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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 23 June 2015**



# House of Commons

*Tuesday 23 June 2015*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### JUSTICE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Prisoner Rehabilitation Services**

1. **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): What his plans are for the future of rehabilitation services for prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [900485]

2. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What his plans are for the future of rehabilitation services for prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [900486]

10. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What his plans are for the future of rehabilitation services for prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [900494]

14. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What his plans are for the future of rehabilitation services for prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [900498]

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice** (**Michael Gove**): May I begin by praising the work of my predecessor to improve the rehabilitation of offenders? Thanks to his reforming zeal, we have broadened the range of people providing and benefiting from rehabilitation, but there is still much more to do.

**Lucy Allan**: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply and for the great work to support the rehabilitation of offenders to give them a second chance. Will he assure me that that rehabilitation will never be appropriate in cases such as the brutal murder of Telford teenager Georgia Williams?

**Michael Gove**: Absolutely. May I emphasise that, with heinous crimes such as the appalling murder of Georgia Williams, judges have the freedom to impose whole-life orders? One was imposed on the killer in that terrible case.

**Michael Tomlinson**: Clean Sheet and Footprints are two charities in Dorset supporting ex-offenders into work and reducing the risk of reoffending. What steps

is my right hon. Friend taking to support such charities and to ensure that offenders leave prison ready to face the world of work?

**Michael Gove**: I commend my hon. Friend for raising the work of those two voluntary sector organisations. Without the work of voluntary and third sector organisations, we would not be able to provide the educational and rehabilitative services that enable people who are currently in our prisons to have a second chance.

**Michael Fabricant**: Not just voluntary services have a role to play, but private businesses such as Marks & Spencer, and indeed other well known department stores. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should encourage private enterprise to help in the rehabilitation of offenders to get them back to work?

**Michael Gove**: I absolutely agree—that is a very good point. May I single out for praise the John Lewis Partnership, which does such a fantastic job in helping people from a variety of backgrounds to be all they can be? I stress that there are other organisations, such as Greggs the bakers and, of course, Timpson, the shoe and key repair firm. John Timpson's leadership in providing ex-offenders with a second chance is exemplary.

**Jeremy Lefroy**: Given that 12% of the prison population are sex offenders, including many in the prison in Stafford, what specific rehabilitation work is being done for sex offenders?

**Michael Gove**: The excellent work that is done in Stafford prison is close to my hon. Friend's heart, and he is absolutely right. We need to make use of the most sophisticated means that psychologists can devise to help people to tackle the problems that led them to offend. I had the opportunity earlier this week to talk to the psychologist in charge of that work at the National Offender Management Service, and to guarantee her all support in the weeks and months ahead in dealing with those terrible crimes.

23. [900509]**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Lord Laming is inquiring into looked-after children and the criminal justice system. As well as rehabilitation, what is the Justice Secretary doing to help youngsters who have been in care to avoid a life in crime?

**Michael Gove**: I welcome Herbert Laming's work. He has been an inspirational figure in social work. He is right to draw attention to the high number of male and particularly female offenders in our jails who spent their lives in care. Working with the Education Secretary and the Minister for Children and Families, who has responsibility for children in care, I hope we can work on the reforms of the coalition Government to ensure that more children in dysfunctional homes can be adopted and fostered quickly, and that there are better educational outcomes for children who have to spend their lives in care.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that central to reducing crime rates overall is reducing the rate of reoffending? Does

he therefore also agree that to cut rehabilitative services, and funding for them, ultimately would be counter-productive in the long term?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman is a distinguished barrister and historian and is absolutely right, because the historical record shows that, overall as a country, we have been very poor at reducing the rate of recidivism. We need to ensure that, both in our prisons and afterwards, we have high-quality services provided by professionals who know how to change the behaviour of individuals who deserve a second chance.

**Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab):** I congratulate the Lord Chancellor on his recent appointment. He looked very impressive in his new robes, if I may say so.

Thirty-five per cent. of prisoners have a drug addiction and 6% acquire that addiction while in prison. What specific help is being given to those with a drug addiction when they come out of prison?

**Michael Gove:** I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his re-election as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. He did an exemplary job in the previous Parliament and I know he will do a very good job in this Parliament. May I also thank him for his kind words about my dress sense? When it comes to cutting a sartorial dash, there are few who can match him.

The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that drug addiction is one of the principal factors that lead individuals to commit crime. It is also the case that there is an unacceptable level of drug use, both of illegal drugs and so-called legal highs, in our prisons. We are determined to ensure that the psychological support currently available in prison, and the support rehabilitation companies can provide for individuals who are drug-addicted, is enhanced so that individuals can be weaned off a habit that brings misery to themselves and to their victims.

**Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP):** Does the Secretary of State agree that an important part of rehabilitation is the nature of the custodial arrangements we make for our prisoners? He will have seen yesterday's announcement by the Scottish Government on their plans to reform the custodial arrangements for female offenders in Scotland. Will he commit to considering a similar approach as he reforms the prison estate in England and Wales?

**Michael Gove:** Both our jurisdictions have a great deal to learn from one another. I am very grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for mentioning that, and for the very constructive tone she took in last week's Westminster Hall debate on these issues. I hope to have the chance to visit prisons in Scotland soon and to talk to the Scottish Justice Minister about some of these issues.

#### Court Estate: Gloucestershire

3. **Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con):** What plans he has for the future of the court estate in Gloucestershire. [900487]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara):** The court estate in Gloucestershire, and across England and Wales, is a major asset of

Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service. Any new proposals on the future of the courts will be subject to consultation.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Will my hon. Friend, as part of the Courts and Tribunals Service reform programme, consider establishing one purpose-built building to house all court services?

**Mr Vara:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I am very mindful of the state of affairs of Gloucestershire's court estate. It is important that court buildings provide value for money and meet local demand. I will certainly ensure that his comments are taken on board.

**Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con):** I have discussed the issue of the courts in Gloucestershire—and in Gloucester in particular, where we have a Crown court that predates the battle of Waterloo—with the Minister and his predecessors for several years. As my neighbour and colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), has said, our courts are in a dire position. Will he confirm today that the Department will look very closely at the state of the courts and take advantage of the opportunity to use the site we have reserved free of charge in Blackfriars?

**Mr Vara:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his re-election. I know the issue of the court structure was a key element in the general election. It is good to see that, post-election, he continues to battle for that cause. We have met and corresponded on this issue, so he will be aware that, as we speak, officials are engaged in considering the best way forward.

#### Prisons: Work

4. **Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con):** What progress he has made on ensuring that prisoners undertake work in prisons. [900488]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous):** We want prisons to be places of industry and purposeful activity by replicating as far as possible a normal working week, and by teaching skills that lead to employment on release and reduced reoffending. From 2010-11 to 2013-14, the number of hours worked in prisons increased by a third from 10.6 million to 14.2 million in public sector prisons.

**Matt Warman:** The Minister will be aware that a number of my constituents in North Sea Camp open prison are already undertaking a great deal of paid work. What work is the Department doing to ensure that people are moved to open prisons at the right time, rather than before time?

**Andrew Selous:** Only prisoners assessed as at low risk of absconding and low risk of harm to the public, and who are within two years of release, may be allocated to an open prison. An open prison provides resettlement opportunities, including paid work that can support successful reintegration into the community and help to reduce the risk of reoffending. We want all prisoners to take advantage of these opportunities. We will continue to encourage all prisoners to do so.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The prison service is housing an increasing number of older prisoners. What steps are being taken to rehabilitate prisoners who are too old or too ill to work?

**Andrew Selous:** We cannot require older prisoners to work, but I would certainly want those opportunities to be available to older prisoners, just as they are to many older people in society who want to carry on working. All our educational opportunities are, of course, open to older prisoners. We recognise the challenge, which the hon. Lady rightly raises, of an increasingly elderly prison population.

**Sir Edward Garnier** (Harborough) (Con): Between 2005 and 2009, I visited about 65 prisons in England and Wales, and it was my universal experience that the work done by prisoners was more or less useless to the outside world. In one prison, I saw people making hairnets. No doubt there is a market for hairnets—

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): There is!

**Sir Edward Garnier:** None of the prisoners in that prison—it was not too far from Lichfield!—was ever going to leave prison to work in a hairnet factory. Will my hon. Friend please ensure that proper wages are paid for the work we tell prisoners to do, so that they can support their families, rather than the welfare state, and can leave prison and get a job that they want to do?

**Mr Speaker:** I think the hairnet has been replaced, to judge by the length of the question, but we greatly enjoyed the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question.

**Andrew Selous:** I have great respect for my right hon. and learned Friend and for his seminal work, "Prisons with a Purpose". Of course we want high-quality work. I could show him what is happening in Halfords academy at Olney prison, where prisoners are trained to be bicycle mechanics so that they can get a job on release; or I could tell him about the new work we are doing with the Ministry of Defence, which has been much appreciated by that Department.

**Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): The Minister will be well aware that one of the biggest safeguards against reoffending is getting people into a job. In a number of prisons, including HMP Risley in my constituency, however, prisoners are often denied access to work experience because the prison wings are locked owing to a shortage of staff. What is the hon. Gentleman doing to tackle this problem?

**Andrew Selous:** We are doing a great deal about it. The first and most important thing is that we were successful in recruiting more than 1,700 extra prison officers in the year to March, and we are going to carry on recruiting the same number of prison officers. That will lead to more staff on the wings, allowing more access to work activities to achieve exactly what the hon. Lady wants.

### Burglary

5. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): If he will take steps to increase the penalties available for people convicted of burglary offences. [900489]

**The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning):** Since 2010, crime has fallen across the country, and in my hon. Friend's constituency by 19%. Burglary has a disproportionate effect on victims, which is why we are pleased that custodial cases for domestic burglary have increased from 22.6 months in 2010 to 26 months in 2014.

**Mr Robertson:** I am pleased that the Minister is taking this crime very seriously indeed. Police forces tell us that a very small number of people commit a very high percentage of burglaries. Is it not easier to take those people out of circulation for even longer so that, very simply, they will not be able to commit those crimes?

**Mike Penning:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why this Parliament has decided that the maximum prison sentence for this offence should be 14 years. It is for the judiciary to decide what sentence burglars get, but I am sure that the judiciary listens to the will of Parliament.

**John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): Many burglaries are driven by major addiction issues, so what is being done to increase the range and variety of solutions? Is there not a place for innovative solutions?

**Mike Penning:** A pilot project to get rid of cautions and defer prosecutions took place in three constituencies during the last Parliament, and it is doing really well at the moment. This is exactly the sort of thing that the hon. Gentleman is talking about. People will know how the offences they have committed affect the community. We can keep them out of prison for low-level offences, but put them in prison for high-level offences.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Mandatory sentencing with "two strikes and you're out" has had its impact on burglary. When is the Minister going to get on and implement this mandatory "two strikes and you're out" policy for knife crime? It was introduced in January, but now we need to ensure that we set a clear implementation date rather than have the latest "as soon as possible" response from the Department.

**Mike Penning:** It is right and proper to pay tribute to Nick de Bois, whose work on knife crime from the Government Benches led to legislation being put on the statute book. My hon. Friend, who knows me well, will know that I intend to implement it as soon as I possibly can.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): Is the Minister aware that in the last few weeks, the Northern Ireland Assembly has discussed the prospect of mandatory minimum sentences for those who attack elderly people within our society? Does he agree that it is time Parliament sent out a loud and clear message that attacking the most vulnerable members of our society will not be tolerated? Will he meet me to discuss the prospect of introducing mandatory minimums in that regard?

**Mike Penning:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, the issue of mandatory minimums is devolved to Northern Ireland, but we will continue to look into it very carefully. I am pleased to say that last Thursday I met David Ford,

Northern Ireland's Justice Minister, and the Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The matter was also discussed during the Anglo-Irish summit in Dublin.

### Prison Officer Recruitment

6. **Chloe Smith** (Norwich North) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase the recruitment of prison officers. [900490]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous):** I believe that prison officers are among the unsung heroes of the public sector. Day in day out, they do amazing work in protecting the public. I am pleased to report that we more than met our target of 1,700 new prison officers by March 2015, and we intend to recruit a further 1,700 by March 2016.

**Chloe Smith:** I welcome that update. As the Minister knows, prison officers serving in HMP Norwich in my constituency, which he visited recently, and at nearby prisons such as Bure, work incredibly hard in difficult circumstances. Will he do everything possible to support them in relation to their work and conditions?

**Andrew Selous:** Of course I will. Both Norwich and Bure prisons are well resourced with prison officers and have a full complement of staff, but the National Offender Management Service will continue to monitor the resources that are available to both governors. I was very impressed with the work that was being done in Norwich prison, and also by the work being done in Café Britannia, outside the prison gates.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): How many prison officers were in post in May 2010, and how many are in post now? Have the numbers not been cut by about 40% overall?

**Andrew Selous:** I will write to the right hon. Gentleman with the exact figures. However, our benchmarking exercise has brought about a number of developments, not least the prisoner-facing roles that prison officers did not always have before. The right hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that we have closed 14 prisons. The National Audit Office has complimented us on our management of the prison estate, and we continue to recruit more prison officers.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I understand that the Minister has created a reserve force of prison officers and three reserve prisons, one of which is Wellingborough. Will he say a little more about that exercise?

**Andrew Selous:** As my hon. Friend may know, when soldiers leave the Regular Army, we encourage some of them to join the Army reserves, and I suppose that this concept is similar to that. The prison officer reserve has about 100 members, which gives us flexibility. I cannot update my hon. Friend any further on what I have said in the past, but this is the right thing to do.

**Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): Does the Minister share my deep concern about the fact that some of the

prison officers who are currently being recruited have not even undergone a simple Criminal Records Bureau check?

**Andrew Selous:** I am very surprised to hear that. We take prison officer training extremely seriously, but I shall look into what the hon. Gentleman has just told me as a matter of urgency. We are increasing the amount of time that prison officers spend being trained, and we continually improve the training we give them.

### Departmental Absence Management

7. **Mr Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): How many days of sickness absence there were in his Department in (a) 2012, (b) 2013 and (c) 2014; and if he will make a statement. [900491]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenge):** The average number of days lost to sickness absence in the Ministry of Justice was 9.8 in 2012 and 2013, and 10.2 in 2014. The Department is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of its employees and reducing sickness absence.

**Mr Bellingham:** Obviously, those are disappointing figures. Is the Minister aware that last year's figures were twice as bad as those in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and four times as bad as those in the Department for International Development? What will she, the Secretary of State and other Ministers do to improve morale and sort out this very disappointing situation?

**Caroline Dinenge:** A large proportion of Ministry of Justice roles involve front-line prison staff, whose working environment is, of course, more physically rigorous than those of staff with office-based roles. It is important to note that other Departments' sickness numbers do not include front-line roles such as those of soldiers, police officers and, indeed, nurses. When we take into account only civil servants who are employed in Whitehall, we see that Ministry of Justice staff actually take fewer sick days than those in other Departments.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): But that suggests that it is prison officers who have been the victim of assaults by prisoners, for example, who are taking sickness absence. What is this year's rate of assaults on prison officers, and what is the Department doing to reduce it?

**Caroline Dinenge:** Of course the Department takes any assault on a prison officer incredibly seriously. It is essential that prison officers feel that the full weight of the state is behind them as they fulfil their duties. When there are serious assaults on prison staff, the perpetrators will be prosecuted unless there is an extremely good reason for not doing so.

**Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Given those figures, it might be pertinent to ask whether the Minister's Department is a living wage employer.

**Caroline Dinenge:** We certainly are, as far as I understand it, and I am looking at that moving forward.

### Reoffending

8. **Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to reduce reoffending. [900492]

**The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning):** May I take this opportunity to welcome the hon. Lady? Edmonton is a part of the world I know extremely well: it is where I grew up and did my early schooling, in Montagu Road. We have opened up the delivery of rehabilitation services through a diverse range of public, private and voluntary sector providers, who are providing excellent new facilities so that we can have fewer people reoffending.

**Kate Osamor:** Half of the prisons inspected by Ofsted in 2013 and 2014 were judged either to require improvement or as inadequate for learning and skills. Purposeful activity for adult male prisoners has plummeted in the past few years. Does the Minister agree that budget cuts are reducing opportunities for rehabilitation?

**Mike Penning:** No I do not. We inherited a really difficult situation with the economy when we came to power, but the way we have reorganised rehabilitation and training is vitally important. The key to rehabilitation is to ensure that people do not reoffend, and education and training are often the best ways of giving them an opportunity in life.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): In the last Parliament, I visited a prison in Denmark with the Justice Select Committee. One of the biggest contributors to preventing the prisoners from reoffending was their ability to cook their own food. Does the Minister agree that that ability is not a reward for good behaviour but an essential part of dealing with reoffending?

**Mike Penning:** I am not the Prisons Minister but I have visited many prisons, not least the ones on the edge of my own constituency, and I have seen that happening in our own prisons. Giving people life skills is vital, as is giving them somewhere to live when they come out.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): Does the Minister agree that we need to retain the Human Rights Act as part of a programme established to deal with reoffending, in order to ensure that proper standards of human rights are adhered to in prisons?

**Mike Penning:** This country has led on human rights for centuries, and it will be no different when we introduce the legislation to ensure that this Parliament decides exactly what goes on, rather than a foreign court.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): Schemes such as that offered by National Grid get young offenders into a job and a routine and back on the right path. What assessment has the Minister made of such opportunities for the future?

**Mike Penning:** I reiterate what the Secretary of State said earlier. Companies such as National Grid, Timpson and Greggs are doing a wonderful job for the community as well as for the individuals involved. Getting people

back into work is by far the best way of giving them the self-esteem that they need and ensuring that they do not commit crimes.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): Recidivism rates double for prisoners who report using drugs in the four weeks before custody. If the Minister and his many colleagues do just one thing, will they please ensure that they reduce access to drugs in prison?

**Mike Penning:** I was responsible for drugs while I was at the Home Office as well, and I shall be responsible for taking the relevant legislation through the House when it arrives here from the other place. This matter is taken enormously seriously, and I am sure that the Prisons Minister is doing everything he possibly can to ensure that drugs do not get into our prisons.

**Jenny Chapman:** I am glad to hear that the Minister is taking the matter seriously—and so he should—but he might want to look at what is actually happening on the ground. Just this morning, the chief inspector of prisons published a report on Pentonville prison in which, among his many criticisms, he observed that there was no detailed drug supply strategy. How many other prisons do not have a detailed drug supply strategy?

**Mike Penning:** I shall write to the hon. Lady on the exact question she has asked. The Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 has given prisons additional powers to test specifically for controlled drugs. I take this seriously, and I have stood outside prisons on patrol with the police and seen individuals ping-ponging drugs across the fences. That is the sort of thing we need to address, making sure those people get penalised exactly like those who are taking the drugs.

### Youth Justice

9. **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): What plans he has for reform of the youth justice system; and if he will make a statement. [900493]

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove):** There has been a welcome decline over the past few years in the number of young offenders, but we know that more needs to be done to prevent young people being drawn into crime. We are committed to preventing youth offending and supporting young people to turn their back on crime.

**Christina Rees:** The number of young people behind bars is indeed falling, but the latest figures show that the number of white children in custody has fallen at twice the rate of that for those from ethnic minorities. What is the Justice Secretary doing to ensure that we help all young people to turn their lives around, regardless of race or background?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Lady makes a very important point. As we discussed earlier in this questions session, there is often a link between circumstances of deprivation and a propensity to offend among young people. Sadly, far too many people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds grow up in homes where they do not have the stability, support and love that all of us think every young person should have. We need to do more to

intervene long before young people fall into the hands of the justice system. Working with the Department for Education, I hope we can improve the way in which we support families, support the family courts and support the care system to look after damaged and fragile young people.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): Consistently, Labour Members, along with charities such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, have argued that the idea of a secure college for young offenders is fundamentally wrong. Will the Justice Secretary indicate whether he has yet decided to drop his plans?

**Michael Gove:** They are under review.

**Wayne David:** An interesting and pithy response, but it does not take us forward, does it? We all agree that education should play a central role in rehabilitation, but spending £85 million on a new prison of this kind is not the best way to help young offenders. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has expressed misgivings about these plans, so will the Justice Secretary tell us, here and now, whether the project will be cancelled?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman makes some characteristically effective points, and of course I was listening very carefully.

