shop during its period of operation found paid work at the end of the personal development course. That is a good outcome as a first step.

It should be noted that the food in the shop is edible, within date and wholesome. It is such food as we would see on supermarket shelves anywhere in the country. It might have packaging that is the wrong colour, or even the wrong shade. The product might be seasonal, or there might have been a forecasting problem on the part

of the supermarket. There are many reasons why food can end up in the community shop at a substantially reduced price. The shops tackle one of the problems that the food bank movement faces—certainly in my constituency—of trying to source fresh fruit and vegetables from suppliers. That is an obstacle: the movement wants to provide a wholesome package of emergency food aid, but often can rely only on what is not perishable. I struggled on behalf of the food bank to secure good fruit and veg supplies. The community shop may be a way around that.

It is worth mulling over the arguments about what we do with misshapen fruit and vegetables. In the past I got myself into hot political water by advocating that funny-shaped fruit should be sold or be made available through food banks. It was a “Marie Antoinette: let them eat U-shaped cucumbers” moment. I am pleased that Jamie Oliver is now trumpeting the cause, because if he can do it then I can lower my head behind the parapet, and not attract such opprobrium as I did.

It is also worth noting the extent to which community shops and supermarkets are reliant on the charities mentioned by the hon. Member for Bristol East, such as FareShare and Foodshare. I, too, have seen figures about France. I seriously examined her Bill and was interested to note the figure of 1.7% of food being wasted at the retail stage here, compared with 11% in France. I noted also that in France the amount donated to charities is 20 times what we donate in the UK. I was trying to square those figures, and cannot quite get my head around them. My only hypothesis at this stage is that we have achieved, by voluntary co-operation and a degree of encouragement from the hon. Lady for the possibility of legislative change, something that the French have not been able to do without passing what is, I think, known as the “loi Macron”, which I think is proving popular.

Kerry McCarthy: To an extent, I share the hon. Gentleman's confusion. There could be an issue, I think, to do with how we record the back-of-store food waste, but I think the figures suggest that the UK is more efficient further down the supply chain, in terms of ordering, so that it does not create as much waste, and that France is not as efficient at that, but is more efficient at passing food on for donation. However, I also suspect that it is a question of data not being recorded very accurately.

Paul Maynard: That is a helpful intervention. The matter remains worth further investigation. The reference to the French model is important. The *Epicierie Solidaire* network is massive in France; there is a network of some 500 of those social supermarkets. However, perhaps the best place to go to learn about the issue is Austria. In Vienna, *Sozialmärkte* are numerous. There are far more, per capita, even than in France. That seems to stem from strong work by local Catholic charities in Vienna.

Food poverty really speaks to the Catholic social action movement in ways that I heartily approve of, and there is a lot that we can learn from the work of groups such as the *Vinzenz Foundation* in Vienna, which works to allow access to social supermarkets not just by those on benefits, but also by those who are below Austria's minimum income guarantee or the citizens' income level. The opportunity is much broader.

All that might be of help in tackling one of the Goldthorpe findings, which was that it was necessary to have a screen across the front of the community shop, because of the stigma that was attached—just as there is with food banks, unfortunately, although there should not be. Like the hon. Lady, I do not want food banks to have to exist, but sadly I recognise that they do. I do not want any stigma to be attached to the idea of people seeking help in their community. Yet in Vienna, and perhaps in France, the wider remit of the social supermarket removed the element of stigma that might have deterred some people from seeking what can be life-transforming help.

The hon. Lady spoke quite a lot about the obligations that should be imposed on supermarkets with respect to the disposal of surplus food that is not sold. They talk a lot about corporate social responsibility and I am sure that she has heard that more than I have, but I have one example from an area of my constituency called Grange Park. It is a large council estate on the periphery of Blackpool. One might call that area a food desert: it is very remote from the basic supermarkets. It does have one branch of One Stop, which is referred to locally as Harrods because of the price of its food, which is far beyond what one would expect to spend if one went 2 or 3 miles down the road to one of the larger supermarkets.

One Stop is owned by the same chain as Tesco—it has the same parent company—and it has always struck me as a strange application of corporate social responsibility that in its smaller outlets, in the more deprived parts of Britain, it artificially increases its prices. Okay, there may be higher overheads because the shops are smaller. None the less, the prices are higher and people are paying that poverty premium that they should not have to pay. That also speaks to the food waste issue. Because the cost of the food is higher, it is more likely to go unsold, and it is those smaller outlets that might find it most challenging to ensure that their unsold food goes back into the system and is in some way reused. I therefore say to the supermarkets, if they are paying attention to this debate, that if they are truly committed to corporate social responsibility, why not ensure that they charge in their smaller outlets what they charge in their larger outlets, particularly in areas of deprivation?

I have gone on long enough, so I shall conclude by suggesting that the community shop idea need not be the sole preserve of one body, one organisation, but should be seen as part of an escalator between reliance on food banks for emergency food aid when the unexpected strikes and the full independence, autonomy and resilience of the average consumer in society. What I am talking about is an important step out of poverty for many people. I would like far more of those shops to spread out across the country, because they are a very good idea.

3.31 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to speak while you are in the Chair, Mr Chope. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) on securing this important debate. She has huge expertise, and I greatly admire the important work that she has been doing in Parliament on food policy and food waste for many years. I have no doubts whatever about her honesty, so I shall report back to Bristol East in those terms.

I also admire the huge number of inspirational projects going on in Brighton on food waste and food poverty. I shall highlight just a few of those before talking about some of the priorities for Government action on food waste and food poverty in the UK.

Last Friday, I had what was probably the best lunch I have had since becoming an MP. I was meeting a constituent. She was the person who started the 38 Degrees petition, mentioned by the hon. Lady, that calls for legislation to make supermarkets donate their leftover products that are still safe to eat to charities, food banks and so on. My constituent and I met at Brighton's Real Junk Food Project café, a groundbreaking community project that intercepts food destined for landfill and turns it into healthy meals. The queue for that café was quickly out of the door and down the road. Everyone is welcome, from local workers and students to low-income families and homeless people.

We were joined by Adam Buckingham, who founded the Real Junk Food Project in Brighton, and he explained what to me at least was the revolutionary concept of "Pay as you feel". That encourages people to think about what the plate of food means to them. If they cannot afford to pay money, that is fine. If they want, they can wash up, weigh some of the intercepted food or spread the word about the concept and the project. Everyone is made to feel welcome, irrespective of ability to pay. The project works with a range of partners, including supermarkets, food banks, independent retailers, restaurants, manufacturers and wholesalers. The previous Friday, the café had fed an incredible 330 people in three hours, all with intercepted food.

The dedication and talent of the volunteers who run the Real Junk Food Project and turn what would otherwise be waste into amazing food is immense. They have transformed 250 kg of frozen turkey, in blocks requiring a forklift truck to move them, into healthy meals—with some assistance from Brighton residents willing to offer emergency freezer space. They have dealt with 630 kg of chocolate, on three industrial pallets, turning up outside someone's window. That might sound like a dream come true, but it is nevertheless a serious logistical challenge. This is a hugely impressive operation already, and the people involved have big ambitions for the future, including a shipping container café; putting to good use underused community centres; building a model of a main hub plus offshoots run by the local community; and, further ahead, expanding into deliveries to older people and others in need.