### Court Reform

11. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What progress he has made on reform of the courts system. [900495]

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove):** Thanks to the leadership shown by our judiciary—in particular, by Sir Brian Leveson—we are now in a position to reform access to justice comprehensively.

**Peter Aldous:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. Lowestoft magistrates court plays an important role in providing local access to justice in north-east Suffolk. Will he meet local users and me to agree on the steps that need to be taken to ensure that the court continues to play that role into the long term?

**Michael Gove:** I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and those who have benefited from the administration of justice in the part of Suffolk he represents, but it is important to recognise that a third of our courts and tribunals are used less than 50% of the time. We do need to reform our court estate, but we can do so and improve access to justice by taking a 21st-century approach to ensuring that justice is served.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Cuts to legal aid have meant that lots of our constituents are finding it even more difficult to access justice, and often they are the most vulnerable constituents who come to see us at our surgeries as a result. What is the new Justice Secretary going to do to make sure that those individuals get access to justice?

**Michael Gove:** We are going to review the operation of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, the Act that transformed and reformed our

legal aid landscape. We are also, as I have today, going to ask the very richest in the justice system to do a little bit more. One thing that struck me is that there are people in senior solicitors' firms and in our best chambers who are not doing enough, given how well they have done out of the legal system, to support the very poorest—they need to do more.

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that to have a more efficient courts service we need a more efficient listing system, and that to get that we need to take more of our existing courts and put them into fewer buildings and to have more efficiency in the use of technology?

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is, not for the first or for the last time, absolutely right. He was a great Justice Minister and he is absolutely on the button when he makes the point that we need a more efficient administration of justice in the interests of victims, witnesses and taxpayers.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Lord Chancellor has indeed had something to say about the reform of the court system this morning. May I say “Well done” for spotting the gaping inequality in the justice system that his predecessor has created? Did he have in mind the 89% fall in social welfare legal aid cases under the previous Government—legal aid for the very poorest—or his own further cut in criminal legal aid announced last week? The president of the Law Society said that that cut could

“undermine the criminal justice system to the point that it may no longer deliver fair outcomes.”

**Michael Gove:** As usual, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the generous and bipartisan tone in which he conducts these exchanges. I am also grateful to him for drawing attention to some of the reforms that we have made to reduce the amount spent on legal aid. When his colleague and friend the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) was the shadow Justice Secretary, he made the point that the amount that the previous Labour Government spent on legal aid was unsustainable. We will review the reforms that we have made to ensure that we can maintain access to justice and also safeguard the interests of victims, witnesses and taxpayers.

### Mental Health

12. **Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): What recent discussions he has had on the treatment of people with mental health issues in the criminal justice system. [900496]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage):** Addressing the individual mental health needs of offenders and ensuring continuity of service from the community into custody are essential to wellbeing and rehabilitation. We work closely with the Department of Health and with the Welsh Government, who have responsibility for the commissioning of health services, in order to address this important issue.

**Mrs Gillan:** May I welcome the Minister to her position? Autism is a lifelong developmental disability, which often mistakenly gets classified under mental health issues, especially in the criminal justice system where too many people do not get the help they need. I am heartened that many prisoners are now seeking accreditation from the National Autistic Society for the skills and the support required for people with autism, but we need better understanding in our courts and in the Crown Prosecution Service. Will the Minister update me on the long-awaited aide-mémoire and support material for the CPS prosecutors that the Department was going to produce after the Think Autism adult strategy was published?

**Caroline Dinenage:** I thank my right hon. Friend for her very kind welcome. I would like to praise her for her ongoing commitment to this really important issue, particularly her work steering the Autism Act 2009 on to the statute book. We are clear that we need a system that ensures that the most vulnerable have access to the right support and help. That is why we are putting in place a programme of reforms to improve the experience of vulnerable victims and witnesses in court, as well as enhanced protection outside.

**Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op):** I welcome both the Minister and the Lord Chancellor to their places. In November 2014, Argoed, a close-knit community in my constituency, was rocked by the horrific murder of Cerys Yemm. She was killed by a prisoner who had just been released and sent to stay in a bed and breakfast. Neither the council nor the landlady was told of his mental health issues. He could not get hold of the mental health medication he needed, the result of which was this unfortunate incident. His mother says that he was in and out of the criminal justice system all his life. He would go into a hostel, and then back to prison when he committed another crime. I thank the Lord Chancellor for agreeing to meet me to discuss this case. Will the Department now launch an urgent investigation into how we monitor the mental health of former prisoners?

**Caroline Dinenage:** It is really important that we carefully monitor how mental health is regarded from within the community into the prison system and then back out into the community again. I know that the Secretary of State and the Prisons Minister have agreed to meet the hon. Gentleman and I am sure that they will listen carefully to everything that he has to say.

**James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con):** Further to that question, does the Minister agree that when somebody has had a psychiatric assessment in prison, the information about their condition should be shared with all services, including social services and the police, when they leave prison? That would ensure that we had continuity of information about their condition so that when they came back into society we were clear about what we needed to do with them.

**Caroline Dinenage:** Yes, in the community, community rehabilitation companies and the National Probation Service are required to ensure that offenders comply with court-ordered treatment services. Probation services also supply offenders with access to mainstream mental health treatment by referring as appropriate.

**Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab):** To protect and ensure sufficient access for people with mental health problems, the Justice Committee urged the Government in 2011—reaffirmed in a 2015 report—to carry out research into the geographical distribution of legal aid providers to avoid irreparable loss of capacity. What progress has been made on that recommendation?

**Caroline Dinenage:** I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with the exact details, but NHS England has developed national specifications for health and justice services. All prisons now have clear commissioning models, and that works as people leave prison and move into the community rehabilitation service as well.

### European Convention on Human Rights

13. **Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab):** What his policy is on the European convention on human rights; and if he will make a statement. [900497]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab):** We will legislate for a Bill of Rights to protect our fundamental rights, prevent abuse of the system and restore some common sense to our human rights laws. Our plans do not involve us leaving the convention; that is not our objective, but our No. 1 priority is to restore some balance to our human rights laws, so no option is off the table for the future.

**Catherine West:** When will Ministers publish a draft Bill of Rights, as mooted in the recent election campaign?

**Mr Raab:** We said very clearly that we shall deliver this in this Parliament. We shall have a consultation in this Session so our plans will be brought forward shortly.

**Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that this country has had a proud tradition with regard to human rights, and it will remain a central part of what we do to promote best practice around the world, but in the end, the country's commitment to human rights will be judged on its actions, not merely the piece of paper it happens to have signed?

**Mr Raab:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have a strong record on human rights. We will continue to set an example around the world, but in our own domestic laws we do need to make sure that we have a common-sense balance. It is not a left or right issue; it is what the public expect as a matter of common sense.

**Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP):** Is the Minister aware that the Church of Scotland has expressed concern about his Government's plans to repeal the Human Rights Act? Will he now support the Church of Scotland's call for human rights to be fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament?

**Mr Raab:** We are well aware of the concerns that have been expressed. We will be consulting fully, including with the devolved Administrations, in due course.

**Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con):** I welcome the Minister to his place. We often hear about rights. Does he agree that perhaps it should be renamed the European convention on human responsibilities?

**Mr Raab:** My hon. Friend has been tenacious in his campaigning on this subject. He comes up with an ingenious suggestion. Actually, our concern has been less with the black-letter text of the convention and more with its application. Some of the problems have arisen from judicial legislation in the Strasbourg Court, some of them through the operation of the Human Rights Act, as the former shadow Justice Secretary acknowledged. We want to protect our fundamental rights and prevent abuse of the system.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Sir John Major, giving the inaugural Edward Heath lecture on the subject of Magna Carta last week, said that he respected the “power and significance” of the European convention on human rights, and that where there was conflict with the UK Parliament,

“I expect consultation and compromise to settle this issue.”

Should not the Minister, and indeed the Lord Chancellor, heed the advice of someone with so much experience of running a Tory Government with a wafer-thin majority?

**Mr Raab:** We listen to all the informed voices in this debate. That is why we are going to have full consultation. We look forward to discussing this with the hon. Gentleman and many others across the House.

### Human Rights Act

16. **Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): What discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the future of the Human Rights Act 1998. [900500]

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove):** I am due to meet the Justice Minister in the Scottish Government next week.

**Kirsty Blackman:** I welcome that news. The Minister will be aware that the Scottish Parliament voted by 100 votes to 10 to endorse the Human Rights Act last year, and that parties representing 58 of the 59 Scottish Westminster seats are against the repeal. Will the Minister make a commitment to not imposing the repeal on Scotland against the will of our people?

**Michael Gove:** I welcome the hon. Lady to her place, not just as the Member of Parliament who represents my parents, but as a Member of Parliament who was educated at the same school as me. She makes a very powerful point about the range of opinions in support of safeguarding, enhancing and indeed modernising our human rights in this country. I shall look forward to engaging with the Scottish National party and others, but I think it is important to stress that in this United Kingdom Parliament, human rights are a reserved matter, and parties that support reform of the Human Rights Act secured more than 50% of the votes at the last general election.

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Hollobone?

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con) *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Speaker:** Very rare!

### Prison Reform

17. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What plans he has for reform of prisons; and if he will make a statement. [900501]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous):** We are very ambitious to reform prisons; to make them places of learning, training and work, and where healthy family relationships are kept strong, in order to change prisoners’ lives for the better, prevent people becoming victims and keep the public safe.

**Nigel Huddleston:** Long Lartin maximum security prison is in my constituency. In the context of any discussions on reform, does my hon. Friend agree that the safety and security of prison officers and prison workers is also of paramount importance?

**Andrew Selous:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right; it is wholly unacceptable that prison officers should be assaulted during the course of their duties. We have extensive violence-reduction work going on within the National Offender Management Service, in which I am taking an extremely close interest—I meet officials every month to track progress. We are absolutely determined to get on top of it so that prisons are safe for prison officers.

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): Northern Ireland prisons are brimful at the moment and struggling, and the prison officers are suffering as a result of the cuts. Will we look at reform of prisons across all the devolved Governments, working together to find a way forward, or will it be a case of “devolve and forget”?

**Andrew Selous:** As the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State has said, the Government are keen to talk with all the devolved Administrations in the UK, because we absolutely believe that we can learn from each other. Where we can, I think that we should help each other as well.

21. [900505] **Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): I am sure that the Minister recognises the importance of reforming rehabilitation in prisons. Does he share my concern about reports from chaplains across the prison estate that they are struggling to organise collective worship because of the number of hours that prisoners are spending behind bars in their cells?

**Andrew Selous:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right; collective or corporate worship is important and all prisoners should have access to it. We will do our absolute best to ensure that that happens. With the increasing number of prison officers, that should be increasingly possible.

### Topical Questions

T1. [900475] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove):** Today I was able to confirm that the Ministry of Justice will throw its full weight behind

the reform programme for Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, led so ably by the Lord Chief Justice and supported by Sir Brian Leveson and the whole Judicial Executive Board.

**Kevin Foster:** I welcome the news that my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor shares my concern about issues in our courts that could lead to a two-tier justice system. As he will be aware, in Devon insufficient bids were received for the new legal aid contract for advice at police stations. Will he agree to meet me and representatives of the profession to discuss the specific issues that have led to that situation, such as the geography of the area, and how they can be resolved?

**Michael Gove:** I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. It is very important that we ensure that in rural areas such as Devon everyone has access to the justice they deserve.

T2. [900476] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): In Lancashire almost one third of domestic abuse victims at multi-agency risk assessment conferences are repeat victims. Anecdotally, many perpetrators are repeat offenders, but no statistics are available on that. What action is the Minister taking to identify repeat and serious perpetrators of domestic abuse?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinéage):** That is a very important question, and something we take very seriously. It is important that we make every effort to identify the perpetrators of these heinous crimes, but we are also determined to ensure that anyone facing the threat of domestic violence has somewhere to turn, which is why we are working closely across the Government, with the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government, to address this important issue.

T9. [900483] **Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on progress being made to improve the military covenant by protecting service personnel from judicial expansionism?

**The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning):** My hon. Friend raises a really important issue. One minute our servicemen are heroes, and the next minute they are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Charities such as Care after Combat, which was recently formed, are doing fantastic work that is being piloted in our prisons. I would like to meet my hon. Friend again to see how we can work together to ensure that our heroes do not end up in the criminal justice system.

T3. [900477] **Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): Last week the Scottish Government celebrated the 10th anniversary of legal humanist marriage. Given their popularity—there has been an upsurge in the number of such marriages in that country—and support in both Houses, can the Minister give us an idea of whether the Government would like to implement something similar in this country?

**Caroline Dinéage:** Yes, marriage is one of our most important institutions and we need to make sure that any changes to the law are carried out with care. That is

why we have asked the Law Commission to undertake a preliminary scoping study to prepare the way for potential future reform. It is due to report in December and then the Government will consider the next steps very carefully.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend look carefully again at the workings of the European arrest warrant following the announcements last night from London and from Kigali, Rwanda, and the misuse of the process by a junior Spanish judge for political rather than judicial purposes?

**Michael Gove:** Few people know more about, or are more committed to, the welfare of the Rwandan people than my right hon. Friend, and few Members of this House are more committed to due process and human rights, so I take very seriously the points that he raises. I will look very closely at this case and report back to him.

T4. [900478] **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): Could the Secretary of State explain exactly what is his policy towards the European convention on human rights and the European Court of Human Rights? On the one hand, he says that he supports the convention; on the other, he says that all decisions must be made in British courts. If all decisions are made in British courts, then the role of the European Court of Human Rights will be an utter irrelevance to Britain, and British people will therefore be denied the right of access to a treaty obligation that we signed in 1948.

**Michael Gove:** May I, on behalf of everyone on the Government Benches, congratulate the hon. Gentleman on making it on to the ballot for the Labour leadership? Had he required any more signatures, I would have been happy to defect in order to ensure that a full spectrum of views was behind him. He makes a very important point. We want to ensure that people's access to human rights is enhanced as a result of legislative changes that we make.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am very glad that the hon. Gentleman has overcome his natural shyness, with which the House is well familiar.

**Mr Hollobone:** You are very kind, Mr Speaker.

How many foreign national offenders do we have in our prisons, and what plans are under way to send these people back to secure detention in their own countries?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous):** This Parliament would not have been the same had not my hon. Friend carried on with his diligent scrutiny of this important subject. I can report to him that at 31 March 2015 10,481 foreign national offenders were in custody in England and Wales, just over 6,000 of whom are sentenced prisoners. The Immigration Act 2014 has enabled us to cut the number of appeal rights from 17 to four. Over 800 removals have now taken place as a result of these changes. Last year, the Home Office managed to send back over 5,000 foreign national offenders.

T5. [900479] **Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): Most women entering prison serve very short sentences. Last year, 58% were serving six months or less. Twenty years ago, this figure was only a third. As 82% of women who enter prison under sentence have committed a non-violent offence, why is this figure increasing?

**Caroline Dinéage:** The decision to impose a custodial sentence is of course one for the independent judiciary. The law requires that a custodial sentence be passed only where an offence is so serious that neither a community sentence nor a fine will do. The courts take into account all circumstances regarding the offence and the offender. It is important to remember that just because an offence is not violent, that does not mean that it does not have victims—multiple victims—and that it is not serious.

**Damian Green** (Ashford) (Con): I am delighted that the Lord Chancellor has committed himself to speeding up the process of justice—an essential task that I suspect he will find is like painting the Forth bridge with a toothbrush. Does he agree that one of the essential elements of that is that the digital technology increasingly available in courts talks to the digital technology that the police use in collecting evidence, because if not, it will not happen?

**Mike Penning:** The technology that my right hon. Friend alludes to is now coming on to the front line, and it is the sort of kit that we absolutely need. Body-worn cameras are the new replacement for Airwave, and that is absolutely vital. We must make sure that the information taken by that technology on the streets can be used all the way through the criminal justice system, particularly in the courts.

T6. [900480] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Yesterday it emerged that the Secretary of State was considering making it more difficult to get hold of official documents under freedom of information rules. I recall that the previous Cabinet Minister, the now noble Lord Maude, suggested that open data should replace freedom of information. Will the Secretary of State clarify whether he has any plans whatsoever to amend the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and if so, what he has to hide?

**Michael Gove:** I think we do need to revisit the Freedom of Information Act. It is absolutely vital that we ensure that the advice that civil servants give to Ministers of whatever Government is protected so that civil servants can speak candidly and offer advice in order to ensure that Ministers do not make mistakes. There has been a worrying tendency in our courts and elsewhere to erode the protections for that safe space for policy advice, and I think it absolutely needs to be asserted. There is no contradiction between making sure that we give civil servants the protection they deserve and also ensuring that the data—for example, the amount we spend in any Government Department—are more transparent than ever.

**Heather Wheeler** (South Derbyshire) (Con): I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinéage) to her new position. Does she agree about the importance of maintaining family

ties and ensuring the rehabilitation of female offenders, as exemplified by the hard work undertaken at Foston Hall ladies prison in my constituency?

**Caroline Dinéage:** Yes, it is important to maintain family ties, and family engagement workers are in place in all public sector female prisons, including Foston Hall. They meet all prisoners on induction to identify any support required to maintain or establish family contact. Women's prisons are also looking at other support for improved family links, including family days, child-centred visits, homework clubs and specific relationship and parenting skills programmes.

T8. [900482] **Corri Wilson** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): Following the question asked by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) on freedom of information, does the Secretary of State intend to introduce legislation on proposals to price out FOI requests and extend the ministerial veto, which my party would oppose, and will he give us a timetable for that?

**Michael Gove:** We want to review the operation of the original Freedom of Information Act. Some of the judgments that have been made have actually run contrary to the spirit of the original Act, and some of those behind the original Act, including former Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Home Secretary who introduced the legislation, Jack Straw, have been very clear about the defects in the way in which the Act has operated. It is vital that we get back to the founding principles of freedom of information. Citizens should have access to data and they should know what is done in their name and about the money that is spent in their name, but it is also vital that the conversations between Ministers and civil servants are protected in the interests of good government.

**Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): Do Ministers agree that a British Bill of Rights is an important step towards ensuring that the matter of votes for prisoners remains a matter for this House to decide, and that the best way of rehabilitating offenders is through a good job and education, not political gimmicks?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab):** I welcome my hon. Friend to the House. He is absolutely right: prisoner voting is a question that should be decided by democratically elected Members of this House. Our wider aim with a Bill of Rights is not only to protect our fundamental rights, but to strengthen the role of the British Supreme Court, defend the rule of law and shield the democratic prerogatives of this House.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): The family of Richard Davies are devastated by his death on Yeadon high street. A man has been charged with manslaughter and yet has been granted bail, which is very distressing for the family. What guidance is given to judges—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman must listen. My advice is that the case is sub judice and, on the basis of a charge having been brought, it is not appropriate to raise the matter in the Chamber at this time. I recognise the assiduity of the hon. Gentleman, who may find other opportunities, but not now.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State's apparent commitment to access to justice for everybody in this country mean that he will reverse the cuts made by the previous Government to that very same access to justice?

**Michael Gove:** We are committed to reviewing the reforms to legal aid, but I have to stress that it was the Labour party's former justice spokesman, the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who made it clear during the last Parliament that levels of spending on legal aid were unsustainable under the last Government and we needed to reform. After all, as the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) told us, there was no money left.

**Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con): In March I brought the families of Ross and Claire Simons, who were horrifically killed in my constituency by a dangerous driver, to meet the Prime Minister to discuss the maximum sentence for death by dangerous driving, which is currently 14 years. In this particular case, the dangerous driver was given 11 years, which could be brought down to five years as a result of good behaviour. The Prime Minister made a commitment to the families to contact the then Justice Secretary to ensure that the Government looked seriously at extending the maximum sentence. Will the Secretary of State please look at this case once more?

**Andrew Selous:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that issue. We have increased the maximum penalties for a number of driving offences, and we are looking carefully at the recommendations of the review announced by the previous Justice Secretary and considering how best to take them forward in a proportionate and consistent manner. We will report back to the House shortly.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Lord Chancellor has suggested that there will be a further reorganisation of the court estate. How many courts does he anticipate being included, and given the number of courts that the coalition Government closed that are still lying empty and costing the taxpayer millions of pounds, can he assure us that there will be better value for the taxpayer this time round?

**Michael Gove:** We suspect that a significant number of additional courts will have to close, and I will make sure that Parliament is fully informed about that process in due course. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. We need to make sure that we get value for money from the disposal of those buildings, and decisions that have been made in the past suggest that the Ministry of Justice has not always done the right thing when investing in the court estate.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): All the statistics demonstrate that a significant number of people with mental health needs end up in prison. Is the Minister really content that there is sufficient treatment for those in prison? She has said that she is in dialogue with the Department of Health. Does she not have the same suspicion as me that if we had more effective treatment in the general community, fewer people with mental health problems would end up in prison?

**Caroline Dinenge:** I very much agree with my hon. Friend, and we are doing just that. In England, we are working with the Department of Health and the Home Office to support NHS England to develop liaison and diversion services. Those services place NHS staff, usually a mental health nurse, at police stations and courts to assess offenders for a range of health problems, including mental health problems, and refer them to the right treatment and support services. The information can then be shared with courts, prisons and probation services to inform decisions on charging and sentencing.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The coalition Government increased the transparency of government by requiring Ministers to report on their meetings with outside organisations. Is the Justice Secretary not embarrassed that he now wants to reduce Government transparency by strengthening the ministerial veto on freedom of information requests?

**Michael Gove:** I enjoyed serving in the coalition Government alongside the right hon. Gentleman, and I welcome him back to the House.

It is absolutely right that people should know who Ministers meet and which lobby groups and others take up ministerial time, but I hope the right hon. Gentleman would agree that it is vital that we protect civil servants by making sure that they can give full and frank advice. Sometimes, as well as respecting transparency, we have to respect confidentiality. We have a duty of care towards those in the civil service who do such a good job of supporting Ministers.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Ministers will be aware of the incident last week at Killingholme, in my constituency, when 51 illegal immigrants were apprehended following a successful operation by Border Force. They were dispersed to detention centres throughout the country. Can the Secretary of State assure me that adequate provision will be made for future incidents of this type, and that the legal process will not in any way hinder their speedy deportation?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that case. It is vital that we ensure that there is appropriate provision for people who have been taking advantage of our generosity. I will therefore work with the Home Secretary to ensure that we have the facilities necessary to deal with situations such as the one that my hon. Friend's constituents have had to face.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): The Government recently announced that they were going ahead with a further 8.75% fee cut to criminal legal aid, the second in a year. The existing system, especially the online Crown Commercial Service system, is already wholly inadequate. What justification is there for further cuts, other than to further reduce access to justice for those most in need?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara):** May I first welcome the hon. Lady to the House?

It is important that we recognise that we have one of the most generous legal aid budgets in the world, and that it needs to be sustainable. It has to be fair to the

people who need legally aided advice, fair to the providers and fair to the taxpayer, who ultimately pays for it. As far as the latest 8.75% cut is concerned, we have made sure that there will be proper access for all those who need legal advice.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry to disappoint remaining colleagues, but time is against us and we must now move on.

## Point of Order

12.34 pm

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Today is National Women in Engineering Day, and it is also Parliamentary Links Day, when we celebrate the links between Parliament, science and engineering—celebrations that you yourself, Mr Speaker, were gracious enough to launch this morning. Could you advise me how it might be in order for me to get two such important events on the record?

**Mr Speaker:** Any advice from me, as the hon. Lady now knows, is superfluous. She has found her own salvation: the matter is on the record; it can never be erased from it. I hope she is satisfied. It is a very good cause.

## European Union (Finance) Bill

*Considered in Committee*

MR GARY STREETER *in the Chair*

### Clause 1

EU FINANCE DECISION: APPROVAL, AND ADDITION TO LIST OF TREATIES

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**The Temporary Chair (Mr Gary Streeter):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 1, in clause 2, page 1, line 18, leave out subsection (3).

*This amendment removes the automatic coming into force of the Act two months after it is passed, which would be incompatible with any of the new Clauses.*

Clause 2 stand part.

New clause 1—*Report on level of EU budget spending*—

“(1) This Act shall come into force on such day as the Treasury shall by order specify.

(2) The day specified in the order made under subsection (1) shall not be earlier than 14 days after the date on which the condition has been satisfied.

(3) The condition referred to in subsection (2) is that the Treasury shall have laid before both Houses of Parliament a copy of a communication sent by the Treasury to the European Commission requesting a review by the European Commission of the basis of appropriations for the European Union budget, and in particular—

(a) a comparative analysis of commitment or payment as the basis for appropriations, and

(b) a study of whether alternative arrangements might offer in the longer term improved value and enhanced budgetary control.”

*The Clause requires Ministers to seek a European Commission study of whether alternative approaches to funding EU activities would offer better value for money and improved budgetary control.*

New clause 2—*Reform of priorities within the EU budget*—

“(1) This Act shall come into force on such day as the Treasury shall by order specify.

(2) The day specified in the order made under subsection (1) shall not be earlier than 14 days after the date on which the condition has been satisfied.

(3) The condition referred to in subsection (2) is that the Secretary of State shall have laid before both Houses of Parliament a copy of a communication sent by the Secretary of State to the President of the European Council requesting a fundamental review by the Council of Ministers to be completed before 31 December 2015 of budget priorities, waste and inefficiency within the European Union budget.”

*The Clause requires Ministers to seek a Council of Ministers review of budget priorities, waste and inefficiency within the EU budget to be completed by the end of 2015.*

New clause 3—*Accountability and transparency*—

“(1) This Act shall come into force on such day as the Treasury shall by order specify.

(2) The day specified in the order made under subsection (1) shall not be earlier than 14 days after the date on which the condition has been satisfied.

(3) The condition referred to in subsection (2) is that the Secretary of State shall have laid before both Houses of Parliament a copy of a communication sent by the Secretary of State to the President of the European Commission inviting officials to provide

[Mr Streeter]

the relevant European affairs select committee in each House of Parliament with details of the draft European budget for each financial year before the draft European budget is agreed in the Council of Ministers.”

*The Clause would require Ministers to invite European Commission budget representatives to provide details of the draft European budget to the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee and the House of Lords European Union Committee each year before the EU budget is agreed.*

12.36 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):**

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Streeter. Clause stand part, the amendment and the new clauses have been grouped, so if it is convenient I shall start with the two clauses, turn to the new clauses and finish with the amendment, which is consequential and related to the new clauses.

The purpose of the Bill is to enable the UK to give effect to the new own resources decision amending the arrangements for financing the annual budget of the European Union. The amendments were agreed at the February 2013 European Council, and the new ORD, reflecting those amendments, was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 26 May 2014.

Clause 1 is fairly simple: it adds the new own resources decision, adopted unanimously in May 2014, to the list of previous ORDs, recognised under the European Communities Act 1972, thus giving it effect under UK law. When passed, the Bill will become the European Union (Finance) Act 2015 and supersede the European Communities (Finance) Act 2008, which approved the previous ORD. Clause 2 cites this legislation as the European Union (Finance) Act 2015 and repeals the 2008 Act.

For the benefit of hon. Members, I shall explain in a little more detail what the new own resources decision, to which clause 1 refers, means. The new ORD will largely maintain the existing financing system framework, which consists of four pillars: levies and duties on trade with non-member countries in agricultural goods, including sugar; customs duties on trade with non-member countries; the yield from applying a call-up rate to a hypothetical harmonised VAT base for each member state; and a fourth resource based on gross national income—GNI. Those four pillars remain largely untouched in the new ORD, and that is no insignificant achievement. During the negotiations over the multi-annual financial framework and before, there was considerable pressure to change the financing system.

**Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con):** Will my hon. Friend confirm that GNI is assessed in the same way across the whole Community?

**Mr Gauke:** Yes, it is. My right hon. Friend raises an important point and I suspect that he has in mind the issues that occurred last year as a consequence of revisions to our GNI and that of other member states, which meant that an additional surcharge was applied to the United Kingdom. He will of course recall the negotiations that followed and how we ensured that payments were delayed and that the rebate applied to the surcharge. There is consistency in the application in this case and that is very important. There is suitable scrutiny and co-ordination, with Eurostat playing a role.

**Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP):** The various agreements have been described as a considerable achievement. Under pillar two and the rural development payments, Scotland’s payments will work out at about €12 per hectare. The EU average is €76 per hectare. Would the Minister care to define “considerable achievement” in that light?

**Mr Gauke:** I would certainly make it very clear that there was a considerable achievement in the 2013 negotiations that were implemented in 2014. For example, there were calls for changes to the financing system and to introduce new types of member state contributions, but the UK resisted that successfully. There were calls to introduce new EU-wide taxes, including a financial transactions tax, and the UK resisted that successfully. Finally, there were calls to reform the rebate and the Government protected that. That is a considerable achievement.

On the subject of the regional distribution of common agricultural policy receipts, it is only fair to point out that payments per hectare are only part of the story. Although Scotland receives the lowest payments per hectare, Scottish farmers also receive one of the highest payments per farm in the European Union. On average, Scottish farmers receive just under £26,000 compared with England’s £17,000, Wales’s £16,000 and Northern Ireland’s £7,000. I hope that that provides some clarity for the right hon. Gentleman.

**Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con):** I note the irony that the House of Commons Library published its briefing paper on the Bill on the bicentenary of the battle of Waterloo. It notes, with its characteristic understatement, that our

“rebate is not popular with other Member States or the Commission”. May I invite my hon. Friend to make a firm commitment to the retention of our rebate? Will he continue to argue for it and ensure that it is not part of any of the renegotiations on our ongoing membership in the Community?

**Mr Gauke:** Absolutely. I am keen to make that commitment and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. Those of us who participated in the equivalent debates after the previous multi-annual financial framework was agreed and on the Act that performed the task that this Bill will now perform will recall that we spent some considerable time focusing on the fact that a large part of the rebate had been surrendered by the previous Government for little or nothing, merely a promise of reform of the common agricultural policy that had not been delivered.

**Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab) rose—**

**Mr Gauke:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I believe that he participated in that debate.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Following on from the point made by the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), I have said many times in this House that the deal done in 2005 was a terrible mistake. The Government have made frequent references to it. Is it not now appropriate to consider trying to regain what was lost in that deal, particularly because our net budget contributions have been rising so strongly in recent years?

12.45 pm

**Mr Gauke:** First, I acknowledge the consistency with which the hon. Gentleman has approached these issues. If I recall correctly our debates in 2008 and 2009, he expressed clearly his dissatisfaction with the performance of the Government that he supported, in terms of surrendering part of the rebate.

The other point to make is that the hon. Gentleman should not underestimate the Prime Minister's achievement in that negotiation. When he went to debate and negotiate on these matters, few believed that he would be able to reduce the overall budget in real terms, but he succeeded in doing so. Today's debate is focused not so much on the expenditure side, although I think we will discuss expenditure thanks to the Opposition's helpful amendment and new clauses—I was going to say "probing amendments", but we shall see—but what happened was also very important on the revenue side. It was a considerable success that we were able to resist new types of member states' contributions, new EU-wide taxes and attempts to reform the rebate. That is of some note.

**Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Gauke:** I will touch on the smaller changes to the own resources decision in a moment, but first it gives me great pleasure to give way to a fellow Hertfordshire Member of Parliament.

**Oliver Dowden:** I congratulate the Government on their success in keeping the EU budget down. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will continue to keep pressure on the EU to make sure that it continues to live within its means, not just for this budget settlement but for future budget settlements?

**Mr Gauke:** I will certainly make that assurance and indeed, I will set out in a little detail what we are doing in that field. I referred to my hon. Friend as a fellow Hertfordshire MP. However, if I remember correctly, at the time of the negotiation, he was part of the team in Downing Street who were involved in the undoubted success. It is characteristic of his modesty that he did not draw attention to that point, but I daresay that a lot of the credit for the successful negotiation lies in his hands.

Smaller changes to the own resources decision affect some member states' contributions and the balance between the pillars of the own resources system. Those are somewhat detailed, but I hope it will be helpful to set them out for the Committee, because they are, in essence, at the heart of the Bill and clauses we are debating.

Specifically, the smaller changes include the following: the member states' retention rate for traditional own resources—TOR—which covers member states' collection costs for customs duties, is reduced from 25% to 20%. That change will have no impact on the ultimate cost of the EU budget to the UK on account of the UK rebate. For the period 2014 to 2020, the ORD also reintroduces the reduced rate of call for VAT-based contributions for Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. Austria will revert from its reduced call rate over the 2007-2013 multi-annual financial framework to a standard call

rate of 0.3% over the 2014-2020 MFF. The financial benefit of the changes to the UK depends on technical factors. Even so, on current estimates, those changes point to a benefit of approximately £150 million over the course of the MFF.

**Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): My constituents are still reeling from Labour's great recession. Will my hon. Friend assure me that the Bill will not result in any new taxes or new contributions from the UK?

**Mr Gauke:** I can certainly give that assurance. Thanks to the success that the Prime Minister achieved in the negotiations in 2013, no doubt ably assisted by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden) and others, that certainly is the case.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Was not another of the Prime Minister's substantial achievements in those negotiations to shift the debate about the future finances of the European Union on to Britain making a contribution to the competitiveness of the European Union, and making sure that resources were allocated to improve competitiveness for business?

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. He anticipates comments that I will make later relating to how we can ensure that the money is not just controlled and reduced, but better spent. There is a criticism, which I suspect is shared by Members from all parts of the House, that the money that the European Union spends in its various ways is not used as efficiently and is not as focused on improving our competitiveness as it might be. There are encouraging signs that there is a greater focus on that. I will return to that shortly.

I was running through the various technical changes in the own resources decision. I have touched on the changes to the retention rates. May I also touch on the changes in relation to GNI-based contributions?

**Simon Hoare** *rose*—

**Mr Gauke:** Before I do so, I will give way to my hon. Friend.

**Simon Hoare:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way a second time; he is being very generous. My constituents in North Dorset and people across the south-west want to have confidence that Her Majesty's Government will in no way acquiesce to a change in our rebate as part of any negotiations. We all understand that the UK's agreement is contingent on any changes to the rebate. I invite the Minister to make the commitment that the rebate is not part of any renegotiation, that it is absolutely off limits and that this Government will always continue to defend our rebate.

**Mr Gauke:** I give the assurance that the Government will always defend our rebate. Perhaps it might be helpful to the Committee if I make the point that I made on Second Reading about the scale and significance of the partial surrender of our rebate by the Labour Government. According to the European Commission, the disapplication of the UK rebate cost the UK about €9 billion over the seven-year period of the previous multi-annual financial framework. Thereafter, with the abatement disapplication fully phased in, the cost to the

[Mr Gauke]

UK is about £2 billion a year. That is a significant sum, particularly given the fiscal circumstances that we continue to face.

Frankly, the question of what was achieved in return for the surrender of that partial rebate might be asked. Perhaps we will hear an answer to that later this afternoon, but I have not heard a convincing answer yet.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The Minister has outlined how the European Union is currently funded through contributions from member states. Some in the European Parliament argue that that system should be replaced by direct taxes levied by the European Union. Will the Minister confirm that the British Government would resist any such move?

**Mr Gauke:** Yes, we would resist such a move. It would be a fundamental change to the nature of our relationship with the European Union, and one that would go in entirely the wrong direction for the United Kingdom. There were calls in the negotiations for such a step to be taken. There were calls, for example, for a financial transaction tax to be introduced to finance EU spending. We resisted that. The Prime Minister was very clear in ruling it out from any deal.

**Mark Garnier** (Wyre Forest) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about the financial transaction tax, but the City is an incredibly important contributor to the UK economy and it has a significant turnover. Will he assure us that the Government will not allow the European Union to attack the City from a different direction as it looks for alternative sources of revenue from the jewel in our economic crown?

**Mr Gauke:** I certainly give that assurance. There was a strong push for a financial transaction tax, which would have had a particular impact on the United Kingdom, given that we have the pre-eminent financial centre not just in the European Union, but in the world. That could have been damaging for the City of London. We resisted it and we will continue to take that approach.

To make a broader point—although I will not go too far down this route, Mr Streeter—it would be more helpful if there was an acceptance in the European Union that the City of London is a jewel in the crown, to use my hon. Friend's phrase, not just of the United Kingdom, but of Europe as a whole. We should have the pre-eminent financial centre in the United Kingdom, and trying to damage it would be disadvantageous to all within the European Union.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Will the Minister welcome the confirmation from the Office for Budget Responsibility that in cash terms, the payment from the UK will be the same in the 2019-20 financial year as it is in 2014-15, which in real terms is a reduction of 7%? Will he encourage the Government to ensure that my constituents in Eddisbury do not pay a greater proportion of their taxes into an ever-increasing European budget, and to seek further reductions of a similar scale?

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is noticeable that our contributions are lower than they were in the last year of the previous multi-annual financial framework, not least because of the achievement of the

Prime Minister in February 2013. Of course, we continue to suffer the unfortunate effects of the previous negotiation, when part of our rebate was lost, amounting to £2 billion a year. None the less, we have made considerable progress thanks to the steps that were taken in 2013.

For the period from 2014 to 2020, the ORD reintroduces reductions in the GNI-based contributions of the Netherlands and Sweden, and introduces a reduction in those contributions for Denmark. The UK will contribute to those small corrections, but that will largely be offset by changes to other corrections.

Lastly, the ORD lays down the own resources ceilings at 1.23% of total member states' GNI for payments and 1.29% for commitments, and sets out the method for calculating subsequent changes to those ceilings following the introduction of the European systems of accounts 2010 by all member states.

The Bill will give UK approval to the new ORD and is the last UK action that is necessary to deliver the 2013 deal on the budget.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I admire the level of detail we are going into in this debate and I know that we all find it fascinating, but my constituents often say that they would like to hear details that they can understand, such as household-level figures. I note from the briefing that we are paying the equivalent of a £10 a month subscription per person. Will my hon. Friend confirm that when we talk about the renegotiation, we will do our utmost to talk in language that everyone outside this House can understand, as well as going through the fine detail?

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. I confess that I have set out rather detailed points. I know hon. Members in the Chamber will be capable of understanding them, but they will not necessarily cause great excitement among the many hundreds of thousands if not millions who are currently viewing the debate. My hon. Friend puts his view of the nature of our contributions in clear language. It is important that we have a Government who are determined to ensure that we get a good deal within the European Union and that we are careful in how we spend money there.

1 pm

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I note again a matter that is of great interest to the electors of Tonbridge, Edenbridge and Malling. The budget will be 7% lower in real terms by 2020, which is very welcome, but will the Minister say more on the consequences to the EU budget of the UK's position, because we are rather hoping that 7% is the beginning and not the end?

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend touches on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who drew attention to the fact that our net contributions are forecast to be lower in 2019-20 compared with 2013-14. In fact, our net contribution in 2019-20 will be £9.3 billion compared with £10.2 billion in 2013-14, which is clearly lower in cash terms but also lower in real terms. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) raises the issue that we should make a strong case for budget discipline. He wants to ensure that we appreciate

that we are dealing with taxpayers' money. Whether UK taxpayers' money or taxpayers' money from the wider EU, that money has to be spent wisely. That is a good point, and I will return to it later when we deal with the Labour new clauses and amendment.

**Alex Salmond** *rose*—

**Mr Gauke:** I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman. I see he has made more contributions in this Parliament than anyone bar a handful of senior Ministers.

**Alex Salmond:** I am pleased to say that I have drawn level with the Chancellor on this morning's assessment.

I admire the dead bat that the Minister is showing to his Back Benchers, but can he answer this point: is it the Prime Minister's objective in the European renegotiations to lower the UK's budget contribution, and if so by how much?

**Mr Gauke:** The right hon. Gentleman refers to my dead bat, but I thought I had played a flourishing cover drive. The Prime Minister has set out objectives for a renegotiation, which will then be taken to the British people, who will decide our future as members of the European Union. We believe we should do a wide range of things to ensure that Europe works better for its members. We have consistently argued the case for fiscal discipline and we are not alone in making that case. Indeed, the Bill itself demonstrates that there is strong support for a fiscal disciplinarian approach within the European Union—the fact that we were able to negotiate a reduction in the multi-annual financial framework was a considerable achievement. In those negotiations, we had the support of member states such as Germany, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and others.