Another local project that I want to mention—sadly, there is not enough time to mention them all—is FareShare Brighton and Hove, set up 15 years ago to provide food to the 11 services in the city serving hot food to homeless people and last year expanding to FareShare Sussex. Now, it is an essential community food service with twice daily deliveries to more than 60 projects across Sussex, totalling more than 7 tonnes each week.

The first crucial point illustrated by those initiatives is that the current level of waste in our food system is scandalous. I am talking not just about waste from supermarkets but, as I mentioned in my first intervention, waste all the way up the supply chain. That a supermarket can apparently reject 30 tonnes of cauliflowers because they are the wrong shade of white tells us something about the fundamental changes that we need. An estimated 18 million tonnes of food is wasted in Britain annually, from farm to fork.

[Caroline Lucas]

The second point is that food is a basic right and should be available to everyone, regardless of financial status. Unfortunately, that is not the society that we live in today. We heard earlier this month that there has been an alarming increase in food poverty and food bank use in the UK, with proposed benefit cuts threatening to plunge 40,000 more children below the poverty line. That shows that food bank visits, which topped 1 million this year, are just the tip of an iceberg of food poverty in the UK.

The public demand for the Government to act on food waste and food poverty is also clear, not least from the superbly successful supermarket food waste petition started by my constituent, Lizzie Swarf. As I said, that petition calls for legislation to require supermarkets to donate leftover food that is still safe to eat to charities and food banks, based on the new law on supermarket food redistribution passed by the French Parliament last month.

In just a couple of weeks, that petition has gained more than 175,000 signatures. I recognise that a number of logistical and other challenges would need to be worked out before such a law could be implemented, but that is not an excuse for inaction. I hope that the Minister will at least agree to go away and examine the options and work with expert organisations, such as the Trussell Trust and FareShare, on the best way forward. I hope that he will agree that a review should urgently examine ways to support food redistribution further up the supply chain and to tackle the root causes of food bank use, including benefit changes and delays and low incomes.

As FareShare has explained, the UK Government can and should play a significant role in ensuring that food redistribution is seen as an important piece of the puzzle to reduce food waste overall, ensuring that it is easier for charities to intercept food elsewhere in the supply chain. As the hon. Member for Bristol East mentioned, France, partly with Government funding, already redistributes 20 times more surplus food than the UK. Perhaps the Minister will today commit to doing what it takes to match that achievement as a first step. I hope that he will be able to tell us what his ministerial colleagues in other Departments—Health, Business and the Cabinet Office—are doing and whether they are open to playing their part in relation to food poverty, food waste and the charities that are making such a positive difference to so many of our constituents. A little Government funding for such projects would go an incredibly long way, and I hope that the Minister will have some specific advice to offer on that matter.

I shall end by highlighting a final piece of inspiration from Brighton's Real Junk Food Project. It aims to use the catastrophic problem of food waste not just as a solution to hunger, but as a way of raising awareness—to teach people how to be waste conscious, how to live sustainably, how to compost, how to grow their own food and how to eat healthily. There is a huge role for education and culture change when it comes to our broken food system, and many organisations are already doing incredible things that bring to life positive, sustainable and healthy alternatives.

I hope that, as politicians, we can learn lessons in the course of this Parliament from the excellent work going on all over the country and ensure that we do our bit to

fix the food system, too. I look forward to working with the hon. Member for Bristol East and others on this issue.

My final words to the Minister are these. There are not many win-wins in politics, so when we are staring one in the face, as I believe we are on this issue, it is incumbent on the Government—and, indeed, all of us—to do everything we can to grasp that win-win. I genuinely believe that it is there for the grasping and I hope very much that the Minister will respond positively.

3.38 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today and I thank the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) for tabling this important debate on what I consider to be a principal concern in relation to one of the most important global issues facing us. The amount of food wasted each year worldwide is staggering: about one third of all food—approximately 1.3 billion tonnes—is discarded each year. Last year, the House of Lords carried out an inquiry into the cost of food waste across the EU and found that an estimated 89 million tonnes of food are wasted every year. Furthermore, it reported that that figure is set to rise sharply if action is not taken.

In the UK alone, it is estimated that households throw away 6.7 million tonnes of food per annum. Worldwide, food wastage is a major problem, as the hon. Member for Bristol East has said, with significant costs for the environment, the economy and society. Something is hugely wrong with our food distribution system if a third of food is wasted globally, but nearly 1 billion people across the planet go hungry.

The UK is by far the worst food wastage offender in the EU, as the hon. Member for Bristol East has pointed out. We should be deeply ashamed of that, and we should seek to remedy it. With food poverty becoming a huge problem, the redistribution of waste food should be a priority. I was pleased to learn last week about Tesco's trial partnership with FareShare, through which it could hand tens of thousands of tonnes of surplus food from its stores to local charities. The scheme has already proven to be quite successful for Tesco in the Republic of Ireland, and I hope that we can look forward eventually to a UK-wide roll-out across all Tesco stores.

Although such corporate responsibility is to be commended, we as legislators have an obligation to fix our broken supply chain. The French National Assembly voted last month in favour of a Bill that will start to redress the food distribution system using waste food from supermarkets. The rare cross-party consensus surrounding the legislation demonstrates the importance and urgency of tackling food waste. Hunger and climate change should not be partisan issues. As elected Members of this House we have a moral duty to work together to address them, and I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

Last week, the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) tabled an early-day motion that called on the Government to introduce legislation to ban supermarkets from throwing away food that is approaching its best before date, and instead to make it available to charities and food banks. I was pleased not

only to support the motion but to table an amendment, which called on the UK Government to engage with the Scottish Government on food waste.

Scotland produces enough food waste each year to fill 42,000 double-decker buses, and each household wastes, on average, £470 per annum on food that they throw away. The Scottish Government have set ambitious environmental targets for reducing CO₂ emissions and reducing the amount of general waste that goes to landfill. The 2010 zero-waste plan is designed to promote sustainability, and the aim is for a maximum of 5% of waste to go to landfill by 2025. The strategy is implemented by Zero Waste Scotland, which is funded by the Government. One of its six key aims is to transform attitudes to food waste.

In my constituency, the local authority trialled a domestic food waste collection in the Drumsagard area in 2011. Such was the success of the trial that the programme was widened to incorporate many more homes in the wider Rutherglen and Cambuslang area, which, in common with every local authority, has a statutory obligation to provide a separate food waste collection service. Starting this month, some 133,000 households will be issued with a free small food waste caddy for use in their kitchens. That is an important measure, because the high cost to consumers of food recycling is widely seen to be prohibitive. The Scottish Government support the changes, and our climate change Minister last week announced that an additional £5 million will be made available over the next two years to help councils to roll out food waste collection schemes to homes across Scotland. Perhaps the Minister could take that on board for the whole UK.

Just across the boundary of my constituency, in Blantyre, a local company is helping to divert food from landfill back into the ecosystem. GP Plantscape now processes some 50,000 tonnes of food and garden waste at its in-vessel composting facility every year. That results in a nutritious compost, cuts down on landfill waste and helps to save the peatlands by offering a viable alternative product.

Hon. Members have not yet mentioned restaurants. The Scottish Government realise that small changes made by individuals can have a huge impact. Not only is Zero Waste Scotland keen to educate people about shopping smarter, making meal plans and using leftovers efficiently, but it has trialled innovative programmes such as the “good to go” scheme, in which restaurant customers took home their uneaten food.