**Alan Mak:** My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) made a very important point about protecting the UK's rebate, which is important to my constituents in Havant and throughout the country. Will the Minister confirm how much of the UK rebate the Labour Government gave away?

**Mr Gauke:** I will certainly make that point. It was estimated by the European Commission to be of the value of €9 billion over the previous MFF period. In this MFF period, it would be in the region of £2 billion a year, which would be a considerable loss. The Government will not be repeating that.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I would like to take the Minister back to the intervention of the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), because the Minister did not really answer him. In an article in *The Sunday Times* this week, one Conservative MP said of the Prime Minister's intentions that he was keeping things up his sleeve, and that:

“He'll try to negotiate a lower net contribution to the budget.”

It is definitely being said that the Prime Minister is holding that in reserve. Will the Minister comment on that?

**Mr Gauke:** We have consistently argued the case for money being spent more wisely and for greater European Union public spending restraint. We have already made

progress with that argument—we made progress in 2013 and the Bill relates to the negotiation, although it is on the revenue rather than the expenditure side. We will consistently argue that case.

**Mark Garnier:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way—he is giving us a lot of his time. He mentions fiscal prudence and spending taxpayers' money wisely. Two things that epitomise the wastefulness of the European Union are the Strasbourg circus—the waste of money moving the whole Parliament to Strasbourg—and the fact that the accounts have not been signed off for some two decades. The Prime Minister is working very hard to achieve fiscal prudence, but does the Minister agree that the mood around the whole EU is behind him in dealing with that? The problem is not unique to the UK. The Prime Minister has the wind in his sails and support from the rest of the EU to deal with those problems.

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I would perhaps go further: it is not just member states that recognise that things need to change and that there needs to be better value for money. Vice-President Georgieva, who has responsibility for the budget, also recognises the need to ensure that money is spent in a better way. The Prime Minister has consistently set out that there are two sensible objectives: to cut the whole budget and to protect the rebate. We will continue to make that case.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I thank the Minister for giving way once again. The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), who is not in his place, made a useful point about expressing our contributions in terms that the citizens will understand—contribution per head, per month or whatever. Would it not be useful to look at the expenditure side of, for instance, the common agricultural policy, and say how much that costs in net terms per head of population, and how much it has cost over many decades in higher food prices? People would be very interested to know that.

**Mr Gauke:** The hon. Gentleman draws me into deeper waters and wider issues. Perhaps I should resist, Mr Streeter, before you advise me not to spend too much time on the common agricultural policy and some of its costs. It is worth pointing out that the CAP as a proportion of expenditure by the EU is falling and has fallen fairly significantly. The hon. Gentleman's point is about making things clearer and ensuring that the British public have a better understanding of where their money is spent. There is a wider point, because that does not apply only to EU contributions. I am sure that he and all hon. Members welcome the fact that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs sends out tax statements to the British public so that they can see details of where money is spent in various Government Departments and the details of the money spent on our net contribution to the EU.

The scrutiny Committees of both Houses closely scrutinised and cleared the proposal for the new ORD, which was agreed unanimously by member states in May 2014. The Bill and the Prime Minister's 2013 deal demonstrate that, working with allies, we can achieve change in Europe, and secure a good deal for the UK and for Europe. I commend the clauses to the House. They should stand part of the Bill.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Gauke:** I will certainly give way, before I deal with the new clauses.

**Sir William Cash:** I am happy to wait if the Minister wishes to deal with the new clauses. I will come back at that point.

**Mr Gauke:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. New clauses 1, 2 and 3 and amendment 1, all tabled by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), would require the Treasury to undertake a series of actions prior to the Act coming into force. New clause 1 would require the Treasury to inform both Houses that it has formally requested a review by the European Commission into alternative ways of running the EU budget and a comparative analysis of commitments and payments as the basis for appropriations for the budget. New clause 2 would require the Treasury to request a fundamental review by the Council of Ministers of EU budget priorities, waste and inefficiency. New clause 3 asks for the Chancellor to issue an invitation to the Commission to provide further details of the draft budget to scrutiny Committees. Amendment 1 would delete subsection (3) of clause 2, which would mean that the Act would not come into force until 14 days after the conditions specified in each new clause were met.

We recognise the concerns underlying the amendments. Nevertheless, the hon. Lady will recall that the Bill relates exclusively to the financing of the EU budget, while the amendments relate to the separate, although equally important, issue of EU budget expenditure. On that basis alone, we reject them.

**Tom Tugendhat:** My hon. Friend talks clearly about financing and the details of various percentages going up or down. Does he recognise that what he is really talking about is setting the tone on the agreement we have in the European Union? The UK can play its part as a good partner in the EU, but the EU can help to play its own role in promoting what we all recognise is a growing economy in Europe, and not just a redistribution of wealth.

**Mr Gauke:** The deal that the Prime Minister reached in February 2013 was clearly a success, as our negotiating objectives were met. I am sure my hon. Friend and most of us would hope and expect similar success to be achieved in the months ahead.

**Barbara Keeley:** I invite the Minister to remind himself of a similar debate we had in January 2008, in which he and his hon. Friends on the then shadow Treasury team tabled a strikingly similar new clause that asked for a report on the review by the European Commission covering all aspects of EU spending. It was a very robust debate and he was a signatory to that new clause. He rejects my new clause, but it is very similar to the one he tabled in 2008.

**Mr Gauke:** I am tempted to point to the remarks made by the hon. Lady's colleagues in setting out the reasons why that new clause should have been rejected. She might not have been persuaded, but I am tempted

to say that six years on, after much reflection, I can see some value in them. The stronger argument I would perhaps make is that in contrast to what happened some years ago, when the previous Labour Government negotiated away part of our rebate, we have just had a successful negotiation in 2013. Let me set out the progress that is being made on that agenda. If I may, I will give a little detail on the substance, putting aside the point that the Bill focuses on the revenue, rather than the expenditure, side of things.

1.15 pm

**Sir William Cash:** On the reference in new clause 3 to "the relevant European affairs select committee in each House of Parliament"

as my hon. Friend knows, the European Scrutiny Committee always goes through all the budgets, makes reports regularly and has the power to invite anybody, including officials from the European Commission. In addition, it receives explanatory memorandums from the Government—in fact, from the Minister himself. I would like to make some further remarks about this later, but I agree very much with what he says in rejecting the Opposition's proposals.

**Mr Gauke:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. Let me come straight to new clause 3, as he has raised that point.

Along with many across Europe, we share the concern that lies behind new clause 3 that the EU is not sufficiently accountable to EU citizens. Hon. Members will need no reminding that the Prime Minister has already made it clear that strengthening the role of national Parliaments is a central tenet of his reform programme. Within the existing legal framework, the Government already take the role of national Parliaments in scrutinising EU proposals very seriously. That is why, when the European Parliament requested the formation of a high-level group on own resources to review the EU financing system, we insisted that national Parliaments, as well as the European institutions, were given a voice as part of the consultation. We therefore amended the joint declaration on the formation of the group explicitly to take account of input from national Parliaments.

We do all we can to ensure the transparent and effective scrutiny of each year's annual budget negotiations. An explanatory memorandum is deposited as soon as possible after the publication of the draft EU budget each year. That is followed by debates in both Houses and regular ministerial updates at significant stages of the negotiation process.

We are committed to working with both scrutiny Committees to make this process as efficient and effective as possible for all parties. However, we believe that requiring the Government to write to invited officials to appear before the scrutiny Committees would add little to the scrutiny process and would be a very peculiar precedent, for all the reasons set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). It would add little because the Committees can, and have, invited officials to appear before them. For example, in June 2014, Nadia Calvino, the Director-General of the European Commission budget, gave evidence to the Lords EU Economic and Financial Affairs Sub-Committee.

It really should not be the place of Government to determine who the scrutiny Committees should see. It is for the Committees of both Houses to decide for themselves who should appear before them and when. It would be a peculiar precedent for the Executive to begin to interfere with that freedom, no matter how benign the initial intention.

**Barbara Keeley:** I appreciate the point made by the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Stone, but the Minister cannot have it both ways. In a debate in October 2012, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), speaking for the Government, complained strongly—I referred to this in a previous debate—that Ministers had asked the Commission to model costs of €5 billion, €10 billion and €15 billion in relation to staffing. That very reasonable request was bounced back with the very insulting comment:

“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”.

If the Minister is expecting us to believe him, when such a simple request on a staffing issue is not taken seriously, then we do have some points to make.

**Mr Gauke:** I will return to that point. My remarks, when the hon. Lady intervened, were in respect of new clause 3 and the European Scrutiny Committee. I have been very clear that it would be a curious thing to do to place this in legislation and for the Executive to take that role upon themselves. I very much echo the remarks made on that by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone.

**Sir William Cash:** Let me add one further point before I deal with the matter in substance. The European Scrutiny Committee’s most recent report, which in this respect has been accepted by the Government, recommended that each Committee, including the Treasury Committee, establish a rapporteur to consider these questions. We could effectively work with the Treasury Committee to ensure, if necessary, that there would be an even deeper examination of the Treasury aspects.

**Mr Gauke:** We obviously welcome scrutiny in this area. If the European Scrutiny Committee or other Committees seek the Government’s support, for example, in bringing over Commission officials to give evidence, the Government would of course gladly support them. Let me offer that hand of co-operation if I may, but I do not see a strong case for placing this within the legislation. Indeed, I would go further and say that it would be inappropriate for us to do so. That deals with new clause 3.

We do not believe that the proposal, which would require the Government to write to various European institutions to invite them to undertake a review of one or other aspect of the EU budget, would really add to the work that the Government have undertaken and continue to undertake to improve the expenditure of the EU budget.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) rightly highlighted the welcome reduction in the contribution, which is good news for my constituents in Charnwood, as it is for his. That was in stark contrast to

results achieved in negotiations by previous Governments. As the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) mentioned, while the focus may be on revenue and not expenditure, it is important that the money is well spent. Will the Minister reassure me that he will continue to push the case for reform of how the EU spends money to ensure that it is well spent, well audited and that the accounts are signed off?

**Mr Gauke:** I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent intervention. The answer to his question lies at the heart of our response to new clause 1. He raises an important point.

New clause 1 requires the Government to write to the Commission to review the basis of appropriations for the EU budget to see whether “alternative arrangements” would provide better value for money. Although the link between appropriations and value for money is an important one, it is not of the first order. The Government’s first priority is to control spending directly, not through the system of appropriations. Cutting low-value expenditure is the first and most important way of improving the quality of EU spending.

In delivering an historic real-terms cut to the budget, the Government took a decisive step. Within a smaller budget, we also made sure that expenditure was reoriented towards areas that provide higher value for money. Spending on the common agricultural policy will fall considerably as a proportion of the total budget, while spending on research and development and other pro-growth investment will increase. So it is possible to operate within the system of appropriations, if appropriate control is in place.

The new clause none the less raises the question of whether the system of payments and commitments is appropriate for delivering value for money. It is a question that we must ask. It is true that it is an unusual budgeting system and it is not the way in which the UK Government budget. If the EU were starting from scratch, we would not advocate using that system. Yet I do not think anything would be gained by requesting a review of the system—for one simple and compelling reason. The proposed review in new clause 1 has already been set in motion by the new Budget Commissioner, Vice-President Georgieva, through her recent “budget for results” initiative. We obviously cannot say what the review will include, but its terms of reference are widely drawn, providing ample space to review the current budget system, including the system of appropriations, and to explore possible alternative approaches that would offer better value for money and improved financial management.

The UK has publicly welcomed that initiative and has shared its expertise. The Chancellor has made it clear to other Finance Ministers during ECOFIN meetings that that is the UK’s position. The initiative will involve member states, the European Parliament and the European Court of Auditors.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I am grateful for that update, but perhaps the Minister will tell us what the Government are going to do proactively in terms of their own priorities to deliver the value for money that he talks about, beyond the generalities that we have heard all morning about better value for money, better spending and better priorities. Can we have some specifics? How will the Government exert real influence on that important review?

**Mr Gauke:** The most important thing we can do is reduce the EU budget because that then focuses the mind of the European institutions to ensure that the money they are able to spend is prioritised in the right way. I come back to how the money is spent and the importance of focusing more on items that will help ensure a more dynamic European economy—more on research and development, for example—and proportionately less on the common agricultural policy. That is something that all hon. Members should support. That has been achieved.

**Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab):** I think the Minister has answered my question. It was about the common agricultural policy, and he has just walked into the answer.

**Mr Gauke:** Walked into it? I ran with enthusiasm into the answer, and I am glad that I anticipated the hon. Gentleman's point.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank the Minister for generously giving way to me a second time. Does he agree that the European Commission did not propose a single euro of savings when the negotiations started, so it would be strange to ask it to conduct the review to secure better value for money, as the new clause demands? In essence we would be asking the poacher to review how the poaching is getting on.

**Mr Gauke:** I take my hon. Friend's point. We are, I hope, moving in the right direction. The new Commission has been in place for the past few months or so, and the early signs are—I shall return to the point—that it appears to be more focused on the task. I think there is a link: there was a reduction in the EU budget, which has somewhat focused the mind.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Following what the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) has said, would it not be sensible and appropriate for our Government to carry out a comprehensive review of how we think the budget should operate, and make that a firm public submission, whatever is undertaken by the EU itself?

**Mr Gauke:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, which he makes in a characteristically constructive way. Clearly, it is important for us to work with other like-minded member states to ensure that we get the focus we need and the prioritisation of expenditure in the areas that add the most value. There are different ways of achieving that, and we can discuss that. It is only fair to note, however, that some progress has been made, as I shall touch on in a few moments.

New clause 2 imposes a requirement on the Government to request a review by the Council of Ministers of the EU

“budget priorities, waste and inefficiency”

in advance of ratification. The new clause relates not to financing, but to expenditure, so I again point out that we will reject it. Although the Government recognise the need to cut down on wasteful spending, requiring the Government to write and ask for a review of waste and inefficiency would add little to what the Government are already doing in this area. We know that there is

waste and inefficiency in the EU budget. We need action, not words—and action is what the Government have taken. Our most important step has been to cut the EU budget. Just as Governments across Europe are making tough decisions to consolidate public finances, the multi-annual financial framework deal negotiated by the Prime Minister has forced the EU to make tough decisions to bear down on waste and to economise. By imposing restraint on the EU budget, we can create a culture change in the Commission. The days of Commission officials measuring their success by how much of the budget they have been able to spend should be behind us.

1.30 pm

**Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** I could understand the Government's reluctance to incorporate the amendments in legislation if they did not deal strictly with the narrow interpretation of the Bill, but in view of what they ask the Government to do, I cannot see why the Government should be reluctant to take any of those actions. Why do they not simply give an undertaking to do so? Then we would not need the amendments, and we could all agree on something.

**Mr Gauke:** In the case of new clause 2, which relates to how we deal with the way in which the Council of Ministers works, we are making progress and taking action, which includes cutting the budget. In the case of new clause 1, I do not need to undertake to write a letter calling for the Commission to do something that it is already doing. As for new clause 3, I have already made it clear that I do not think it would be appropriate for us to impose on members of the European Scrutiny Committee something that is a matter for them.

**Barbara Keeley:** I am slightly surprised that the Minister is unable to take on board what was actually a very sensible suggestion. He says that overall budget restraint is sufficient, and that there is no need for a focus on “waste and inefficiency”. As I mentioned earlier, back in 2012, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells tried to introduce measures to reduce the staffing budget and asked for modelling, but that request was rejected. Commission representatives should not feel that they can bounce back to UK Ministers simple requests that really would help decision making.

Time and again, Members on both sides of the House raise issues relating to the Commission's staffing costs. If that is the response that the Minister has been receiving—he is not admitting it today, but the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells mentioned it during another debate—we really must press the matter. It is not good enough simply to accept that everything is fine and we do not have a problem. We must push the case for enhanced scrutiny.

**Mr Gauke:** We care a great deal about eliminating waste and inefficiency in the EU budget. The question is how we should do that. Let me say first that, if we can reduce the MFF, that will place a much greater onus on the Commission to eliminate wasteful expenditure.

The hon. Lady made a perfectly fair point about what happened back in 2012. However, the Prime Minister's negotiation triumph in 2013 has reduced the MFF, and we are now seeing signs—which we were not seeing

three years ago—that the Commission is focusing much more on the issue. Vice-President Georgieva described the 2015 budget, which was agreed last December, as

“a budget of responsibility... a tight budget that reflects the tight fiscal conditions in our Member States.”

She said that it was

“a very focused budget, focused on the priorities that we have established in the new Commission.”

She added:

“It is directed towards investments in competitiveness, for instance supporting the innovative nature of our businesses. It is also a budget where tight controls on spending will allow us to achieve the best possible results.”

Vice-President Georgieva’s “budget for results” initiative, which focuses on better rather than more spending, has come about as a direct result of the imposition of restraint at the top. The United Kingdom is engaging constructively with the initiative, and is working actively with the Commission to ensure that momentum is maintained through regular meetings at political and technical levels. We are working with our allies to increase support for the initiative and to ensure that all member states are represented in discussions. We look forward to the first meeting of the inter-institutional working group in mid-July and to contributing to the “budget for results” conference in September.

Because of what we have achieved in reducing the budget, we are seeing a culture change, but we need to ensure that the momentum is maintained. If the Labour party supports that, I am delighted, but we must remember that it was Labour that surrendered part of our rebate and failed to impose the discipline that we needed.

**Barbara Keeley:** Again, I am surprised by the Minister’s response. Let me remind him of a point that I made on Second Reading. When Labour Members voted with rebels in the Conservative party, they strengthened the Prime Minister’s hand before he went into negotiations by insisting that the MFF be cut. The Minister really ought to acknowledge that. Surely it helps if, on every occasion, Members in all parts of the House can be strong in saying that we want enhanced scrutiny, and that is what we are trying to do through our new clauses today.

**Mr Gauke:** I cannot but throw back the record of the Labour Government in that regard.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): It is difficult to listen to what Labour Members are saying about new clause 2 without remembering what happened when they were in government in the United Kingdom. Let us not forget the huge increase in the number of people they employed, including outreach workers and people with non-jobs. Given the vast inefficiency and waste of all those years, it seems a bit rich for Labour Members to expect us to take lectures on the subject.

**Mr Gauke:** That is a very good point. However, you would not wish me to be detained too long, Mr Streeter, by the fact that various candidates for the leadership of the Labour party appear to be recognising that too much money was spent before the crash, and that not all of it was spent in an efficient manner.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Gauke:** I give way to the hon. Lady, who may share that view.

**Carolyn Harris:** Does the Minister believe that enough is being done to ensure the transparency of budget decisions that are made at EU level?

**Mr Gauke:** The hon. Lady has asked a good question. In the context of the review that the Commission is undertaking and the focus on a budget for results, transparency is certainly important. The Government’s record is clear: we want more transparency in relation to all expenditure, whether at UK or EU level, and I think that more can be done in that regard.

The hon. Member for Worsley made an important point about administrative expenditure. As part of the MFF deal, EU staff salaries were frozen in 2013-14, and EU institutions committed themselves to a 5% headcount reduction by 2017 and an increase in statutory pension age to 66 for officials who started work in or after 2014. I would be the first to accept that those reforms do not go far enough, but, working with like-minded member states, the Government will continue to press the EU institutions to show maximum restraint when it comes to administrative expenditure.

**Barbara Keeley:** Are this Minister and other Ministers having more success than their right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) had back in 2012, when the European Commission dismissed his very reasonable request for some modelling on staffing costs? Are the Commissioners being any more helpful nowadays?

**Mr Gauke:** Some progress has been made since then. The Commission has improved its transparency record, partly thanks to the Government’s ongoing work. In particular, it released a payments plan containing much more detail on payment forecasts. I accept that we can go further, and that UK citizens expect more, but requiring the Government to write a letter inviting officials to attend Select Committee meetings will not really deliver that. What is required is constant vigilance and discipline. We have shown that, and it is delivering results.

**Sir William Cash:** Earlier, the hon. Member for Worsley raised the question of how the proposals for budget reduction came about. As I am sure the Minister remembers only too well, I was one of the so-called rebels, although actually we were not really rebels at all: all that we were doing was asking the Government to listen, which is exactly what happened, because our amendments were accepted. The then Financial Secretary to the Treasury—or perhaps the Economic Secretary—paid tribute to us for having presented the proposals, and everything was hunky-dory.