The so-called doggy bag pilot last year was so successful that it is now being extended. The restaurants involved saw dramatic reductions in food waste, and it has been estimated that if restaurants across Scotland routinely offered customers doggy bags, the equivalent of 800,000 full meals could be saved from the bin every year. A lot more can still be done to divert food from landfill, and encouraging better consumption habits and widening access to food waste recycling are only part of a wider strategy. We have a responsibility, as legislators and as human beings, to do more.

We have to dare to be bold and innovative about how we approach food growing, harvesting, storage, distribution and disposal. As the world population continues to grow and demand for resources increases, food security will pose an ever greater problem. The hon. Member for Bristol East spoke about how we can deal with that.

Changing deeply ingrained public attitudes is not an easy or quick process, but the action we take now will determine the legacy that we leave to the next generation.

These islands are wealthy, and the widespread explosion in food bank use should shame us all. In the last year alone, the Trussell Trust supplied more than 1 million people with emergency food support. In contrast, it supplied only 40,000 people over the same period five years ago. Food banks address a symptom of the problem, but it is incumbent on us all to address the causes. Much remains to be done to tackle the challenges that we face.

Food redistribution has traditionally faced a number of barriers. If we are really serious about tackling the problem that we face, we must work proactively with all the relevant outside organisations to effect change. As has been mentioned, one factor that has deterred businesses from donating food is the risk that they will be held legally liable in case of illness. We must find ways to protect and support those who donate food in good faith. In particular, we must support small businesses, which might otherwise find the implementation of a food waste strategy to be prohibitive. I would like us to legislate to divert food waste from landfill to those who are in need, and to ensure that sending waste to landfill is neither easier nor more economical for retailers.

We must look at how food loss and waste can be reduced at every stage of the food chain, and we must work together to address the food poverty crisis on these islands. There is much on which we can co-operate, and no doubt there is much that we can learn from one another. I enjoyed hearing from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) about the initiatives in that city—especially the story about the chocolate, which sounded really good. The shipping container café is also a great idea. In addition, we have not spoken a great deal about how food waste could help elderly people. No doubt, there is much we can learn from one another to help us tackle the problem at a household, local and UK level. I support calls for legislation on food redistribution, and I implore other Members of the House to do likewise.

3.48 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) on her re-election and on increasing her share of the vote. She has been, and I have no doubt that she will continue to be, an excellent representative for the people of Bristol and a champion for that great city. I congratulate her on securing this debate on the important subject of food waste. Her commitment to the environment is well known, and she has regularly championed in Parliament the need to tackle food waste. During the previous Parliament, she introduced a ten-minute rule Bill that highlighted this important issue.

I also welcome the Minister to his new role, and I congratulate him on his appointment. There have been a few changes at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Dan Rogerson lost his seat, and, as I understand it, the noble Lord de Mauley stepped down. I wish them both all the best in the future roles that they choose to pursue.

[Angela Smith]

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East spoke with her usual passion on a subject about which she clearly feels deeply. Food waste is relevant to us all, as has been clearly illustrated by the contributions to this debate. We are probably all guilty, at one point or another, of not using food as efficiently as we should or, to put it another way, of not valuing food as much as we should. I was brought up by a mother who always said to me when I wasted food, “You would not have been so wasteful during the war.” That lesson remains with me to this day. I compost and do all the things that one should do to try to minimise food waste.

None of us should be surprised that the scale of the problem is very large, but it is only part of the much wider problem of a rising population and the need to increase the supply of affordable food in a world affected by climate change and water stress—which, of course, makes it difficult to secure the food supply, to say the least. Many of us believe that we will need to grow our food more efficiently in future, with less waste and less damage to the environment, and that there will be serious consequences if we do not. As always, it will be the poorest who suffer the most if we do not address these issues.

In the UK alone, according to House of Commons Library figures, some 15 million tonnes of food is either sent for landfill or incinerated annually. It is estimated that the economic cost to households and businesses of throwing away food is some £12 billion a year, or around £480 per household. However, although the economic costs are great, the real cost of that waste is environmental or, as the noble Lord Cameron once described it, a disaster for climate change.

In the USA, for instance, it is estimated that 300 million barrels of oil a year are used to produce food that is thrown away. In the UK, it is estimated that food waste is responsible for 20 million tonnes of carbon emissions a year, or about 3% of the country’s total emissions. That figure is equivalent to the emissions produced by 20% of the country’s car usage or, to put it another way, the amount of carbon produced by some 7 million cars. Additionally, it is estimated that 70% of all water consumption is used in food production, which means that in the UK alone some 5 million cubic metres of water a year is used in producing foodstuffs, a proportion of which is wasted unnecessarily. It is therefore clear and well understood that producing food for human consumption that is then not consumed is not only costly to business and households but environmentally damaging.

The importance of food waste was recognised by the last Labour Government, who established the Waste and Resources Action Programme. One of the programme’s outcomes was the Courtauld commitment, a voluntary agreement with industry that, in phases, aimed to improve efficiency and reduce waste in the groceries sector. That approach led to successes and to reductions in waste. For example, 1.2 million tonnes of food and packaging waste was saved in phase 1 of the commitment by using new solutions and technologies. That alone is estimated to have saved £1.8 billion and cut 3.3 million tonnes of carbon emissions between 2005 and 2009. During phase 2 there was a further reduction of 1.7 million tonnes of waste, with a monetary saving of £3.1 billion, by using

such initiatives as the resealable fridge pack, which the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) mentioned, or by increasing the shelf life of products by improving delivery and storage.

It was recognised, however, that we needed to place this important issue on a more strategic footing and to address the wider issues of food sustainability and security, so we came up with our Food 2030 strategy. The vision established by that strategy was that, by 2030, the UK would have a low carbon food system that is efficient with resources, with any waste being reused, recycled or used for energy generation. The strategy clearly set out the actions needed to reduce food waste in the supply chain and at home, and it focused on what could be done by the Government and local authorities, households and consumers, the food industry and, finally, the Government and the food industry working together.

The strategy set clear goals for 2030: reducing food waste as far as possible; addressing waste in developing countries; and valuing surplus food. On that final goal, the strategy coupled the recycling of waste food with the need to share or redistribute food to vulnerable people. That goal is now more urgent following the rapid rise in the use of food banks in the UK over the past five years, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East mentioned in her comments about FareShare.

The hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) talked at length about Company Shop, which is headquartered in my constituency. It is a local business, and last week it received the Queen’s award for enterprise. The community shop aspect of Company Shop’s work is a relatively new innovation. Company Shop’s main business is providing surplus food from a number of supermarkets to employees working in food manufacturing and the emergency services—it is a restricted clientele. Broadly, it recycles food that would otherwise have gone to waste. Community shops are a welcome new initiative that couple access to cheap, good quality food, on the same principle as Company Shop, with positive help to get people back into work and back on their feet. I welcome that initiative, and I have visited Company Shop, which I wish all the best.

It saddens me to say that, in 2010, the incoming coalition Government decided, for whatever reason, to abandon Food 2030, effectively leaving the UK without an overall strategy to address supply, security and waste in the food industry. Not only that, but recent successes were threatened when WRAP’s funding was cut by £10 million. No wonder that, in a letter to members of the waste and resources industry, the previous Minister, Dan Rogerson, let it slip that the Government had “stepped back” from that policy area. Stepping back is not good enough, especially in the context of the huge strategic challenges that we face and the worrying increase in the number of UK citizens resorting to food banks in recent years to feed themselves and their families.

We recently heard that the Government have yet again made a partial U-turn. This time they acknowledged the need for a food strategy by announcing a 25-year plan for food and farming, which we welcome. If the Conservative manifesto is anything to go by, however, the plan might be narrowly focused and will not address the bigger issues in the same way that our Food 2030 plan clearly did. The Conservative manifesto made no mention of waste, so we now need a proper, thorough review of waste policy.

I conclude with the following questions for the Minister. What will the Government's plan for food and farming encompass, and what progress has been made on setting it up? When might we see more details of that plan? Is he confident that the recent improvements in cutting food waste will not be lost due to the cuts his Government have made to WRAP? Moreover, are there any further plans to cut the WRAP budget?

Of course, as supply chains become longer, cutting waste successfully becomes a transnational issue that will require co-operation with trading parties, especially our European partners in the EU. At a time of great uncertainty over this country's status in the European Union, can the Minister confirm that he will not allow any trans-European commitments to be negotiated away, and that he will continue the work started by the last Labour Government to reduce waste in food supply chains across Europe?

Seven senior waste industry, recycling and infrastructure bodies have written to the Minister, calling for a meeting to discuss future policy direction on waste. Their view is that clarity on the issue is needed from the Government. Is the Minister willing to provide that clarity? This debate is a great opportunity to do so. Will his Government make a rigorous and transparent commitment to tackling waste issues strategically and effectively?

Food waste is serious. It demonstrates market failure in the gravest of ways, it costs everyone in the country a great deal of money and it is doing immense damage to the environment. Unfortunately, this Government do not see it as a priority, and that needs to change. Food waste is a scandal. When people find it hard to access cheap, nutritious food, it is immoral for so much of this essential of life to be thrown away. That needs to change. I look forward to the Minister's answers.

4.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): I pay great tribute to the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) for the leadership that she has shown on this subject for a long time, and for raising the issue again so powerfully. It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope; this is only my second time standing here.

There is basically broad agreement in this room and around the country on the importance of the subject. Increasingly, Britain has been a global leader in tackling food waste. We need to do more, but there is a great deal of achievement for us to be proud of, particularly achievement by non-governmental organisations, the charitable sector and politicians such as the hon. Member for Bristol East over the past few years, and particularly since 2007.

As all hon. Members have pointed out, food waste is an issue requiring urgent action worldwide. Many Members have remarked that about one third of the food in the world is wasted. It is a tremendous waste not only of food but of water, energy, land and money. Agricultural land, for example, consumes about 70% of the world's fresh water. In an era of rising population and global warming, we have a strong moral obligation to conserve those resources. I know that many people—not necessarily in this room, but in debates on this issue—focus on the economic arguments, but at the heart of the argument about waste, particularly food waste, is the depletion

and degradation of precious resources. As hon. Members have pointed out, half of all food waste is produced by households: it amounts to nearly 7 million tonnes of food, worth about £12.5 billion a year, or £60 a month for an average family. Huge tribute must be paid to those who have taken action to address the issue, such as Love Food Hate Waste.

The hon. Member for Bristol East set the parameters for this debate. She provided a fantastic overview of the problems and progress since 2007, including Government legislation and the actions of NGOs. I will not recap those arguments, but she seemed to focus on four issues that were most urgent, in terms of my response as the Minister. One of them was about the contribution to the UK charitable sector that could be made if we were better at finding ways to get food to charities. She produced the astonishing figure, which I would be happy to explore further, of hundreds of millions of pounds in potential donations to charities. She discussed the notion of a good samaritan Act. One has been passed in the United States, but it has not yet been tested in law there, and she pointed out some of the issues involved. In terms of my answer to other hon. Members, the hon. Lady has laid out some of the complexities involved in the issue.

The hon. Lady also mentioned food waste on farms, which was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). We discussed that in great detail. The Government have been considering food waste on farms—waste that occurs before food reaches the supermarket—along with NGOs. We are considering whole crop purchasing, which could address the issue of people rejecting strangely coloured tomatoes. Take the example of class A, class B and class C tomatoes; one could imagine an individual retailer distributing them according to whether they were to be sold loose in a shop, to be processed, or to go into soups and sauces. Clearly, we need to do much more of that. The gleaning movement has brought attention to how much is left in the fields unnecessarily.

The hon. Member for Bristol East mentioned supermarkets not reporting in detail which individual supermarket has which amount of waste. In other words, the data are grouped together by retailers into a single unit, from which it is difficult for us to disinter those data. Her argument, which was about transparency and specificity—how on earth are we supposed to hold people to account if we cannot work out how much individual people are doing?—seems to me to be a good one.

The hon. Lady also talked about the importance of targets and how they might be used to drive action. One striking thing about the United Kingdom, looking back to 2007, is that we seem to have exceeded comfortably most of the targets that we have set ourselves so far. One debate that goes back and forth in the European Union is whether such targets are achievable, and what their marginal costs are, but we in the United Kingdom can take a certain amount of confidence from our ability to exceed those targets in the past.

Kerry McCarthy: I accept that we have exceeded the targets, but there is then the question of whether the targets were ambitious enough. It is easy to exceed targets if they are set very low. Perhaps we ought to try to raise our game by setting ambitious targets for the next phase of Courtauld.

Rory Stewart: Yes. As the hon. Lady will realise, the challenge of setting the right target is that it is difficult, thinking forward to 2030, to work out what is desirable, feasible and affordable, and what the different cost-benefit calculations will be. There will always be a tendency on the part of any Government, whether the previous Labour Government or ours, to set targets that are achievable. Equally, we need to be pushed to work harder; we need ambitious targets to make us get out of bed in the morning and shove towards them. I am happy to sit down and examine those targets in detail and talk through the constraints.

The more good ideas people have and the more technological solutions are developed, the easier it will be for us to meet those targets. To take an example from the debate on Tuesday with the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) about targets for nitrogen dioxide emissions, a leap forward to electric vehicles would totally transform our ability to meet those targets if we do not make enough progress in 10 years. It is not quite the same with food waste, but there are many ideas. The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) pointed out the numerous innovations in food that could help us reach those targets. I am happy to discuss that in more detail.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) discussed fantastic models for community shops. I want to talk about that more generally at the end of this debate. Much of what the Department is taking away from this debate is that the best examples are at local level. It is not a question of civil servants from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or Ministers having all the bright ideas; we should be listening much more attentively to what is being generated by the NGO sector, community shops and individual constituencies, and learning from them.

My hon. Friend made a good point about the French model. He and the hon. Member for Bristol East discussed the astonishing statistics and why France appears to be able to conserve such a staggeringly high proportion of food. One thing that I genuinely do not know and would be very interested to talk about is the extent to which French fiscal instruments, particularly the French ability to count food donations and donations in kind against their tax bills, does or does not provide a perverse incentive; we need to focus on that. If the result of those instruments is to increase the amount of excess food that the French produce, because they are confident that they can then receive donation-in-kind tax benefits from disposing of it, that is not something we would want to encourage. We need to be very careful with these tax incentives to ensure that trying to do something that we want to do—making sure that that food gets to people who really need it—does not end up encouraging people, in a perverse way, to produce more food than they need to.

Kerry McCarthy: In response to the Lords Committee's inquiry, the Government said they would not reassess their opposition to fiscal measures to increase food redistribution before considering the European Commission's communication on sustainability of the food system. I understand that that communication has now been shelved—we had waited quite a long while for it to be published—and that a more ambitious circular economic strategy will be

published later this year. Will the Minister take part in discussions on whether we can include incentives for food waste distribution in that strategy? I appreciate that it is very early days for him in his job, but I urge him to do so.