**Mr Gauke:** I am grateful for the constructive tone that my hon. Friend brings to the debate; he has a history of so doing. He has argued for greater efficiency and transparency in the expenditure of the European Union for many years, and I am grateful to him for that.

I should also point out that we are providing technical assistance to the Commission as it considers all the options for enhancing performance on the budget.

[Mr Gauke]

We are sharing our expertise in areas such as value for money, spending area objectives and improving budgetary performance—for example by removing adverse incentives and improving accountability and transparency.

**Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): My constituents were aghast when the previous Labour Government gave away our rebate. Will the Minister confirm that the Bill will ensure that there will be no further such concessions as long as this party is in power?

**Mr Gauke:** I am more than happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. When we debate the scrutiny of expenditure, it is worth bearing in mind that allowing us to make a bigger contribution than we otherwise would involves a cost to the UK taxpayer. The fact that budgets were allowed to increase significantly also means that the focus on getting value for money could be lost. If we are to eliminate wasteful expenditure, it is important that we bear down on the overall budget, because that has a big impact. That is a clear area of difference—if I may put it that way—between the two parties. We have placed a consistent focus on controlling expenditure, whether at UK or EU level.

The next opportunity to look wholesale at the priorities of the EU budget will be the mid-term review of the MFF. That review is required under the agreement reached on the MFF, and it must take place by 2016. The Opposition's calls for a review appear to add little to the review that is already planned. The Government will engage constructively with the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament to look at further ways in which spending can be improved.

In the meantime, the Government are taking every opportunity to bear down on wasteful spending and to highlight it where it is identified. That is reflected in our having voted against the discharge or approval of the EU budget for the past four years. Until the European Court of Auditors is able to give a positive statement of assurance on the EU accounts, we will continue to work with allies in calling on the Commission to do better. I note that this position is not the one that the previous Labour Government took.

Together with our allies, Sweden and the Netherlands, we have issued a joint counter-statement calling on the Commission and member states to take proactive steps to reduce the level of error in the EU accounts by simplifying regulatory frameworks and increasing the training and guidance available to national officials. By supporting the European Court of Auditors' calls for more focus on performance and added value in the EU budget, we have helped to change the Commission's focus from compliance to results.

The Government are also playing their part in the work being undertaken to simplify the rules governing the implementation of structural funds. In the past, the Commission's focus has too often been on compliance, fostering a tick-box culture with little care for performance. A structural fund simplification agenda was launched earlier this month by Commissioner Cretu, and those involved will meet for the first time next month. The budget for results initiative, to which I have already referred, will provide another valuable opportunity for this Government to continue to insist on maximum efficiency and results in relation to EU spending.

Of course, we are also keeping up the pressure on the Commission in the annual budget negotiations and in response to in-year requests for more funding. We have a strong track record of pushing back against draft amending budgets, to ensure that value-for-money criteria are met, and we regularly challenge the Commission to identify opportunities for reallocation rather than coming to member states with requests for more money. The Government are constructively engaging with the work that I have outlined, in order to ensure the best possible deal for the United Kingdom.

1.45 pm

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Has my hon. Friend seen the work of the so-called five presidents of the euro area, which sets out how they wish to press for full fiscal union, with a euro Treasury and a euro budget under central control. Will he assure the Committee that we will have nothing to do with any of that?

**Mr Gauke:** Yes; my right hon. Friend makes an important point about the euro area. No doubt he will have heard the speech delivered by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the Mansion House a couple of weeks ago, in which he made it clear that one of our priorities in the UK's negotiations ahead of any referendum will be to ensure that the "euro-outs"—the European Union member states that are not in the eurozone—are properly protected and do not find themselves disadvantaged by the eurozone countries working together to the disadvantage of the "euro-outs". That is a real priority for the United Kingdom.

**Sir William Cash:** I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates the difficulties inherent in this matter. It is all very well to want to disaggregate the eurozone from the non-euro member states, but the reality is that we are all part of the same European Union. Any attempt to make a change of this kind would involve a fundamental change to our relationship with the EU and would therefore require a treaty change by any reasonable standards. Does he appreciate how serious the position would be if we neither sought nor achieved that objective?

**Mr Gauke:** It is important that we meet that objective.

On the subject of the report, I would make the point that we benefit from the single market and do not want to stand in the way of the eurozone resolving its difficulties, but we will not let the integration of the eurozone jeopardise the integrity of the single market or disadvantage the United Kingdom in any way. That is one of the important objectives in our negotiation with the European Union, and it is exactly the point that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was making in his Mansion House speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) are right to raise the importance of this point, which we fully recognise.

**John Redwood:** The five presidents' press release and work programme, which will result in a White Paper, are about taking over the European Union budget and using it for transfers throughout the eurozone. Clearly, Britain does not want to be part of that. I was asking the Minister about the budget, not about single market regulations.

**Mr Gauke:** The point about our position applies across the piece. To be fair to my right hon. Friend, certain eventualities that he predicted many years ago have come to pass. Because of the current situation in the eurozone, substantial reform could well be needed so that the members of the single currency are able to co-ordinate fiscal policy to a greater extent, with greater fiscal transfers and so on. That raises issues for the eurozone members which do not apply to other members of the European Union that have access to the single market but would not wish to partake in any such arrangement. We would need to ensure that if that is the direction the eurozone goes in, the position of the euro-outs is protected. Ensuring that access to the single market remains in place for all 28 member states is an important part of that, which is why I mentioned it. We need to ensure that our position is protected. That is the point I wish to make, and I fully understand the points that my right hon. Friend is making.

Finally, amendment 1 has been proposed in order that the conditions set out in new clauses 1, 2 and 3 are consistent with the terms of commencement in the Bill. I have explained to the Committee why we will not be supporting the new clauses, and we thus reject the amendment. While I have the opportunity to do so, I wish to identify a typographical error in the explanatory notes. The second line of paragraph 6 refers to a VAT-based rate of call of 15% for Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, whereas it should have read 0.15%. I draw the Committee's attention to that in case it caused consternation among right hon. and hon. Members.

In conclusion, let me assure the hon. Member for Worsley that, having made important progress in 2013, this Government are focused on ensuring maximum restraint, budgetary control, value for money and transparency in EU spending. I therefore welcome the spirit of her proposals, but requiring the Government to request that the Commission or the Council of Ministers review these issues adds little to the real work that has been done and continues to be done to improve the working of the EU budget. That work began with the Prime Minister's historic deal, which cut the budget in real terms and protected the current system of financing—we should not forget that that is what this Bill is about. That work continues through the budget for results, through the Government's continued engagement on the annual budget and through the discharge of the budget, and it will continue during the mid-term review of the MFF.

With those few, brief introductory remarks, I urge the hon. Lady not to press her proposals to a Division and I urge hon. Members to support the clauses set out in the Bill.

**Barbara Keeley:** Before we go any further, may I point out that my constituency is now called Worsley and Eccles South? The people of Eccles would rightly be very upset if we left them out of the equation; Eccles is a very important town in my constituency.

I rise to speak to the new clauses standing in my name and those of my hon. Friends. We are dealing with a slight complexity, in that the Bill is simple but drafted in such a way as to make it complex to amend. Amendment 1 is therefore a technical paving amendment which can bring in the new clauses, so it is that amendment that we will push to a vote, if necessary.

The Bill relates to agreement of the own resources decision that will be incorporated into UK law, based on the agreement reached at the February 2013 European Council. The Minister covered that at great length over the past hour and 20 or so minutes. Decisions on UK contributions reaching €14 billion are brought into sharper focus in a week when Ministers are discussing cuts to tax credits for the low-paid and have not been prepared to rule out cuts to financial support for disabled people. We find ourselves in a serious and austere financial context, so we must ensure that we look at every aspect of value for money, budgetary control and the reform of priorities within the EU budget.

When we debated the MFF in this House in October 2012, the Government's motion talked about agreeing that we must see

“significant improvements in the financial management of EU resources by the Commission and by Member States and significant improvements in the value for money of spend”.—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2012; Vol. 552, c. 295.]

The last debate contained many examples, some of which I shall refer to, showing that we are not there yet. I am sure the Minister would agree, so what we are simply trying to do with the new clauses is find ways in which we can enhance value for money assessments, budgetary control and the reform of priorities. That is very important to many of the Members in the Committee today and to Members throughout the House.

The proposals standing in my name and those of my hon. Friends will assist greatly in ensuring that reports are made to this House on value for money and budgetary control, and on budget priorities and waste and inefficiency within the EU budget. Examples have been given in interventions that give us an understanding of the extent of concerns about this out in the country—which we explored on Second Reading—and those can only increase.

**Tom Tugendhat:** Would the hon. Lady let me know which of her hon. Friends are so supportive of her? There appears to be somewhat of a dearth of support.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Barbara Keeley:** I will.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I rise to assure my hon. Friend that I am supporting her very strongly today.

**Barbara Keeley:** I think the hon. Gentleman will see when we come to the vote that we do have support.

Our new clause 3 would also improve accountability and transparency by inviting EU budget representatives to appear before the European Scrutiny Committees in this House and the other place each year before the EU budgets are negotiated. I appreciate the points made by Conservative Members that of course there should be no interference with the work of the European Scrutiny Committee in this House, but what we have tried to do in these new clauses is send the strongest statement we can send and give the strongest possible support to all those in this House who want to see these important aspects of value for money and budgetary control put in place.

**Sir William Cash:** I am sure the hon. Lady would appreciate the fact that the European Scrutiny Committee functions by virtue of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. Leaving aside the merits of this

[*Sir William Cash*]

proposal, if there were to be a stream of requirements imposed by Parliament on the manner in which the European Scrutiny Committee, an all-party Committee containing many Labour Members, were to conduct its business, the life of the Committee would be made pretty intolerable and its purpose would probably be undermined.

**Barbara Keeley:** I very much take that point on board.

New clause 1 requests a review by the European Commission of the basis of appropriations for the European Union budget and a study of whether alternative arrangements might offer improved value and enhanced budgetary control. On Second Reading, I highlighted a concern about 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. As I pointed out in the earlier debate, that gap has crept up from an average of 2.6% to the current 5.4%, and it is projected to rise to 5.7% in the period from 2014 to 2020. We must now seriously question whether that gap is manageable.

The Commission describes the system as follows:

“Commitments are tomorrow’s payments, and payments are yesterday’s commitments. Commitments are planned future payments whereas payments are legal obligations from the past...if every year the increase in commitments is much higher than that in payments you end up promising many partners to pay their future bills but find yourself unable to pay those bills when they arrive years later.

This is what has been happening over the last years: as many commitments were made years ago for projects that are being completed now”.

That is a key issue with the drive to smaller EU budgets, yet, as the Commission says,

“many bills related to projects remain unpaid and have to be rolled over to the following year. This leaves no choice to the Commission but to call for increases in payments.”

**John Redwood:** I entirely agree with the hon. Lady about the need to get better value for money in a smaller budget and to bring down the commitments. Does she have some individual proposals on things that could be taken out of the EU budget for which the Government should argue?

**Barbara Keeley:** I think that we could get to that if we had the information in the review that I am calling for, but what I want first is an examination of the system. This system is a recipe to drive up budgets rather than a way to control them.

Commitments are being made at a level of up to €14 billion a year more than payments. We have had years when the commitments have been €14 billion more, and that means bills being rolled forward, or staying unpaid, which is unacceptable. It is not a sensible system, and I think that the Minister actually acknowledged that. If it is not a sensible system, we should not be going along with it.

2 pm

**Kelvin Hopkins:** My hon. Friend is making a fair point. It has been suggested that, in real terms, we should be paying 7% less into the European Union

budget by—I think—2020. Given what she has just said, is it not likely that that will not turn out to be true, and we will not see a reduction of that kind?

**Barbara Keeley:** Indeed, that is a very real fear. If we look down the list of commitments and compare it with the payments made, we will see the level of commitments that are still to roll forward, which is a very frightening prospect. I go back to the point that I have just made. This is a system designed to drive up budgets. We support what has taken place and recognise that the House voted for it back in 2012, but unless this system changes we will be in a situation in which commitments are being made in the period up to 2020 of €960 billion, which is €52 billion more. It is a serious matter. Clearly, it is serious if the Commission is taking on budgets and then not paying bills, but it is the upward pressure on the budget process that is the great concern.

In our last debate on this Bill, the hon. Members for Corby (Tom Pursglove), for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), and for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) referred to a range of concerns that their constituents had about EU finance, how the EU budget is spent and the need for control of the budget. That is a point to which we will keep returning.

In the debate of 15 January 2008 on the Committee stage of the European Communities (Finance) Bill—I have already mentioned this—the Financial Secretary, then shadow Treasury Minister, and his shadow Treasury colleagues called for a report on “all aspects of EU spending”. Clearly, both the Opposition then and the current Opposition have had concerns about this. The Minister and his colleagues called for that report in 2008. I hope that we still have time in the rest of this debate for him to repent his view that we do not need further reviews.

As I have mentioned, there were complications in the wording of the amendment in 2008. I have read through the debate. The difficulty that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends on the shadow Treasury team at that time ran into was that the amendment called for Treasury certification that it

“considers the outcome of the review is satisfactory to the interests of the United Kingdom”.

That seemed to be the sticking point. We have avoided such complications in this Bill by tabling simpler amendments that ask for an analysis of the basis used for appropriations and the study of alternative arrangements.

The Minister has said that such a review is ongoing. Will he tell me at this point when we will see that review?

**Mr Gauke:** On the timing, we are expecting it in 2016.

**Barbara Keeley:** Will he clarify at which point in 2016? [*Interruption.*] No, it is just some time in 2016.

**Alex Salmond:** Will it be before or after the referendum?

**Peter Grant:** During.

**Barbara Keeley:** The Minister can hear the comments being made by Members from sedentary positions. Clearly, we are working through a crucial time in the run-up to

the referendum, and the budgetary information, with all the decisions that have to be made, will be crucial for the people out there.

In our amendments, we have expressed the wish to have these reviews and the reports. We want to send out the message that this House is serious about scrutinising the EU budget.

At the end of our debate on Second Reading, the Economic Secretary talked about the need for scrutiny on the payment gap. She told us that the European Commission has committed to publish more frequently its analysis on payment forecasts. I join the hon. Lady in welcoming an enhanced level of information on the EU budget, but believe that much more needs to be done on that. Does the Minister agree now—after both of us have spoken on the matter—that it is time that the EU moved away from a system in which it can make commitments of billions of euros more than it can pay, creating pressure on member states to ever-increasing budgets?

New clause 2 calls for a reform of the priorities in the EU budget, and specifically requests a review by the Council of Ministers of budget priorities and waste and inefficiency in the EU budget. The Minister has mentioned reviews that are already taking place, but I do not think that he mentioned a review of priorities of the kind that our new clause invites.

On Second Reading, I raised the need for further reform of budget priorities. Labour believes that expenditure on growth and jobs should continue to be prioritised by cutting back even further on agriculture spending.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury told us that overall spending on the common agricultural policy will fall by 13%, compared with the last financial period, and that spending on research and development will increase by 4%. As welcome as that fall in agriculture spending is, we believe that the level of spending is still too high compared with spending to support growth and jobs. The Minister has responded to points made by his own side today, but he has not really got to the nub of the point.

As I said on Second Reading, agriculture accounts for only 1.6% of the European Union's total output. If that is the case—I think that we will keep returning to this point—is it still appropriate that it accounts for 30% to 40% of the budget?

**Alex Salmond:** Is the hon. Lady saying that, in the opinion of the Labour party, agricultural support and spending are too low in Wales?

**Barbara Keeley:** I am not making that point in particular. What we are asking for in this clause is a review of budget priorities. We can see from the percentages that competitiveness for jobs and growth is the most important. I am not making specific points about specific countries. Under the new method of agricultural spending, I think that there is a great deal of flexibility for allocating the funding between countries.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** My hon. Friend made a very strong point about the CAP. If there were no CAP, would it not be sensible for us to subsidise sections of our own agriculture according to what we think is right rather than what the European Union thinks is right?

**Barbara Keeley:** Indeed we could. Let me go on and make a few more points about the proportion that is allocated to that very important priority of competitiveness for jobs and growth. In 2014, only around €15 billion will be spent by the EU on that budget priority compared with over €41 billion for market-related spending and direct payments for agriculture. There is no sense in a system that takes that vital priority—vital for every part of the EU—of competitiveness for jobs and growth and spends so little on it. Out of the €6.3 billion of European Union funding allocated to the UK in 2013, only 23% was spending on jobs and growth compared with 63% on agriculture. It is the balance that we are calling into account.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North said on Second Reading, although the proportion of the budget for agriculture has been falling, there has been a fairly significant increase in money terms over the past eight years. As long as this balance seems wrong to people, it will be very hard for many of us to explain on the doorstep why we are spending only 23% of European Union funding in the UK on jobs and growth but 63% on agriculture. Some hon. Members might find such an explanation easier in their constituencies than others, but it is a difficult argument.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con):** I am very sympathetic to what the hon. Lady is saying. My one concern would be that if there are reforms, they do not disadvantage some farmers in North East Somerset and other rural constituencies to favour spending on the continent. Reform is quite right, but it needs to be fair for the United Kingdom's farmers.

**Barbara Keeley:** The more reviews that we carry out of those priorities, the more that we develop our understanding of where the money is going. Earlier, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) called for these matters to be discussed in a language that his constituents could understand, and I do not think that they are discussed in such a way. Having ploughed through very many debates and very many documents in relation to the Bill, I do not think that those matters are understood. The hon. Gentleman is quite right.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury said she accepted that expenditure on the CAP is

“still too high both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the overall budget.”—[*Official Report*, 11 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1426.]

If that is what the Treasury team currently feel—that it is still too high, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the overall budget—what are we doing to understand that better, to review it and to change it?

It is my assertion that previous reviews have not led to the level of reform that we want to achieve. It was our purpose in tabling new clause 2 to keep focus on that vital issue. When most member states are finding it necessary to make very difficult decisions—clearly, we are in that position ourselves—about their own budgets and spending, the European Union must ensure that expenditure is efficient and focused on addressing the major concerns that member states face. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie) said in the October 2012 debate:

[Barbara Keeley]

“The next seven years of the EU budget should prioritise jobs, growth, infrastructure and practical programmes that rejuvenate fragile economies.”

As I mentioned on Second Reading, this is much needed when we still have 735,000 16 to 24-year-olds in the UK looking for work. That should be our focus—those young people.

We need a better balance of funding and we need the European Union to provide a better framework and strategy to achieve growth and jobs. Looking deeper into the detail, and the spending commitment to the EU’s smart and inclusive growth priority, only a quarter of that is spent on competitiveness for jobs and growth, and three quarters on the EU’s cohesion policies, including structural funds. It probably is not appropriate today to open up further debate about the use of structural funds. That is often discussed when we are discussing EU finance, but as my hon. Friend also said:

“Savings can be made on aspects of EU structural funds that...are too often committed in a haphazard manner and depend on outdated commitments rather than future priorities. Unless structural funds contribute to positive economic development, they cannot be justified.”—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2012; Vol. 552, c. 304.]

The Opposition say strongly that the proportion of the EU’s smart and inclusive growth expenditure that goes towards securing competitiveness for jobs and growth is too small. That important area of spending accounts for around a quarter of the EU budget in 2014, but that rises to only 27% across the whole six-year period.

**Sir William Cash:** Does the hon. Lady appreciate that much of what she says in terms of generalities is understandable, and is reflected very much in European Commission documents, which I have been looking at for the last 30 years, one way and another, on the European Scrutiny Committee, but that the inherent problem is the fact that every time there is a need to argue for jobs and growth, the answer from the European Commission is to give more subsidies, more bail-outs, and more cohesion and structural funds, when actually what is needed is deregulation and to provide people with a means of increasing productivity and jobs and to deal with youth unemployment?