Rory Stewart: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention, and I will take on that message. However, having got into trouble on Tuesday for speculating about Treasury fiscal measures, I will not say anything about that issue at all. Nevertheless, the point is taken; we need to concentrate hard on this matter. Basically, the way that we will make progress on this issue is by sitting down with people who know a lot about the subject, such as the hon. Lady, and getting them to hold us to account and push us to do better. I am very happy for that to happen.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion talked about farm-gate food waste; we discussed how whole-crop purchasing should help, and it will be interesting to see whether we make as much progress on that as we hope to. We talked a little about the French model. It would be interesting to know whether there are things that the UK can contribute to other countries, as well as things that other countries can contribute to us. For instance, I would be interested to know whether our supermarket ombudsman model is something that we might want to share with other European countries as an example of best practice. There are things we can learn from other countries, but there are things that the supermarket ombudsman here is doing well to cut down on food waste, even by signalling to retailers in advance the dangers of a supermarket ombudsman intervention. Perhaps other EU member states could learn from that.

The hon. Lady asked what my Government colleagues were doing on food poverty, food waste and charities. The answer is that the Cabinet Office is joint chair, with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of a redistribution food round table; the Department for Education has a school food plan, having introduced, as she will know, universal free infant school meals last September; and the Department of Health provides “eatwell plate” guidance. There is also an NHS Choices website, which helps with menu guides.

The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West gave a really good series of examples from Zero Waste Scotland. I would like to talk a little more about this issue in detail at the end of the debate, but Zero Waste Scotland is a very good example of the range of initiatives across the UK, some of which are funded by Government, some by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and some by philanthropic donations, which are changing the way we look at food waste.

I was particularly struck by the hon. Lady's intervention on the subject of composting. It is absolutely true that traditionally, when we look at the hierarchy of waste in relation to food, we prefer to eat food; our next preference is to have animals eat it; and then we eventually consider how we might extract energy from it, for example through anaerobic digestion. However, her point that food put into composting can save endangered peatlands is a very important environmental argument, and a real reminder that we need to keep looking at issues really broadly. One of the dangers in a lot of discussions in this area is that we can miss potential environmental benefits by getting so tightly attached to a particular

model or hierarchy that we fail to consider, for example, the relationship between composting and peatlands. I do not want to move to a world in which we encourage people to over-invest in composting at the expense of eating, but it is worth bearing in mind that composting has not only an anaerobic digestion energy benefit, but a benefit to endangered habitats. I also liked the reference to doggy-bags; the hon. Lady made a very good argument for them.

The hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said that there were many challenges, and many things with which she was uncomfortable or unhappy. Of course, I am delighted that she welcomes the 25-year strategy, although I note that she has concerns about its content. So long as I am fortunate enough to be a Minister, we shall not step back from the subject of waste. A great deal of progress has been made. I would be delighted to meet the industry representatives she mentioned.

The hon. Lady asked specific questions about Europe. I am going to the Environment Council in Luxembourg on Monday. Clearly, European negotiations are extremely complex and we must ensure that we get different Government Departments to agree, so I am not in a position to make promises about exactly what we can deliver. However, our Department will certainly try to be thought-leaders and challenge other people in this field, and we will try to get what I hope will be ambitious responses from that European process.

The specific question about the Waste and Resources Action Programme and its charitable funding brings me to the core of this whole discussion. WRAP is a really impressive charitable organisation. It receives Government funding; this year, it received about £13 million. It employs about 200 people. The Government are not in a position to make promises about continuing funding a specific charity. However, WRAP seems to do a very good job, and on the basis of its performance to date, I reckon that it would be in a very strong position to continue to bid for support. WRAP has also been very good at diversifying and finding in-kind donations, which has had an added benefit: in some ways, it has pursued programmes in quite an edgy and creative way, which it might not have done before it applied to broader sources of funding. WRAP is certainly very impressive.

The Back-Bench Members who have spoken in this debate and are still sitting in front of me—my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, and the hon. Members for Brighton, Pavilion, for Rutherglen and Hamilton West, and for Bristol East—represent four different parties in Parliament. I am surprised that the fifth party is not present; I am not quite sure where the Liberal Democrats are in this debate. Nevertheless, I am very proud that there is a Conservative representative, a Green representative, a Scottish National party representative and a Labour representative here in Westminster Hall. Their presence is a reminder of how much importance we should attach to parliamentary work on this issue. The hon. Member for Bristol East pointed out how landfill tax, for example, has totally transformed recycling and waste. That is a very good example of the fact that Parliament has some levers and can bring about change.

The hon. Lady gave a good example from Belgium that shows that civil society and Government working together, rather than alone, is the key to resolving these

issues. She talked about how petitions drove the Belgian process. To put that in context, the 200,000 people who signed that petition in Belgium, which is a country with a population of—

Kerry McCarthy That was in France.

Rory Stewart: Ah. So there was no Belgian petition?

Kerry McCarthy: The Belgians were the first to pass the law on food waste in May 2014, but the example I gave about the bleach being poured into the skips and the related petition was from France, and the French law on food waste has just gone through.

Rory Stewart: I thank the hon. Lady; I stand corrected. I was getting my Belgian and French petitions confused. But the conceptual point I wanted to make is that this process, whether in France or in Belgium, is about driving civil society actions, through petitions, alongside Government action.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the Minister for his response, and for the detail that he is going into. Will he clarify what he thinks the obstacles would be to a piece of legislation that looked something like the Bill that the hon. Member for Bristol East brought before the House, or like the French model? Are they technical obstacles, which we can clarify, or are they ideological obstacles to do with regulation? It would be really helpful to know.

Rory Stewart: I am a little bit reluctant to get drawn into the detail of all this at the moment, but a series of questions would have to be answered before we could go ahead with that legislation. Take the good samaritan legislation in the United States. Given that it has not been challenged so far; given that most retailers in the UK do not seem to be indicating that the major obstacle to taking action or improving performance is a concern about being sued over food safety issues; and given that the Food Standards Agency would have to continue to exercise its legislative powers anyway, and that if someone unfortunately got food poisoning from food that had been disposed of, it would remain a responsibility of the Government—and, unfortunately, indirectly, of the retailer, probably—it is not clear to me at the moment that the good samaritan Act is necessarily the way to go.

I am being shifty about the next set of issues, because they relate to the Treasury and to fiscal instruments, which are for the Treasury to consider, and I do not wish to get whacked for speculating on them.

That brings me back to civil society and central Government. The key to all this—we have made more progress than anyone else in Europe in this respect—is the impressive role played by NGOs, such as the Real Junk Food Project, mentioned by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion; WRAP, which the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge mentioned; FareShare; and Feedback. The hon. Member for Bristol East mentioned Tristram Stuart, who is an extraordinary phenomenon. He has succeeded in combining his own personal lifestyle as a freegan with leading the collection of waste food and writing a best-selling book, and with his understanding of the intricacies of both national and European Union legislation and his attachment to technology. That is a really good example of where Britain is doing well.

[Rory Stewart]

The consequences of the work done by NGOs can be seen. We should also pay tribute to the previous Government for their funding to get WRAP off the ground. That is another good example of how things can be driven forward, and of the way that legislation, UK performance and global indicators can be shaped by such civil society debates. The app piloted by Tesco is the latest great example of people coming up with creative technological solutions that can go straight into a retailer. In addition—this is the point at which I sound like a crusty old Tory—this stuff is also good for the UK economy, because a lot of people are now exporting these ideas as consultants, taking British thought-leadership to other countries and showing how our approach to food waste can be replicated in other places. Of the extraordinary and impressive 21% reduction in household food waste that we have achieved, probably 40% has been achieved through the kind of awareness campaigns and civil society campaigns that have been mentioned. We do not want to minimise that in any way.

A decade of work to tackle food waste has given us much more knowledge of why and where food waste happens. We have tried and tested approaches that have delivered significant reductions. We now need to go further. Waste must be tackled across the whole value chain, and not just in the UK. We may need to start thinking about the value chain stretching into other countries. For example, if we are eating Kenyan food we have a moral obligation, in a sense, to the Kenyan farmers producing it, and to food waste in places where our supermarket ombudsman cannot stretch at the moment.

Food waste has a close relationship with sustainability and food security. The subject is central. Food, metaphorically and literally, is the energy of our lives. It is intimately connected to our soil, water and air, and to our habitats and our landscape. Again, speaking as a crusty Tory, it is also important to our economy. Millions of people work in this sector.

Angela Smith: I am listening with great interest to the Minister. He is coming remarkably close to endorsing Food 2030. May I ask once again, what is the Government's strategic plan on food and farming, and when will we hear more detail about it?

Rory Stewart: The answer is that I am going to evade that question. We do not yet have that plan, and I am not yet in a position to give the hon. Lady a deadline on it, but I promise her that we are thinking hard about the subject. I am happy to sit down with her and talk about where we have got to with that thought and take on any suggestions that she has.

Food to the value of £108 billion and the one in eight jobs connected to food and farming in the UK are connected to what every hon. Member in this Chamber deeply believes in, whether it be poverty alleviation, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys; the legislative programmes advocated by the hon. Member for Bristol East; the important arguments on the environment and resource depletion advanced by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion; or the civil society examples from Zero Waste Scotland produced by the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West.

I want to end with a huge invitation. I do not see why this need be a party political issue. There is obviously an enormous amount of knowledge in this room and I should be delighted to sit down with anybody who has good ideas about what we could do to tackle something that matters deeply to British citizens, the food industry and the packaging industry, and which matters deeply in respect of the resources on which our biosphere depends.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered tackling food waste.

4.26 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 11 June 2015

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Royal Mail

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):

The Government have sold half of the 30% stake they retained in Royal Mail plc, at a price of 500p per share.

The sale has raised £750 million, which will be used to reduce public debt.

Following independent financial advice, the Government decided that yesterday was a good opportunity to realise value for money from a sale of part of their remaining shareholding in Royal Mail. The shares were sold through an accelerated bookbuild process which enabled the Government to take advantage of the current favourable market conditions. The sale was launched yesterday after the financial markets closed.

Royal Mail has demonstrated that it can thrive in the private sector. It now has the ability to access the funds it needs to ensure that it has a sustainable future and can adapt to the changes in the postal market.

The universal postal service will continue to be protected by the regulatory regime set out in the Postal Services Act 2011. Ofcom has been given a primary duty to ensure that the universal postal service is maintained and the regulatory tools to intervene if it is under threat.

In addition, building on the success of the initial scheme, and in recognition of their work in turning around the Royal Mail, the Government intends to gift up to 1% of the shares of the company to Royal Mail's UK employees. These shares will come from Government's remaining holding and they will be subject to sales restrictions.

This builds on the 10% of the total shares in the company that were awarded to Royal Mail employees as part of the 2013 flotation.

The Government see no policy reason to keep their remaining stake in Royal Mail.

Post Office Ltd, which operates the network of branches throughout the UK, remains wholly owned by Government and was separated from Royal Mail in April 2012. The relationship between the Post Office and Royal Mail is a commercial one and a 10-year contract for the delivery of Royal Mail services through post offices was put in place in 2012.

[HCWS23]

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Telecommunications Council

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): The Telecommunications Council will take place in Luxembourg on 12 June 2015. I am representing the UK at this Council, and below are the agenda items, and the positions I intend to adopt on each of them.

The first item is an exchange of views on the Commission's digital single market strategy, which was published on 6 May. The debate will be informed by two questions from the presidency. My intervention will include: This strategy is strongly welcomed by the UK; Europe should prioritise making it easier for small businesses to start up, scale up and add value to the whole EU economy; and that we should also prioritise the area of e-commerce. My intervention will also lay out early high level HMG views on various parts of the digital single market package including telecoms framework, the data economy and cross border parcel policy.

The second item is for Council to reach agreement for a general approach on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a programme on interoperability solutions for European public administrations, businesses and citizens (First reading—EM11580/14). I am proposing to abstain from voting on this general approach. My intervention will make it clear that while we support the aims of ISA2 in principle and hope to be able to support a final text following negotiations with the European Parliament, we cannot support the current text.

This will be followed by information from the presidency on the 'state of play' on negotiations regarding 'a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down measures concerning the European single market for electronic communications and to achieve a connected continent' (EM 13562/13 and 13555/13 + ADDs 1-2). My intervention will: stress UK's ambition that the regulation contain a clear timetable of actions that will result in the eventual cessation of mobile roaming charges in the EU; and seek to ensure that the regulation enables member states to bring forward, or maintain, existing parental controls measures, thus permitting the UK to maintain our current regime of online protection for children. Discussion on this item will be preceded and informed by an informal ministerial breakfast whose aim is to reach political agreement on the regulation; my interventions during this discussion will mirror those in Council.

This item will be followed by information from the presidency on a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning measures to ensure a high level of network and information security across the Union (NIS directive), (First reading—EM6342/13). I do not intend to intervene on this item. However, if a round table is initiated by others on this item I will remind Council that while the UK supports the aim of raising the level of cyber security across the Union it would be prudent to take our time and make sure we get the detail right so the directive is not unduly burdensome on business.

The Council will then be given a progress report from the presidency on proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the accessibility to public sector bodies' websites (First reading—EM16006/11). We do not expect a debate on this item and I do not propose to intervene.

There will then follow the adoption of draft council conclusions on the transfer of the stewardship of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) functions to the multi-stakeholder community. I will support these conclusions and do not expect a debate on this item.

Finally, under any other business, the Luxembourg delegation will inform the Council of their priorities for their forthcoming presidency before Council adjourns until the next meeting in quarter four 2015.

[HCWS30]

TREASURY

Fiscal Sustainability Report

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands): Today the independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published its fifth fiscal sustainability report (FSR). This document meets its requirement to annually prepare an analysis of the sustainability of the public finances, and provides an important insight into the state of the public finances and the impact that demographic change will have.

The OBR also published the second welfare trends report (WTR). This report provides a transparent and independent analysis of welfare spending, in line with a request from the Chancellor in December 2013 to publish information on trends and drivers of welfare spending, and sources of error compared to the previous forecast.

The FSR was laid before Parliament earlier today and copies of both reports are available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office.

Changes since last year's fiscal sustainability report do not change significantly the path of the long-term projections, with the FSR's key conclusion reiterating that:

"longer-term spending pressures, if unaddressed, would put the public finances on an unsustainable path."