**Barbara Keeley:** I hesitate to say that I think we agree on this point, but I think we do. [*Interruption.*] All right, then: we enthusiastically agree on this point. It is very clear indeed that, particularly with youth unemployment, we have a serious problem. It is a problem throughout the EU. We must spend more on that and we must find a way of doing so. Although the Minister spoke at great length, he did not tell us at any point what the difference would be between the ongoing review in the EU and the existing commitments. We want to send a very strong message. Until the Bill is passed, it is our last chance for a considerable period to make these points strongly to the EU, and we believe that we should do so.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): One issue that concerns me in the area that I represent is the fishing industry. There is to be a review of the common fisheries policy. One thing that could come off the back of that is our young people getting jobs in the boats, because up until now they have not been encouraged to do so.

We need not just a better common fisheries policy, but encouragement and incentives for our young people to take the jobs in the local fishing boats, and thereby create employment and prosperity for them as well. Does the hon. Lady agree?

**Barbara Keeley:** Indeed. We have focused a great deal on agricultural spending and the CAP, but I do not think any of us would say that there has been a fair deal for people in the fishing industry. Fisheries policy, in many places, has been a disaster and has caused great problems for our fishing industry. It is a shame and a pity if, as I think is the case, young people no longer believe that they can have a career in fisheries.

**Alex Salmond:** Given that many people who represent fishing constituencies would agree with the hon. Lady on that point, does she not find it passing strange that in all of the possible treaty amendments that have been listed as possibilities for the Prime Minister’s soon-to-be-considered renegotiation stance, not once have I heard from the Government Front Bench that a treaty renegotiation on the common fisheries policy is any part of the Conservative party’s priorities?

2.15 pm

**Barbara Keeley:** That is strange, but I cannot answer for the Minister. He may want to intervene for himself now or at some later point.

I have emphasised jobs and growth, but this EU budget priority also includes policies and programmes to promote vital areas of research and innovation—infrastructure, education, training and enterprise development. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) has been a staunch advocate of the importance of EU funding for research and development in the UK. In 2012 he said:

“The more the EU invests in research and innovation, the more the UK benefits, because the quality, breadth and depth of UK research puts us in a position whereby we gain disproportionately from European research programmes.”—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2012; Vol. 552, c. 292.]

It is self-evident that competitiveness for jobs and growth should be more of a priority, but also that we would benefit more if the priorities were switched to increase funding for research and innovation.

Serious consideration of reform of the EU’s spending priorities is needed if we are to use the EU budget, as the Opposition believe we should, as a mechanism to promote future jobs and growth in the UK and other member states. We can only get that change of spending priorities if we keep a focus on the balance between competing priorities and continue to drive down wasteful and inefficient spending.

Much was said on Second Reading, as I am sure the Minister recalls, about what hon. Members consider to be wasteful and inefficient spending. Some Members might cover that again today, but we have already talked about staffing costs and administration costs, and the costs of the move between Brussels and Strasbourg. Other items of waste and inefficiency can also be drawn to the Minister’s attention.

We have already discussed new clause 3, and I do not need to keep on emphasising this, but in tabling it we did not in any way want to disturb the balance between

the Government and the scrutiny Committees. I hope that hon. Members accept that. However, points have been raised in previous debates on why we need that relentless scrutiny. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East said in the debate on the multi-annual financial framework that we need

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

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury said on Second Reading:

“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.”—*[Official Report, 11 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1389.]*

That is a very poor situation that we find ourselves in.

**Sir William Cash:** The hon. Lady referred to the need for relentless scrutiny. I have a thought in my mind that maybe some people think that the European Scrutiny Committee, at least over the last five years, has indeed been relentless in its scrutiny, and that goes for all members of the Committee, which has produced many unanimous reports. Is she effectively prepared not to press her amendment because of the problem I gave about the constant stream of legislative requirements that might interfere with our status as a European Committee?

**Barbara Keeley:** Indeed, we could do that. We would definitely want to press the other new clauses, but there was no intention to upset that balance. It has been suggested that the Minister could solve these matters by giving some kind of undertaking on the matters raised in our new clauses. We do not resile from the position that we want to send out the strongest possible message from this House that we are serious about scrutiny. The European Scrutiny Committee is of course relentless in its focus on those matters, and so too must the House be relentless. Doubtless we will have many more reports and reviews.

When in opposition, the Minister was part of the team that tabled an amendment to get a report, as I mentioned earlier. It was not agreed to at the time, but the Commission review went ahead anyway. The results of that report, which was published in 2010, were interesting. Its main finding—it was a very substantial finding—was that the current rules for the EU budget make it slow to react to unforeseen events, while too many complexities hinder its efficiency and transparency.

This is a week of tumultuous events for the European Union. The situation we find ourselves in with the EU budget, with its complexity, its slowness to react, the difficulty in balancing priorities and the fact that it does not represent the priorities that we think are important, means that it is clear to all—there is often broad agreement on this in the House, and I am sure that there will be today—that it is past the time when it needs to change.

Our remaining amendments would assist in ensuring that reports are made to the House on value for money, budgetary control and, importantly, budget priorities and waste and inefficiency. I commend them to the Committee.

**Sir William Cash:** I have already said much of what I need to say on new clause 3, which is my main concern today, so I will make only a few points. Basically, new clause 3 is inappropriate. The European Scrutiny Committee

does its job relentlessly, as the shadow Minister has just indicated, so there is no need for the new clause. We can invite officials to it if we wish to, and we do on occasion, but we are perpetually scrutinising the budget and recommending matters for consideration on the Floor of the House.

Imposing on the European Scrutiny Committee legislative functions that would be monitored by other Government Departments could cause enormous difficulty by interfering with its Standing Orders functions. Under the Standing Orders, the Committee has to form a judgment on what is of political and legal importance. We can invite European Commission budget representatives to see us, and indeed we can also recommend to the Treasury Committee, for example, that it might wish to do the same, so we already have various means at our disposal.

It is not necessary for me to repeat the points that I have already made in interventions. I am grateful to the shadow Minister for agreeing not to press new clause 3 and putting that on the record, so that in future nobody else is tempted to impose on the European Scrutiny Committee, or indeed on any Select Committee, legislative requirements that might in one way or another interfere with their discretionary judgments under the Standing Orders.

**Barbara Keeley:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept my assurance that we have no intention of doing that, but I also hope that he will agree that it is important to send out the strongest possible message that we are focusing on these matters relentlessly throughout the House, and that the European Scrutiny Committee will continue its excellent work.

**Sir William Cash:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady. I hope that she will not mind my mentioning the fact that she is sitting in glorious isolation on the Opposition Front Bench, and with nobody behind her, other than my friend the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), who is not known to be enthusiastic about all matters European. Perhaps the relentless scrutiny to which she refers could be improved by having a few more Labour Members here to support her.

**Alex Salmond:** It is a great pleasure to follow what must be the briefest speech I have ever heard from the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) on this subject—it is wonderful to see him able once again to stand in his place today.

Let me turn to the question of EU finance and agriculture. I know that agriculture is not a subject that much concerns the Conservative party; the Tory party these days is much more likely to be concerned with asset stripping, rather than agricultural production, and with financial derivatives, rather than agricultural crops—that is what gets its pulse moving.

I was concerned when the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) said that far too much of the European Union budget was consumed by the common agricultural policy. The fundamental reason for that—we did not hear this simple point from the Government Benches—is that the common agricultural policy is one of the few policies that financially is effectively under the competence of the European Union. If the European Union had competence over health, for example—I doubt that there is much support for that,

[Alex Salmond]

from me or anyone else in the House—its agricultural budget would be totally dwarfed by what it spent on health. The dominance of the agricultural budget is a factor of its being one of the European Union's relatively few common policies.

Of course, it is possible to argue that there should not be direct farm payments. Indeed, that was the argument that the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) took into the CAP negotiations. He started from the position that the UK Government, without much opposition from Members from rural constituencies in the Conservative interest, thought that there should not be direct farm payments, and he found himself in a minority of one in the negotiations; his position was not supported by any other member state. It was therefore decided that we were to continue with farm payments. Therefore, if we have a common agricultural policy, and it is a substantial part of the European Union's budget, it is reasonably important to ensure that our share of the agricultural budget as component nations in these islands is fair and competitive, because our agricultural production has to compete in that common market with that in other member states.

Does the Minister really think that the share allocated to UK agriculture, and to Scottish agriculture in particular, can be counted as a considerable achievement, as he claimed in his opening remarks? Let us remind ourselves of some of the facts. Under pillar one of the CAP budget, it was agreed that the lowest that any member state should receive in support was €196 per hectare. It was agreed in negotiations that each country in the original 15 would work to that minimum. Scotland receives substantially less than that—just over half of that payment per hectare. That is going to cost Scottish agriculture about £1 billion in the period to 2019.

**Mark Garnier:** The right hon. Gentleman said from a sedentary position during the Minister's speech that that was because Scottish farms are the biggest in the UK. It would be helpful if he could give a little flavour of the size of Scottish farms compared with English, Welsh and Irish farms, and how the numbers break down.

**Alex Salmond:** I was going to move on to that very point, because the Minister's reply to my intervention inspired me to go to the Library in search of some figures. I will answer that point in a moment.

Let me move on to pillar two, the second major aspect of agricultural support. I have been doing some comparisons and looked at what would have happened if in negotiations Scotland had achieved from pillar two the same amount of agricultural support as the Republic of Ireland, which in many ways is a comparable country with regard to land area and agriculture as a share of the overall economy. The answer is that Ireland has achieved a budget four times the size of Scotland's budget under pillar two—€2.19 billion compared with €478 million—in the years to 2019.

Given that it has been decided that the common agricultural policy should continue and that farm payments should continue to be made, how will it be possible for Scottish agriculture to compete effectively when it gets such a dramatically lower share than the minimum

allocated to any other EU country? Far from getting an excellent deal on pillar two to compensate for the poor deal on pillar one, Scotland gets a miserable share in comparison with comparable countries.

2.30 pm

That brings me to the point made by the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier). The Minister said that the comparison of support per hectare does not really matter. I would say that it is exactly what matters, given that agreements per hectare, per country govern the size of the overall budget.

As the Minister said, for the share per farm or per estate, there is a different figure and a different comparison. We have some very large farms and very large estates in Scotland. Indeed—this is the point that I was checking in the Library—500 companies or individuals own half of the country. That is how imbalanced is the concentration of ownership in Scottish agriculture and Scottish land. If someone is receiving a lower payment per hectare, that tends to favour and militate for even further concentration of land ownership.

I took the Minister's reply to me, when he alighted on a very significant point, as a coded call for the fairer distribution of land ownership in Scotland. I was inspired to look at an article in an edition of *The Spectator* only last month entitled "David Cameron's father in law offers to adopt a 'Rob Roy' style Scottish accent to stop 'Mugabe-style' land grab by SNP". In that article, Viscount Astor, presumably in *The Spectator* to get to the wide audience that the Conservative party was after in this European debate, was extremely suspicious of the SNP Scottish Government's proposals on land reform, which are being enunciated in the Scottish Parliament this very day. I am delighted to reassure the Minister that no Mugabe-style land grab is intended; we are just seeking a fairer distribution in agriculture so that family farms and communities across Scotland get a more equitable distribution of the land holdings. That also helps to answer his point. It cannot be seriously argued that we should look at payments per individual farm or estate—whether of 200, 300 acres, or, in the case of Viscount Astor, 20,000 acres. That cannot be used as a serious argument in relation to the imbalance of agricultural support.

Substantial insult has been added to injury in these matters. The European Union, after representations from the Scottish Government and others, tried, in a minimalist fashion, to address these imbalances, which had occurred due to the total incompetence of the UK Government's negotiations and their stance on the CAP. It decided to allocate €220 million as convergence money to take account of the fact that there was such an imbalance in support per hectare in the United Kingdom—in Scotland, in particular—compared with the rest of the Europe. All of that €220 million is to be distributed geographically across the UK instead of accepting that the UK is getting it because of the dramatic imbalance in terms of the huge land holdings in Scotland and the very, very low payments per hectare. I have heard that described in National Farmers Union meetings in Scotland as akin to embezzlement by the United Kingdom Government. That is how it is regarded. I hope that the Minister will at least revisit the issue of the convergence money, or if not, another issue that should be revisited—getting a fairer distribution of agricultural support.

An industry in a competitive position in a common market with other industries must have a fair distribution of support in order to compete effectively.

**Kevin Foster:** I have been listening with interest to the right hon. Gentleman's points about funding for Scotland. How does he think this support would be getting on without the benefit of the UK's rebate?

**Alex Salmond:** One of the reasons we do so incredibly badly in many European programmes as regards funding is that the Treasury's interest, when looking at additionality, as it calls it, is always to minimise EU expenditure. Although it is perfectly acceptable for the Government to defend the rebate, it is less acceptable to look at every European programme and try to minimise expenditure on it, because in doing so, we lose some of the alternative opportunities that the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South talked about. If the Treasury looks at every European programme and says, "How do we minimise spending?", what follows as a natural consequence is that our share of that spending is also diminished. In the case of the common agricultural policy, it is possible to make a direct connection with the negotiating stance of the right hon. Member for North Shropshire, who was trying to abolish farm payments altogether and got the miserable, unfair and inequitable distribution of support that has been the end result of the CAP negotiations.

The Minister—I am not sure if it was a dead bat, a glorious drive through covers, or a catch at slips—rather evaded the direct question of what is the Prime Minister's negotiating stance on the budget. The Minister said, after being passed a note, that the Prime Minister's stance was to cut the whole budget and to protect the UK rebate. Let me point out that that has been the Government's stance and policy since they took office in 2010; it is not a particular stance for these renegotiations. What the Minister is being asked—we really would like an answer—is whether the Prime Minister has a specific target in mind in renegotiations for changes in the EU budget or the UK contribution to it, and if so, what it is. Failure to answer that question throughout the debate adds to the no doubt unworthy, but considerable, suspicion shared across this Chamber that the Prime Minister is adopting this nebulous approach to what are his negotiating aims so that whatever he comes back with can be announced as a fundamental achievement. That does not stand scrutiny in this Committee, but even more importantly, it is a particularly poor campaigning argument in favour of the European cause.

I hope that the Minister—the last man in—will rise to the occasion by confirming that he is in favour of more equitable distribution of land ownership in Scotland and by giving us an insight into the Prime Minister's true negotiating hand in the coming arguments and discussions in the European Union.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The speech by the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) is tremendously important and gets to the heart of one of the issues we have with the common agricultural policy, although, not surprisingly, I look at it in a different way from the question of socialism and land holdings that the SNP is going for.

The issue, as has been discussed in the European Scrutiny Committee, is that over the years our farmers have increasingly become so efficient and large that

there has been a good deal of consolidation. That applies very much in my constituency among dairy farmers. The number of dairy farms has reduced significantly and they are bigger farms proportionately, but European subsidies tend to go to smaller farms disproportionately. Therefore, we find that British farmers are disadvantaged. I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that if, under a system of farming subsidies and a competitive framework, that means that people are getting handouts from the European Union, British farmers—farmers in the United Kingdom—do not get the equivalent subsidies to farmers on the continent, they are disadvantaged because their cost base is automatically higher and their profitability is reduced. Therefore, when we are arguing for careful consideration, overview and oversight of expenditure in the European Union, and reductions in the common agricultural policy, we have to ensure that the cuts are made in a way that is fair to the UK farmer. Even if our end objective is the entire elimination of agricultural subsidies, it must be done in a way—

**Jim Shannon:** As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is well aware, the farms in Northern Ireland are smaller. They are greater today than they were, say, 20 years ago, but they are still not big in comparison with those on the UK mainland. Does he agree that there needs to be consideration for the farms in Northern Ireland, particularly in my constituency of Strangford? He seems to be referring to farms that are very large. In Northern Ireland, we have farms with an average of 150 acres.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am very sympathetic to farmers and I ought to declare an interest as I have a little land in Somerset, although sadly not a great deal and I do not farm directly. If I did, I would certainly count as a very, very small farmer. In the past a slice has been taken from the biggest receivers of European subsidies, so the farms that have been the most consolidated and efficient lose subsidies at a faster rate than other farms. I think that protection is already in place—

**Alex Salmond:** That is why the protection built into the agricultural settlement of €196 per hectare is so important, and why it is so disadvantageous that it is almost half that figure in Scotland. That is why the minimum per hectare is so important.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Being more traditional, I prefer a minimum per acre, but otherwise I am broadly in agreement with the right hon. Gentleman. I agree that it is not right to look at the issue purely in terms of the landowner, because that discourages consolidation. As Conservatives, we are in favour of efficiency in all industries, but the subsidy system across Europe not only disadvantages our farmers, but discourages consolidation and efficiency. That cannot be the right approach.

**Peter Grant:** Is the hon. Gentleman telling us that consolidation and enlargement always equal efficiency? Does he not recognise that, especially in agriculture, there are significant community and social benefits to allowing small, family owned farms to continue in existence?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** There are great advantages to having small, family owned farms, but we need an efficient agricultural system that provides the food and produce

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

the country needs. I do not think one should be unduly sentimental for agriculture against other industries. As a lover of the countryside and of our rural traditions, I am tempted to fall in line with the hon. Gentleman, who represents Glenrothes. The constituency was called Central Fife when I stood there—unsuccessfully, just for the record. However, although I am sympathetic to his point, I think it is important to have efficient agriculture first when spending other hard-pressed taxpayers' money. It ought not to be entirely about sentimentality.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). Before I turn to the main part of the my speech, I would like to comment on what he has just said. Some 34 years ago, my then 11-year-old son had a discussion at his primary school about what was then called the Common Market. He was asked about the common agricultural policy, which he knew a lot about because he listened to me at home. His teacher asked him, "What is the CAP?" He said, "It's the common agricultural policy." His teacher asked, "What is that about, then, Daniel?" He said, "It's a way of subsidising inefficient small farms," and 34 years on, the hon. Gentleman has raised exactly the same point. Some things do not change very much. I think my son is the same age as the hon. Gentleman.

It is also a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), who sits on the Front Bench, and support two of her new clauses and her amendment. On new clause 3, I am pleased that she has acceded to the sensible point made by the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee, of which I am also a member. I will, however, support my hon. Friend in the Lobby later on her other new clauses.

I have spoken probably 100 times in European debates in this Chamber over the past 18 years. I have said some of what I am going to say today a number of times before, but in order to make an effect in politics I think we must sometimes repeat messages over and over again, hoping that, in time, one's colleagues, particularly those on the Front Bench, will listen, agree, take note and act accordingly.

I was also much taken by the hon. Gentleman's comment that when he rebelled he was trying to help his Front-Bench colleagues. That is a splendid idea. If ever I am moved to rebel in future, I shall tell my Whip that I am trying to help our Front-Bench colleagues and I hope she will accept it in that spirit.

The most interesting new clause is new clause 2, which is about expenditure. I have said many times that I believe that the common agricultural policy ought to be repatriated to member states for them to decide how to subsidise their own agriculture, and that the CAP's structures should be dismantled. We would certainly benefit from that financially in more than one way, including by not paying in so much. We could subsidise at exactly the same level and possibly in exactly the same way, but still be better off because we would not be paying into something where we are net losers.

2.45 pm

Beyond that, food prices have, over decades, been higher than they would have been if we were not in the CAP and could buy food on world markets. Indeed, one

of the markets we could buy in would be within the European Union itself. There are some low-cost food producers, particularly in eastern Europe, from whom we might buy food. A year or two ago, the Chairman of the ESC and I visited Lithuania, where I discovered, much to my surprise, that Lithuania used to be self-sufficient in food production. Now it is being paid to not grow food, and large swathes of land in Lithuania are lying fallow. It is nonsense that a poorer country that was self-sufficient is now being paid to not grow food. If it were allowed to grow as much food as it liked and we could buy it at relatively lower prices, that would be a very sensible arrangement. The CAP should be repatriated to member states, something which I think would, in the end, be to everyone's advantage.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has ever been to Iceland, Norway, the Faroe Islands or places further north of Scotland, but he would see greater use of land there than in the highlands and islands of Scotland, because the agricultural support is so much better. On repatriation, would there not be a danger to some countries that the Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-American model of economics would suck out the little money that is there and give it to London, which does not put it around its own state? At least with Europe we have some sort of guarantee that we will get the money, even though we are among the least favoured areas of the land.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** The hon. Gentleman's point tempts me to talk at greater length about a broader, more socialist approach to running the world, with which I strongly agree. If I did so, however, I think I would set too many hares running and Mr Williams would call me to order very quickly.