As the OBR notes in its analysis, this is due to the spending pressure generated by an ageing population, which is projected to increase age-related spending by 3.9% of GDP from 2019-20 to 2064-65. Without additional policy change, the overall budget surpluses that are assumed to continue after this Parliament bring debt down to a low of 54% in the early 2030s, before being outweighed by age-related pressures that put debt back onto an upward trajectory. Debt reaches 87% of GDP in 2064-65 and is expected to continue rising thereafter. The report projects that tax revenues will remain at a relatively constant share of GDP from 2019-20 onwards, although in its detailed analysis of oil and gas revenues, it highlights the sharp scale of the decline in tax receipts from the North sea.

The Government take the sustainability challenge seriously. As life expectancy continues to increase, there is a need for a regular and structured way in which to consider changes to the state pension age in future. That is why the Government will carry out a regular review of state pension age every six years, starting in this Parliament. Details of the core principle to guide that review were set out alongside autumn statement 2013, including that people should expect to spend on average up to a third of their adult life in receipt of the state pension. The OBR projects that this would have a substantial positive impact on long-term fiscal sustainability, with state pension spending projected to be 0.8% of GDP lower by 2064-65 than if the state pension age had risen with currently legislated changes.

Reforms to the state pension come alongside the Government's reforms to public service pensions, which will rebalance taxpayer and member contributions in

the short term while ensuring costs are sustainable and fair in the long term. The previous Government implemented reforms to rebalance contribution costs between the taxpayer and the member, to change the uprating measure to CPI, and to reform the schemes' designs in line with Lord Hutton's recommendations. HM Treasury has estimated that these reforms will save more than £430 billion by 2061-62.

Spending on health rises from 6.2% of GDP in 2019-20 to 8.0% in 2064-65, as the population ages, with spending on social care rising from 1.2% to 2.2% over the same period. Given the particular spending pressures that arise in health and social care, including non-demographic factors, the Government are committed to ensuring that care services are as efficient and effective as possible. This includes funding the NHS's own plan to deliver a modern, efficient and sustainable NHS and continuing to integrate health and social care services through policies such as the pooling of around £6 billion of health and care funding in Greater Manchester and the £5.3 billion Better Care Fund.

On the revenues side, the OBR have revised their oil and gas forecast down to £2.1 billion between 2020-21 and 2040-41 with companies' net revenues expected to be low over the period. The OBR's analysis clearly demonstrates the impact of falling production and cost escalation on the profitability of the sector—the onus is now on industry to make real improvements in these areas to improve their competitiveness. At Budget, the Chancellor introduced a radical package of reforms to support the sector, worth £1.3 billion, including reducing the headline tax rates and introducing a new investment allowance to reward companies investing in the UK continental shelf. This package is expected to lead to £4 billion of additional investment and an increase in production by 15% by 2019-20.

Recognising the scale of the long-term challenge, the Government are committed to ensuring that our public finances are put on, and remain on, a sustainable path for the long term. The OBR analysis makes it very clear that the Government's medium-term fiscal consolidation plan is a vital step towards achieving long-term fiscal sustainability. This includes Government reforms to change the welfare system to ensure it promotes work and personal responsibility, while putting expenditure on a more sustainable footing.

Over the last Parliament, the Government halved the deficit from its post-war peak, but the deficit remains one of the highest in the developed world. This Parliament, the Government will complete the task of getting the public finances into surplus, so that we bear down on our excessive national debt, and begin to address the long-term challenges that we face.

The fiscal sustainability report and the welfare trends report published today are key examples of the great strides the OBR have taken in delivering greater transparency and credibility to our fiscal forecasts since its creation, five years ago. This Government remain committed to supporting the OBR in its role to provide independent and authoritative analysis of the UK's public finances. The Chancellor has therefore asked Sir David Ramsden, Chief Economic Advisor to the Treasury, to complete a Treasury review on the existing regime and framework of the OBR including a focus on its role in enhancing UK fiscal credibility. The outcomes of the review will be published in the summer.

[HCWS31]

Financial Services

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): The Chancellor announced yesterday, following advice from the Governor of the Bank of England and N M Rothschild, the Government's independent advisor, that the Government plans to initiate share sales of RBS in the coming months. Copies of the advice have been made available on HM Treasury's website.

As Rothschild noted, the UK is currently in a position where alongside the United States, the taxpayer can comfortably expect to secure proceeds which exceed what they put in to overall banking sector interventions.

The Chancellor was advised that it is in the interests of the taxpayer to begin sales soon, with decisions on specific details of a sale to be made in due course.

[HCWS32]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Environment Council

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) and I will attend the EU Environment Council in Luxembourg on 15 June.

Following the adoption of the agenda the list of "A" items will be approved.

During the legislative deliberations, there will be a policy debate on the proposal for a directive on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants.

The one non-legislative item on the agenda is the road to the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC), conference of the parties in Paris, for which there will be an exchange of views. Over the lunch Ministers will be invited to discuss further aspects of the international climate change negotiations, namely the Lima-Paris action agenda and possible long-term goals for 2050 and 2100.

The following any other business items will be discussed.

Proposal concerning the establishment and operation of a market stability reserve for the Union greenhouse gas emission trading scheme.

An update from recent international meetings.

The European fund for strategic investments—an opportunity for environmental projects.

The Lisbon charter—a guide for public policy and regulation of drinking water supply, sanitation and waste water management services.

The work programme of the incoming Luxembourg presidency.

[HCWS25]

HEALTH

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council will meet on 18-19 June in Luxembourg. The Health and Consumer Affairs part of the Council will take place in the morning of 19 June.

The main agenda item is the following:

Regulations on medical devices and in vitro diagnostic medical devices: the presidency plans a general approach on medical devices. The regulations seek to address weaknesses in the current regulatory system, ensure a more consistent level of implementation across the EU, and ensure that the EU will continue to be viewed by business as an innovation-friendly regulatory environment.

The UK has broadly supported the Commission's proposals in order to ensure high standards of patient safety. At the outset of negotiations the UK identified three areas as priorities:

avoiding an ineffective and bureaucratic process proposed by the Commission involving additional pre-market scrutiny of higher risk devices by a central committee of member state experts;

ensuring sufficient flexibility is in place to allow health institutions to manufacture and use diagnostic tests developed 'in-house'; and

resisting proposals to introduce additional regulatory burdens.

Under 'any other business' there will also be presentations on three other issues by the following delegations:

Slovenia—follow-up to the informal meeting of EU Health Ministers on a new framework for the EU alcohol policy;

Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta—importance of the health dimension in the European agenda on migration;

Luxembourg—priorities for their forthcoming presidency, which will run from July until December 2015.

It is also available online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS24]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of her TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

TPIM notices in force (as of 31 May 2015)	2
TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 31 May 2015)	1
TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)	0
TPIM notices revoked (during the reporting period)	0
TPIM notices revived (during the reporting period)	0
Variations made to measures specified in TPIM notices (during the reporting period)	6
Applications to vary measures specified in TPIM notices refused (during the reporting period)	0
The number of subjects relocated under TPIM legislation	1

The TPIM Review Group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. A TRG was held on 16 March 2015. The next TRG will take place in June.

On 20 April 2015 the Court of Appeal agreed that the appeal brought by DD in the case of DD v. Secretary of State for the Home Department [2014] EWHC 3820 (Admin) (which resulted in a judgment in which the High Court determined a preliminary issue in DD's appeal

against the revival of his TPIM notice), could be withdrawn with all the issues to be heard again by the High Court. This Court of Appeal order is available at: [http://www.bailii.org reference T1/2014/4078](http://www.bailii.org/reference/T1/2014/4078).