The CAP is nonsense. We ought to abolish it and repatriate agricultural policy to member states. We can decide in our own country which parts of agriculture should be subsidised and to what extent, and we can decide where and when we buy food. We might choose to subsidise to keep agriculture sustained in this country for strategic reasons. During the second world war we needed to produce food for ourselves, and all countries have to bear those sorts of factors in mind when deciding what they produce.

Interestingly, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) obviously does not like the common agricultural policy or the common fisheries policy very much. I am surprised that the SNP is in favour of the European Union at all.

**Alex Salmond:** The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. I think that the CAP is a failure of UK Government negotiation, as I have tried to explain. On the CFP, however, he is on much stronger ground: I would support a treaty amendment to change it substantially and remove it from central control.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** We are in strong agreement on that point. I have said many times in this Chamber that we ought to give notice of withdrawal from the CFP if it is not abolished in total. Countries could then manage their own fisheries with a 200-mile or 50/50 limit. In that way, fish stocks could be recovered, because they

would be managed at a national level and we would license fishing for our own fishermen. In addition, if any other fishing boats came from outside, they would have to be licensed and managed properly.

**Alex Salmond:** To pursue my point, is it not strange that the Government never mention treaty amendment to the common fisheries policy as an objective, even though it would certainly be within the competence of this financial Bill? Everything else is mentioned as an objective in the renegotiation, but to my knowledge the Prime Minister has never identified the common fisheries policy as something that he is even trying to get change on, far less a treaty amendment.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a strong point. That is one of my red lines, and I shall put that case to the Prime Minister when I have an opportunity. I have said that many times before in the Chamber.

**Jim Shannon:** As I said earlier, I represent the constituency of Strangford, and the fishing industry is particularly important to me. We have had a cod recovery programme in the Irish sea for the past 10 to 12 years, and there are greater numbers of cod than there have ever been during that time and the fish are bigger. However, Europe restricts our fishermen's ability to fish those cod. That is an example of why we need a new common fisheries policy that local people can control and have an input in.

**The Temporary Chair (Hywel Williams):** Order. I hope that the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) will not go too far down that line of discussion.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I shall move on to my other points in a second, Mr Williams, but I agree with the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) that if member states control their own fisheries, they will be able to stop irresponsible fishing and the plundering of fish stocks by other nations.

**Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con):** Going back to what the hon. Gentleman said a few moments ago about agriculture, is he aware that many farmers do not want to leave the EU because they feel they would be treated less generously? However, if Britain came out of the Union, would we as a net contributor not have more money to spend on farming if we wished to do so?

**Kelvin Hopkins:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a strong point. I have said that if we were outside the EU, we would be better off financially and could choose what we subsidised, how and to what extent. We could choose what sort of farming we wanted to sustain. I have made the point before that small hill farmers in Wales, who are part of our rural culture, ought to be preserved. They might not be very efficient, but we could perhaps choose to subsidise them. For other forms of farming we might choose to maintain the subsidies at the current level, but we would make that choice democratically through our Government and this Parliament.

**Mr MacNeil:** The glib answer that has often been given to me in the House in years past as to why we should maintain the common fisheries policy is that

fish do not have passports. Of course that neglects the reality that there are three types of stocks: migratory stocks, non-migratory stocks and straddling stocks. We can look at what happens in countries that control their own fisheries, such as Iceland. Jóhann Sigurjónsson, the chief fishing scientist of Iceland, tells me that its fishing has so improved, and trawlers are catching the cod stocks so much more quickly, that fishermen are actually getting frustrated. They are being so successful and doing their work in so little time that they want to go and catch more. That is a sign of their success, having managed their own stocks for a number of decades.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Indeed. The hon. Gentleman is well ahead of me in his expertise in the matter, but the basic point is that we should control our own fish stocks and manage them properly.

I have one or two other points to make about expenditure in the EU budget. From time to time we have discussed international aid. My view, and I think the view of the Department for International Development, is that we would spend international aid better than it is spent through the European Union. We would target and manage it better and try to ensure that it was spent in a less corrupt way in certain countries. Countries would do better to manage their own aid donations abroad than have them dealt with through the European Union. Aid is therefore another component of the EU budget that could be taken away.

Then we come to structural funds. Again, I believe that member states, particularly our own country, are best able to judge what regional assistance they need to provide. We could target that assistance better than when it is decided by the European Union. As part of our regional policy, we might want to have state aid to assist the growth of manufacturing in some of the less successful regions of our country. Manufacturing is too small as a proportion of our economy, and if we want to expand and improve our manufacturing sector to help investment, we might want to use state aid, which is forbidden under the EU arrangements.

**Mr MacNeil:** Is not the great danger that the high priest of the austerity cult, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, would drive austerity further and we would not see the spending that we currently see in areas of Wales and in the highlands and islands of Scotland?

**Alex Salmond:** He'd keep it all for himself.

**Mr MacNeil:** He would keep it all in London. If that were to happen, we would need full fiscal autonomy, or indeed independence, to ensure that areas of Scotland were well protected.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, but it is a counsel of despair to say that because we cannot trust our own Government, we have to go to the European Union. I was on a march through London opposing austerity last Saturday, and there were tens of thousands of people there who felt strongly about it. Even though we may have Governments we do not like from time to time, we have the chance of pressurising them in the short term and getting rid of them and replacing them with more progressive Governments in the long term.

[Kelvin Hopkins]

Pressurising Governments is what I do in politics, as I think Members of all parties do. I want to see the Government elected in this country governing this country, not giving away our powers so that we are governed by a bureaucracy in Brussels or wherever.

I have mentioned spending on the CAP, aid, structural funds, regional policy and so on. If we had responsibility for those things, some of the fiscal transfers that effectively take place between the richer and poorer countries in the European Union might no longer happen. If we want fiscal transfers, the way to do it would be for us to make substantial contributions to a fund that could be allocated to the Governments of less well-off countries. Lithuania, Latvia, Poland or wherever could benefit from donations, but they would go to those countries' Governments, who would decide how that money ought to be spent in their countries. It would not be about the European Union subsidising certain sectors in a way that may or may not be beneficial to those countries. As I said, in Lithuania, and no doubt in other countries, they are being paid not to grow agricultural products and their own food. That is nonsensical, and I wish to see an end to it. If we want fiscal transfers, let them be up front. Let us contribute to a fund that poorer countries in the EU, or in a new association of member states, could draw on. That would be a more sensible way forward.

Of course, that would loosen the bonds of the European Union. We would not have decisions about all sorts of sectors being made by the Commission in Brussels. They would be made by democratic Governments, and we would have a looser association of states within Europe, which would be a much more sensible way of operating. I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South said, and I support her probing new clauses and her amendment 1, which we hope to be voting on soon.

**The Temporary Chair (Hywel Williams):** I call Peter Grant.

**Peter Grant:** Tapadh leibh—thank you, Mr Williams. I apologise for not being able to say that in Welsh despite your attempts at tuition last night. I will keep practising.

It struck me after hearing the first two speakers in the debate that we had spent an hour and 45 minutes discussing the Bill and the only point of contention appeared to be whether the Government should write letters, and, if so, how many. If we are serious about sorting out great European institutions that are inefficient and have a lot of waste, I suspect that many of the audience of millions watching live on television will ask us to hold a mirror up to our own face. A debate such as this surely cannot be what this place was designed for.

3 pm

I have found it quite interesting that, although in theory the Bill is about agreeing how the European Union brings in its money, a lot of today's discussion has been about what happens to the money afterwards. One big problem with the way the European Union manages—or does not manage—its finances is there is still a complete divorce between decisions on how much money it needs and who pays it, and on how much

money is going to be spent and how. Until the European Union brings those two big decisions closer together, we are always likely to have anomalies.

We talk all the time about what the EU costs, but at some point in the future perhaps we will talk about the benefits we get—or could hope to get—from it. I am an accountant by profession, and, if it is true that an accountant is someone who knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing, the Government Benches are today full of accountants. We have had a lot of questions about whose fault it is that costs have gone up, and who gets the credit for costs coming down. We have not heard an awful lot about the benefits, and that is worrying when we are approaching a referendum that could see us torn out of the European Union—even if we vote to stay in. Talking about the benefits should mean talking about not just getting more money out than we put in, however, because it does not take a genius or even an accountant to work out that not everybody in the European Union can carry on taking out more than they put in.

As a trading island state, surely there is a benefit to the removal of trade barriers. I can remember the trade wars, as a wee boy, when the United Kingdom did something to upset the French, so the French discovered that British lamb was no longer fit for French consumers, and in retaliation, and completely by coincidence, the United Kingdom discovered that French apples did not quite come up to our standards—and so it went on. It was great for lawyers; it was probably quite good for the politicians; but it did not help the producers of those foodstuffs, because they spent longer arguing about who was allowed to buy and sell what, and less time producing and making their businesses more efficient.

We should never allow ourselves to forget that this year we mark 70 years since the United Kingdom was at war with Germany. I do not think that condition has existed at any time before 1945. I have been back through the books and cannot find a period of 75 years without a major war between the countries of western Europe. Surely that has to be celebrated, and it is no coincidence that it started with the establishment of the common market and with European nations looking for ways to settle their disputes without going to war. That has to be a massive benefit of continued co-operation among European nations.

My position, and that of the Scottish National party, is that we want to be citizens of the European Union in such a way that we can have a state of co-operation with our European neighbours without losing the sovereign rights of the people of Scotland. We want our co-operative relationship with our neighbours across the North Sea to be exactly the same as that with our neighbours across the Irish Sea and, indeed, across the River Tweed.

There has been a lot of talk about the common fisheries policy and common agricultural policy. It should hardly be a surprise that Scotland does not get a good deal out of the common agricultural policy, because the longest-serving, most respected Agriculture Minister in the whole of Europe, possibly in the whole world, is not allowed to take part in those discussions, as he is not a Minister of a member state. We are represented by somebody who has not even been elected—who has never faced the test of public accountability at the ballot box. We in Scotland have an Agriculture Minister who is quite possibly unique in the world, in that he

holds the full confidence of his Government and the absolute trust of farmers at the same time, but he is not let through the door to be part of those discussions.

It should not be any surprise that the common fisheries policy has never worked for Scotland, when Luxembourg gets a vote on it and we do not. Luxembourg's population is the same size as Edinburgh's. I do not consider myself to have a coastal constituency, but my constituency has a bigger coastline than Luxembourg—indeed, my constituency has a coastline. Is it any surprise that so many of the major pillars of EU policy do not work in the communities where they have an effect, when so many decisions are taken by people who represent nations that do not have a fishing industry, and where agriculture is peripheral to their economy, rather than central not only to their economic but social well being, as in nations such as Scotland and, indeed, Northern Ireland and Wales?

A Conservative Member asked about the SNP's position on Europe. I would love to see what deal Scotland could get out of Europe if we had a voice in Europe. At the moment every representation that we make to Europe has to go through the Westminster filter, and I do not blame that filter for changing them to act in the interests of the majority of the citizens of the United Kingdom. We are outnumbered by 10, 11, or 12-1 in population terms, so the representations that the UK Government make to Europe will always be loaded towards what they see to be in the best interest of the major nation.

**Alex Salmond:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point about the likely outcome of Scottish negotiations in Europe, but it is highly unlikely that any Scottish negotiator would come back with less agriculture support than the minimum awarded to every other European nation.

**Peter Grant:** I do not know whether that is a bid to be the first independent Scottish ambassador to the European Union, but if I am in a position to put anybody's name forward I shall certainly bear in mind my right hon. Friend. He makes a valid point, which is related to the question he has asked repeatedly and on which he has still not had an answer: what the Prime Minister's negotiating position and priorities are going to be. The fishing industry is not a massively important part of the United Kingdom's economy; it is a massively important part of the economies of some nations that make up the United Kingdom. The negotiations are, however, always carried out through the Westminster lens, and it is as seen as a major achievement when all we come back with is, "Not too many things have got worse." We talk about aspiration. I think aspiration means we want things to get better, not to think we have achieved a lot when we come back from negotiations and have not had to lose too much.

The European Union does not manage its finances very well at all. We do not need to be accountants to work that out. Most companies would not be allowed to continue if they went 20 years without having their accounts signed off. Sometimes we need to look, however, at how we manage the part of it for which we are responsible. Some questions today, particularly those from the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) on the Labour Front Bench, about scrutiny of the European budget and the performance

and financial management of the European Union, were pointing to weaknesses in the way this House holds Europe to account. That points either to a lack of involvement of members of the European Scrutiny Committee, or to the fact that it has not been given sufficient powers. There are many weaknesses in the way European finances affect the responsibilities of this Chamber, and changes could be made to the way this House holds Europe to account, but their delivery does not necessarily mean having to threaten to walk away from Europe altogether.

As I said in an earlier intervention, I do not see why the amendment needs to be put to a vote. It does not contain anything that the Government should be reluctant to do. I defer to the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), who has left the Chamber, and his expertise on the procedures of the House and the position of the EU Scrutiny Committee, but it is time to put on a statutory basis a process whereby the Government ask things of Europe on our behalf—and which no Government in their right mind should be reluctant to do. How could any Government not want to ask Europe to be more accountable, or to think a wee bit more carefully about its spending priorities before it sets them? I hope that we see an outbreak of common sense among Government Members.

The United Kingdom's position in whatever negotiations the Prime Minister has would be strengthened if we could find a way for this Bill to be amended and approved unopposed. If the proposed changes are put to a vote, I am minded to go with them. It would be sad if it were a matter of public record that this Committee had divided on such an important matter—on the crucial question of whether we wanted the Secretary of State to write a letter to Europe.

**Mr Gauke:** We have had a wide-ranging debate over the past two and a half hours. The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) was not far off the substance of the matter before us: the disagreement is over whether there should be placed in statute a requirement to write a letter.

I recognise the spirit of the proposed changes before us, and the need for us to improve the value of expenditure in the European Union, to cut down on waste and to increase transparency. We strongly support and have advocated those points.

I have to say that writing to the Commission, asking it to review the issues, will not particularly achieve the objectives we have heard set out, but the Government have taken action and continue to do so to improve EU spending. That began with the Prime Minister's historic deal, cutting the budget in real terms. It has forced the Commission to prioritise, which we very much welcome, and it has led to the Commission's budget for results initiative. The UK is playing an active role in that process, and we continue to push the Commission to bear down on waste in its responses to the EU budget discharge process. The Government are contributing to the simplification proposals from the Commission, and the UK will continue to fight for restraint in the annual budget.

Those steps have led to concrete results: the Commission has become more transparent and has shifted more funding into pro-growth spending. We certainly make no apologies for that—although there appears to be

[Mr Gauke]

some resistance to it in some parts of the House—and the UK’s contributions will be lower for every year in this seven-year deal period than in the final year of the last MFF deal. That is a saving of almost £8 billion over the forecast period compared with 2013-14.

**Barbara Keeley:** If the Minister is resisting the amendments, and it sounds as though he is, will he tell the Committee whether he is happy with the balance of priorities in the spending on competitiveness for jobs and growth, which was a key point that I spent time discussing? He seems to be resisting any attempt to put forward a review or report that would make it easier for the House to push for changes, so is he happy with the current balance?

**Mr Gauke:** In the 2013 negotiations, we achieved a shift towards a greater proportion of expenditure being on pro-growth measures, such as research and development, and away from other areas of expenditure that contribute less to growth. That includes the common agricultural policy. The hon. Lady says that it is a small amount. Actually, it was not; there was significant progress in terms of a reduction in the common agricultural policy, with more spending on those areas where we think there could be greater added value. That is the right direction. I again have to draw the contrast with the surrender of £2 billion a year in respect of our rebate for common agricultural policy reform that we did not see—I am afraid that that is the record of the last Labour Government with the 2005 deal. I therefore believe that we are moving in the right direction.

If the hon. Lady is asking, “Would we like to go further?”, then, yes, I very much support that view. We want to go further and see a greater emphasis on expenditure that provides better value for money for UK and EU taxpayers. That is very much what we want, but I question the idea that the letter she is calling for will make any difference, particularly when we are seeing progress with the Commission’s budget for results initiative. The working group will meet for the first time in July and there will be a major conference in September 2015. We want to continue that approach during the mid-term review, which, as I said, will occur in 2016.

**Barbara Keeley:** The Minister was unable to give a date. Mid-term reviews are one thing, but we are moving towards a referendum, as we all know. We are all going to have to build this case for our constituents and for the campaign out there, and we need the information sooner. The slow trundling-on of the EU Commission will not suit our need for that information in this country, in this year and the next. I invite the Minister to come to my constituency and try to explain that this is a really good deal—the split between competitiveness and growth, and the amount that is spent on research and development—when we really should be pushing for that for our economy. We need to explain that and we need the review to be done sooner. He cannot even say when it is going to be done in 2016—it may be too late.

**Mr Gauke:** The MFF will be in 2016, as I said. The reality is that trying to transfer expenditure in the way we certainly want to—and from what the hon. Lady is saying, she also wants to, although it does not seem to

have support in all parts of the House—is a major task. We have made progress. If she is saying that the situation is frustrating and she would like to go faster, I am not disagreeing with her, but I am afraid that that is the way the European Union works. We have clearly made progress and I do not think it does her cause any good to downplay our progress.

3.15 pm

**Alex Salmond** *rose*—

**Mr Gauke:** I was going to turn directly to the common agricultural policy, for which the right hon. Gentleman is such an enthusiast, subject to his complaint that he would like Scotland to have a greater share of the money that comes to the United Kingdom.

During the renegotiation, we faced the fact that the UK’s CAP receipts would fall over the next budgetary period in real terms. The conclusion was that the fairest way of allocating that cut was through an equal, proportionate reduction in both pillars across the United Kingdom. To have allocated more funding to Scotland or any other part of the United Kingdom would have meant deeper cuts across the rest of the United Kingdom. That was why the Government took the steps we did.

**Alex Salmond:** Rather than bemoaning the £2 billion the Labour party lost in respect of the budget rebate, will the Minister revisit the €220 million of convergence money that the Government chose not to distribute by hectare, which is the basis on which we got it in the first place? Does he realise how much bitterness that decision caused in the rural communities of Scotland? It no doubt contributed to the Conservative party’s worst election result in Scotland for a century last month.

**Mr Gauke:** I will briefly make two points to the right hon. Gentleman. There is no additional money for the United Kingdom. Over the next funding period, the UK’s direct payments will fall by about €500 million compared with 2013. The most appropriate way of allocating that cut, as I said earlier, is to share it equally between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. To have given more money to Scotland would have meant a greater reduction across the rest of the UK.

If the right hon. Gentleman objects to that approach, let me put it in context. Regions are allocated structural funds according to a Commission formula that was agreed as part of the MFF deal, which takes into account, among other factors, regional wealth relative to the EU average. As a result of the new EU formula for allocating structural funds, there would not have been a fair distribution across the UK, with each of the devolved Administrations set to lose out significantly. In 2013, the Government decided to correct that. As a result, Northern Ireland’s allocation was increased by €181 million, Scotland’s by €228 million and Wales’s by €375 million. That meant that all parts of the UK were subject to an equal cut. We believe that that delivered the fairest deal for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. However, the right hon. Gentleman chose not to draw the Committee’s attention to that example of equal treatment, which benefited Scotland.

**Alex Salmond:** The Minister would probably get more information from *The Scottish Farmer* than he is getting from his civil service briefs. There was €220 million of

convergence money to take account of the fact that per hectare, particularly in Scotland, we were receiving so much less than the minimum that was allocated to other countries. The question is quite a simple one. The vast majority of people think that it would have been fair to distribute that convergence funding per hectare, because that was why we were getting it. Why was that not done, and will he revisit that bad decision?

**Mr Gauke:** I say again that the right hon. Gentleman really must look at the overall treatment. When we look at agriculture spending and the structural funds, we see that there has been fair treatment of each part of the United Kingdom to ensure that no one part suffers as a result of changes to the EU budget. I say to him that if we can find savings in the common agricultural policy, we should do so.