The case of *DD v. Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2014] EWHC 3820 (Admin) was heard again at the High Court between 21 and 24 April 2015. The judgment is expected to be handed down in June.

[HCWS26]

JUSTICE

NOMS Accounts

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): I wish to apologise to the House on behalf of the Ministry of Justice following the provision of misleading information to Members. In its annual accounts to be published today, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is releasing amended data for prison crowding. It has become apparent that crowding figures previously published in the NOMS annual report, and doubling figures published in the *Prison Performance Digest*, have understated the level of crowding in each year back to 2008-09.

These incorrect figures have in turn informed public statements from the Ministry of Justice, including statements to Parliament.

There are two measures of prison estate capacity: (i) certified normal accommodation (CNA), also known as the uncrowded capacity, which refers to the number of prisoners that cells, cubicles or rooms were originally designed to hold, and (ii) operational capacity, which is the number of prisoners a prison has been assessed as capable of holding, taking into account regime facilities and the requirement to maintain order and control. Crowding means, for example, that two prisoners may be sharing a cell originally designed for one. All prisons' regimes, facilities and staffing are structured to provide for the total number of prisoners within it and NOMS will only crowd where it has been assessed as safe and decent to do so.

Errors in the published figures, used to provide parliamentary answers, were due to misinterpretation on the part of some prisons, which reported the number of prisoners held in excess of the number that cells were designed to hold (CNA), rather than the number of prisoners affected by crowding. In instances where two prisoners were held in a cell designed for one, both prisoners should be counted as being in crowded conditions. Some prisons, however, were only counting the additional prisoner.

The public should rightly expect this information to be accurate. Publication of clear, reliable figures on how many prisoners we hold in crowded conditions is an important part of making sure we can be held to account. It is therefore unacceptable that these incorrect figures have been published over the last six years and that these errors were not identified sooner. Since discovering these errors, we have taken urgent steps to ensure that figures will in future be subjected to rigorous quality control.

A table—available as an attachment online—shows updated national figures for crowding, which is measured as the percentage of prisoners who are held in a cell, cubicle or room where the number of occupants exceeds the uncrowded capacity of the cell, cubicle or room from 2008-09 to 2014-15. The table also contains amended

data on the level of doubling, defined as the percentage of the prison population held two to a cell designated as a single cell.

The amended figures have been calculated following an exercise to validate data and make appropriate corrections. The new data will also be published in the 2014-15 NOMS annual report.

Going forward, we have put robust new checks in place to quality assure figures as they are submitted, and to prevent incorrect figures from being published again. I will be writing to Members who have been provided with incorrect information and I once again apologise to the whole House for these mistakes.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-06-11/HCWS29/>.

[HCWS29]

PRIME MINISTER

Ebola Medal

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I have today placed in the Libraries of both Houses a copy of the Command Paper setting out the details of the Ebola medal for service in West Africa. The Ebola medal pays tribute to the bravery and selflessness of civilian and military personnel who have taken on great personal risk to support the UK Government's response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa. I would like to put on record my admiration for the commitment shown by people helping those suffering with Ebola.

It is also available online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS28]

Investigatory Powers Review

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): In 2014 the Government asked the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, David Anderson QC, to conduct a review into the operation and regulation of law enforcement and agency investigatory powers, with specific reference to the interception of communications and communications data. David Anderson has completed that review and I am pleased to be publishing his report today. I can confirm that no redactions have been made to the report.

I am very grateful to David Anderson for a thorough and comprehensive report. The Government's intention is to bring forward legislation relating to the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies' use of investigatory powers and to have that legislation enacted before the sunset provision in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 takes effect on 31 December 2016.

The Government will take full account of David Anderson's report, which I believe offers a firm basis for consulting on our new legislation. The Government will need to give further consideration to the detail of both David Anderson's recommendations and those in the Intelligence and Security Committee's Privacy and Security report published in March, before we develop our proposals.

But this report is a very important and valuable contribution to the continuing debate about the role of the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies, their use of investigatory powers and their oversight. The Anderson review was taken forward with cross-party support and I believe that it should help us continue to take this issue forward on the basis of cross-party consensus. The Government's proposals will be brought forward for pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of Parliament in the autumn.

As David Anderson's report highlights, there are a range of threats against the UK and its interests, from terrorism, both at home and overseas, to cyber attacks from criminals. Many groups, not just the Government, have a role to play in ensuring the right capabilities are in place to tackle those threats. It is particularly important to engage communications service providers in developing solutions, given the technology supporting modern

communications. That is why I appointed Sir Nigel Sheinwald as my data envoy to engage with industry and others to explore the possibilities for a sustainable long-term basis for providing data when it is needed to protect our security. In parallel to new legislation, the Government will be taking forward Sir Nigel's advice, including pursuing a strengthened UK-US mutual legal assistance treaty process and a new international framework. As David Anderson recognises in his report, updated powers, and robust oversight, will need to form the legal basis of any new international arrangements. We will continue to work closely with the companies to take all these issues forward.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-06-11/HCWS27/>.

[HCWS27]

Petition

Thursday 11 June 2015

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH

Changes to budgets for GPs

The Petition of residents of the Wakefield constituency,

Declares that the Petitioners are concerned about the proposed £3.8 million cuts from budgets for GPs; further that these cuts could result in small practices closing, 38 full time doctors or 95 full time nurses being lost and patients waiting longer to be seen by a GP; and further that a local petition on this matter has been signed by 850 individuals.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to reconsider the proposal to make cuts to budgets for GPs in the Wakefield area.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mary Creagh, *Official Report*, 25 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 1544.]

[P001489]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Health:

These are matters for the local NHS. GPs, clinicians, patients and local authorities are best placed to determine the nature of their NHS services.

NHS England is reviewing the funding of PMS practices in a move toward equitable funding arrangements for both General Medical Service (GMS) and Primary Medical Service (PMS) practices. Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is leading the PMS Review process in the Wakefield area. The CCG, the Local Medical Committee and other key stakeholders are working together to ensure that any proposed contractual changes and funding is aligned to Wakefield CCG's strategic plan and local priorities including the health inequalities agenda. PMS practices will not see any changes to funding or contracts until October 2015.

Ministerial Correction

Thursday 11 June 2015

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change

The following is an extract from the speech made by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in the Opposition day debate on 10 June 2015.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend to her new job, and very well deserved it is too. While I support everything that we can do with regard to renewable energy, does she not agree that we have a particular problem in the south-west, namely the vast solar farms that are springing up across the land? Hundreds of acres of good agricultural land in my constituency are being wasted, and replaced by the vanity mirrors that are solar farms. Is there any way of limiting them to industrial sites, schools and so on?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is right. We have introduced limitations for large solar farms, and we will consider what else we can do in this regard. I also agree with him that solar energy is best dealt with by community energy projects. It should not be on people's houses; it should be on public buildings and factories. That is an excellent way of generating solar energy, and it has become much more affordable and possible since the price has fallen so much under this Government and the previous one.

[Official Report, 10 June 2015, Vol. 596, c. 1277.]

Letter of correction from Amber Rudd:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) during the Opposition day debate on climate change.

The correct response should have been:

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is right. We have introduced limitations for large solar farms, and we will consider what else we can do in this regard. I also agree with him that solar energy is best dealt with by community energy projects. **It should be on people's houses;** it should be on public buildings and factories. That is an excellent way of generating solar energy, and it has become much more affordable and possible since the price has fallen so much under this Government and the previous one.

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