We have had a wide-ranging debate. When it comes down to it, I believe that there is support for the clauses in the Bill, but it appears that the Opposition wish to press their new clauses that call on us to write letters calling for action, ignoring that that action is already being taken and that there is already going to be a review of the MFF by the Council of Ministers. The Commission is already following the Prime Minister's historic deal by focusing on prioritising expenditure. I am afraid that the letters that the Opposition propose will achieve nothing of substance and do not belong in a Bill that is focused on revenue, rather than expenditure. I therefore urge the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) not to press her amendment and new clauses, and urge hon. Members to support the clauses of the Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 2

REPEAL, EXTENT, COMMENCEMENT AND SHORT TITLE

*Amendment proposed:* 1, page 1, line 18, leave out subsection (3).—(Barbara Keeley.)

*This amendment removes the automatic coming into force of the Act two months after it is passed, which would be incompatible with any of the new Clauses.*

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 254, Noes 301.*

**Division No. 23]**

**[3.20 pm**

### AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Blomfield, Paul
Abrahams, Debbie	Boswell, Philip
Alexander, Heidi	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Ali, Rushanara	Brennan, Kevin
Allen, Mr Graham	Brock, Deidre
Anderson, Mr David	Brown, Alan
Arkless, Richard	Brown, Lyn
Ashworth, Jonathan	Burden, Richard
Austin, Ian	Burgon, Richard
Barron, rh Kevin	Butler, Dawn
Beckett, rh Margaret	Byrne, rh Liam
Benn, rh Hilary	Cadbury, Ruth
Black, Ms Mhairi	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Blackford, Ian	Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Blackman, Kirsty	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair

Champion, Sarah	Healey, rh John
Chapman, Douglas	Hendry, Drew
Chapman, Jenny	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Clwyd, rh Ann	Hermon, Lady
Coaker, Vernon	Hillier, Meg
Coffey, Ann	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Cooper, Julie	Hopkins, Kelvin
Cooper, Rosie	Hosie, Stewart
Cooper, rh Yvette	Howarth, rh Mr George
Cowan, Ronnie	Hunt, Tristram
Cox, Jo	Huq, Dr Rupa
Coyle, Neil	Hussain, Imran
Crausby, Mr David	Irranca-Davies, Huw
Crawley, Angela	Jarvis, Dan
Cruddas, Jon	Johnson, Diana
Cryer, John	Jones, Helen
Cummins, Judith	Jones, Mr Kevan
Cunningham, Alex	Jones, Susan Elan
Dakin, Nic	Kane, Mike
Danczuk, Simon	Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
David, Wayne	Keeley, Barbara
Day, Martyn	Kendall, Liz
Debonnaire, Thangam	Kerevan, George
Docherty, Martin John	Kerr, Calum
Donaldson, Stuart Blair	Khan, rh Sadiq
Doughty, Stephen	Kinnock, Stephen
Dowd, Jim	Kyle, Peter
Dowd, Peter	Lammy, rh Mr David
Dromey, Jack	Lavery, Ian
Dugher, Michael	Leslie, Chris
Durkan, Mark	Lewis, Clive
Eagle, Ms Angela	Lewis, Mr Ivan
Eagle, Maria	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Edwards, Jonathan	Lucas, Caroline
Efford, Clive	Lucas, Ian C.
Elliott, Julie	MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Esterson, Bill	Madders, Justin
Evans, Chris	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Farrelly, Paul	Mahmood, Shabana
Fellows, Marion	Malhotra, Seema
Ferrier, Margaret	Mann, John
Field, rh Frank	Marris, Rob
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Marsden, Mr Gordon
Fleelo, Robert	Maskell, Rachael
Fletcher, Colleen	Matheson, Christian
Flint, rh Caroline	Mc Nally, John
Fovargue, Yvonne	McCabe, Steve
Foxcroft, Vicky	McCaig, Callum
Gapes, Mike	McCarthy, Kerry
Gardiner, Barry	McDonagh, Siobhain
Gethins, Stephen	McDonald, Andy
Gibson, Patricia	McDonald, Stewart
Glindon, Mary	McDonnell, John
Godsiff, Mr Roger	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Goodman, Helen	McGarry, Natalie
Grady, Patrick	McGinn, Conor
Grant, Peter	McGovern, Alison
Gray, Neil	McInnes, Liz
Green, Kate	McLaughlin, Anne
Greenwood, Lilian	Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Greenwood, Margaret	Mearns, Ian
Griffith, Nia	Monaghan, Carol
Gwynne, Andrew	Monaghan, Dr Paul
Haigh, Louise	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Hamilton, Fabian	Morden, Jessica
Hanson, rh Mr David	Morris, Grahame M.
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Mulholland, Greg
Harpham, Harry	Mullin, Roger
Harris, Carolyn	Murray, Ian
Hayes, Helen	Newlands, Gavin
Hayman, Sue	Nicolson, John

O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owen, Albert  
 Paterson, Steven  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Pugh, John  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Jamie  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Marie  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robertson, Angus  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Salmond, rh Alex  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff

Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thomson, Michelle  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Weir, Mike  
 West, Catherine  
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Wilson, Corri  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Tom Blenkinsop and**  
**Graham Jones**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Mr Henry  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter

Bradley, Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, Alun  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey

Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matthew  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heappey, James

Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Boris  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David

Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Phillips, Stephen  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark

Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond  
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame Angela  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Simon Kirby and**  
**Mel Stride**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.*

*Bill reported, without amendment.*

*Third Reading*

3.36 pm

**Mr Gauke:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill gives UK approval to the financing aspects of the 2013 EU budget deal. As hon. Members will recall, in 2013, the Prime Minister secured a deal that delivered the first ever real-terms cut to the EU budget and preserved our rebate. If we are tightening our belts at home, we should not be spending more through

the EU—and thanks to the Prime Minister's historic deal, we are not. It is a good deal for the taxpayer now and over the coming years.

In addition to forcing restraint on EU expenditure on the revenue side, it was a specific UK objective that there would be no new types of member state contribution; no new EU-wide taxes to finance EU spending; and no change to the UK rebate. That is precisely what we achieved. The political agreement at the February 2013 European Council was accurately reflected in the new own resources decision. This sets out the system of financing the EU budget until 2020, and was agreed unanimously by member states at a meeting of the Council of Ministers in May 2014.

Hon. Members will have noted that the ORD reintroduces reductions in the gross national income-based contributions of the Netherlands and Sweden, and introduces small reductions in those contributions for Denmark and Austria. The UK will contribute to these small corrections, but this will largely be offset by changes to other corrections. The UK has always supported the principle of budgetary corrections set out at the 1984 Fontainebleau European Council, which gave us our own rebate. In the absence of any meaningful reform on the expenditure side of the EU budget, we believe that those member states that, like the UK, make disproportionately large net contributions in relation to their prosperity, should receive corrections.

The Bill will give UK approval to the unanimous agreement on the new ORD—an agreement that maintains the existing system of financing the EU budget. That means no new types of member state contributions; no new EU-wide taxes to finance EU spending; and, crucially, no change to our rebate.

This agreement is in our national interest. It also serves as an important reminder of what can be done when we are tough, constructive, positive and determined in negotiations with European partners. The agreement that will be implemented by this Bill is a good deal for Britain and a good deal for Europe, and I commend it to the House.

3.39 pm

**Barbara Keeley:** I am glad that new clauses 1 and 2 were discussed earlier. Given the result of the vote, I urge the Minister to consider the importance of keeping EU budget spending under review. As I said earlier, the system of commitments and payments is worrying. We want a system of budgetary control, not a system that drives up the pressure for increases through unpaid bills and commitments made in years past.

I also urge the Minister to continue to focus on the need for reform of EU budget priorities, which we spent some time discussing, and, in particular, on the need to increase funding for competitiveness, jobs and growth. It is important for Ministers to be able to reshape EU budget priorities, but, following our discussions, I am not sure that they have that ability.

The Minister resisted our amendments, and resisted our requests for him to make a sensible undertaking that would have removed the necessity for a vote. His position on our amendment and new clauses suggests that he is content with the reports and reviews that are trundling along in the EU, and it does not send the strong message that could be sent about the need for

[Barbara Keeley]

enhanced scrutiny and reformed priorities. That is a pity, and I hope that the Minister will continue to reflect on it.

3.40 pm

**Alex Salmond:** Thinking back to all the Committee sittings, I recall that the Minister did not feel able to give an effective answer to questions about the Prime Minister's negotiating stance in relation to the forthcoming European question and, particularly, European finances. He was asked a number of times—by me and by other Members, including Labour Front Benchers—what would be distinctive about that stance, and what the Prime Minister's precise objectives were. The Minister responded by telling us that the Government's objective was to minimise the EU budget, to ensure that it was efficient, and to protect the rebate, but that has been Government policy for a number of years. What really interested Members was whether the Prime Minister had a specific intent and negotiating stance, and what his objectives were. We were interested in those questions in the context of European finances, so that we could judge his success or failure after the negotiations.

If the Minister does not feel able to provide an answer to what strikes me as a very reasonable and fair question, he will add to and fuel suspicions among both pro- and anti-Europeans in the House that it is not just a question of the Prime Minister's having a stance, but of the Prime Minister and the Government deliberately concealing the nature of that stance from the House and the country, so that it will not be possible for them to be judged effectively when the negotiations are over. That seems to me to be a fundamentally

unsatisfactory way to proceed in regard to any financial issue, let alone an issue as important as European finance.

The Minister shakes his head. I hope that, if he disagrees, he will intervene and reveal what the Prime Minister's stance actually is, because we are all mystified by what the targets are in the negotiations that are at this moment taking place in various European capitals. The Prime Minister, on our behalf and at our expense, is moving from capital to capital, and the only people who are not to be informed of his actual negotiating posture are the Members of this House and the people of this country. That is a remarkable position.

I am familiar with the Minister's steady hand at the Dispatch Box, and with his wonderful cover drive. I know that he would not want, at the very last minute of the Bill's progress in the House of Commons, to be caught at slip in not answering a simple question: what are the Prime Minister's negotiating targets, and how will we be able to judge whether he has achieved them?

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

#### **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)**

*Ordered,*

That, at today's sitting, the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of the motion in the name of Secretary Patrick McLoughlin relating to High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill: Instruction (No. 3) not later than 90 minutes after the start of proceedings on this motion; such questions shall include the questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Mr Goodwill.*)

## High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill: Instruction (No. 3)

3.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill):** I beg to move,

That it be a further Instruction to the Select Committee to which the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill is committed—

(1) that the Select Committee have power to consider—

(a) amendments relating to the vertical and horizontal alignment of the proposed railway in the vicinity of the A38 and Trent and Mersey Canal in the parishes of Fradley and Streethay, King's Bromley and Whittington in the County of Staffordshire;

(b) amendments conferring additional power to carry out works in the Borough of Slough and in the parish of Iver in the County of Buckinghamshire for the purpose of providing a new Heathrow Express depot in the Borough of Slough (to the north east of Langley railway station), in consequence of the displacement of the existing depot because of the exercise of powers conferred by the Bill;

(c) amendments conferring additional power to provide sidings for Crossrail services at Old Oak Common in the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hammersmith and Fulham that could be extended in the future to create a connection between the West Coast Main Line Railway and the Great Western Main Line;

(d) amendments to accommodate the requirements of landowners and occupiers in

- i. the London Boroughs of Brent and Ealing;
- ii. the parishes of Barton Hartshorn, Calvert Green, Chetwode, Great Missenden, Grendon Underwood, Little Missenden, Preston Bissett, The Lee and Twyford in the County of Buckinghamshire;
- iii. the parishes of Godington and Mixbury in the County of Oxfordshire;
- iv. the parishes of Aston-le-Walls, Boddington, Chipping Warden and Edgcote, Greatworth, Radstone, Thorpe Mandeville and Whitfield in the County of Northamptonshire;
- v. the parishes of Burton Green, Coleshill, Curdworth, Kenilworth, Ladbroke, Lea Marston, Middleton, Offchurch, Southam, Stoneleigh, Stoneton, Wishaw and Moxhull and Wormleighton in the County of Warwickshire;
- vi. the parishes of Armitage with Handsacre, Drayton Bassett, Hints with Canwell, King's Bromley, Swinfen and Packington and Whittington in the County of Staffordshire;
- vii. the parishes of Balsall, Berkswell, Chelmsley Wood and Hampton-in-Arden in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull; and
- viii. the City of Birmingham;

(e) amendments to accommodate changes to the design of the works authorised by the Bill in:

- i. the London Boroughs of Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hillingdon and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea;
- ii. the District of Three Rivers in the County of Hertfordshire;
- iii. the parishes of Chetwode, Denham, Ellesborough, Great Missenden, Grendon Underwood, Little Missenden, Preston Bissett, Quanton, Steeple Claydon, Stoke Mandeville, Turweston, Twyford and Wendover in the County of Buckinghamshire;
- iv. the parishes of Godington and Mixbury in the County of Oxfordshire;
- v. the parishes of Aston-le-Walls, Boddington, Greatworth, Marston St Lawrence, Radstone and Thorpe Mandeville in the County of Northamptonshire;

vi. the parishes of Coleshill, Curdworth, Kingsbury, Lea Marston, Middleton, Offchurch, Radbourne and Stoneleigh in the County of Warwickshire;

vii. the parishes of Colwich, Drayton Bassett, Fradley and Streethay, Hints with Canwell, King's Bromley, Swinfen and Packington and Weeford in the County of Staffordshire;

viii. the parishes of Berkswell and Bickenhill in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull;

ix. the City of Birmingham;

(f) amendments to the definition of "deposited statement" in clause 63(1) of the Bill to refer to supplementary environmental information provided in relation to matters which do not require an extension of the powers of the Bill to construct works or acquire land;

(g) amendments for purposes connected with any of the matters mentioned in sub paragraphs (a) to (f);

(2) that any petition against amendments to the Bill which the Select Committee is empowered to make shall be referred to the Select Committee if—

a) the petition is presented by being deposited in the Private Bill Office not later than the end of the period of four weeks beginning with the day on which the first newspaper notice of the amendments was published, and

b) the petition is one in which the petitioners pray to be heard by themselves or through counsel or agents.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

The motion relates to the High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill that is currently before a Select Committee of this House. The role of that Committee is to hear petitions against the Bill from those who are, to use the legal term, "directly and specially affected" by it. The Committee, under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Syms), has already heard more petitions in 11 months than the Crossrail Bill Select Committee dealt with in its entire 21 months of sitting.

**Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** But does this not demonstrate the rather crass way in which HS2 initially dealt with our constituents? I should like to praise the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Syms). He has a unique ability to put constituents' minds at ease when they feel tense as they appear before a Select Committee.

**Mr Goodwill:** I would extend that praise to the other members of the Committee, who have dealt very well with people who can be nervous in that situation. I should also like to take this opportunity to praise the work done by my officials at HS2, who have gone the extra mile to address some of the petition issues before they even needed to reach the Committee.

As intended, the process has led to many sensible changes to the scheme in order to address the needs and concerns of petitioners. Some of the changes have been agreed by HS2 Ltd dealing directly with petitioners, and some were recommended in the Select Committee's recent interim report, to which the Government responded on 4 June. Many changes can be accommodated using existing powers, but some require the powers in the Bill to be extended—for example, when a change requires the use of land that is not included in the Bill. In such circumstances, an additional provision is required. This is effectively a mini-hybrid Bill, with its own environmental statement and petitioning period for those "directly and specially affected" by the changes.

[*Mr Goodwill*]

The motion relates to an additional provision that, subject to it being passed, the Government intend to deposit on 13 July. The additional provision contains 125 changes, along the line of route beyond Camden, that have resulted from the petitioning process and from HS2 Ltd's continued development of the design of the railway. The changes are mostly of a minor nature. They include the realignment of access routes and the diversion of footpaths following discussions with affected landowners, or the relocation of areas of ecological mitigation to reduce the impacts on farming operations. I am tempted to say that this is a tidying-up process, but I recall that that was how some described the Lisbon treaty.

There are, however, proposals for three significant changes. As already announced, we propose to realign the route in the Lichfield area so that it runs in a cutting rather than on an embankment, as well as moving the route away from the Trent and Mersey canal. This will enable the line to go under the A38, the South Staffordshire railway and the west coast main line, which will significantly reduce the visual impact of the railway in the area. I hope the House will welcome this example of the promoter seeking to take on board petitioners' concerns and integrate them into the HS2 project where we are able to do so. I am particularly pleased that, in this case, the solution will be less expensive to deliver.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): Will the Minister tell the House what effect those route changes will have on the proposed journey times?

**Mr Goodwill:** They will have no effect at all on the journey times. This is about delivering the project by and large as planned. HS2 is more about capacity than it is about journey times. This is about addressing the real capacity issues that we have on our rail network, particularly between Birmingham and London.

The most significant other change concerns the Heathrow Express depot. It is currently located at Old Oak Common, but it needs to be relocated in order to construct the new Old Oak Common station. It was originally intended to be moved to another site nearby, but more detailed operational work undertaken by Network Rail since the Bill's deposit has revealed that that site would not work operationally. We therefore propose to relocate the depot to a site in Langley, near Slough.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the Minister shed more light on his statement that this "would not work operationally"? What I have heard on the grapevine, which has been my only source of information, is that there is more potential to make money out of the Old Oak site than out of the Langley site, and so Network Rail wants a depot out and more commercial development in.

**Mr Goodwill:** We looked closely at the North Pole depot site, but the Langley site is operationally more effective, and it also means that we would not block any proposal that might come forward for the Great Western line to connect with Crossrail at terminal 5.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): Will the Minister explain what he means by "operationally more effective", because to any normal person it would seem odd that

it is "operationally more effective" to have a depot that is not even on the route between Heathrow and Paddington?

**Mr Goodwill:** In these matters we are advised by Network Rail, which informs us that the practicality of operating these depots is such that the Langley site is the best one on which to locate this depot.

**Mr Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield) (Con): In considering the Langley site, what work has been done on the knock-on consequences for transport within the Iver area? I ask that because there are specific schemes to relieve the heavy goods vehicle problem that is besetting Iver, and it is widely concluded that the project being proposed here will prevent those schemes from happening. In particular, I refer to the relief road into the back of the Ridgeway trading estate. This matters very much and will have to be sorted out if this proposal is to go ahead.

**Mr Goodwill:** Those are precisely the sort of issues that petitioners can come forward with as part of the hybrid Bill process that this additional provision triggers. May I make it clear that we are not, at this point, considering agreement on these changes? This is about setting the process in train so that these points can be made and the Committee can look at them.

**Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Will the Minister clarify that last point? Will an environmental impact study be carried out on the difference between the two possible depot sites? Has that been considered or is it something that will come further down the line, if he will pardon the pun?

**Mr Goodwill:** There will indeed be an environmental statement to address the impact that will arise from the 18 changes that require additional powers in the Bill—for example, a new location for the replacement village hall for Burton Green. An environmental statement will accompany those additional provisions, and some changes that do not require additional provisions will also have their own environmental statement, which will allow those particularly important environmental considerations to be discussed.

The additional provision includes powers to build sidings for Crossrail at Old Oak Common which may in future enable a link to be built between Crossrail and the west coast main line. That is not in itself part of HS2, but doing the work after HS2 is built would incur significant expense and disruption.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): It is good that these points made by homeowners have been addressed. On Old Oak Common, what compensation is available to residents in Wells House Road and Midland Terrace in NW10, because they say that their suburban way of life will be demolished? Their gardens are being compulsorily purchased and then they will also have to deal with noise, disruption and all sorts of other things for 10 years. Whatever compensation scheme—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. You can sit down and relax for a second, as I want to try to be helpful. The hon. Lady has just come in and normally I would just let that go, but we must have short interventions.

If she wants to catch my eye to speak, I am more than happy for that to happen. That might be a good way to address this, but we must have short interventions as this debate will last only an hour and a half. Wherever I can be helpful, I will be.

**Mr Goodwill:** The hon. Lady makes precisely the point that has already been raised by many residents about the existing provision before the hybrid Bill Committee. The additional provisions in AP2 will also allow them to have that say, so that, if necessary, mitigation can be put in place to lessen the impact of construction traffic and to look at alternative routes for traffic and other such things. I have been down the line of route, and I do understand many of the problems. Indeed, I was in Slough on Sunday, and saw the site from the train. I know exactly where it is located.

**Robert Flello:** On the future-proofing issue, the Minister may possibly be aware that I have a certain interest in Stoke-on-Trent being serviced ideally by HS2 directly. However, is the Handsacre junction also being future proofed to protect areas such as Stoke-on-Trent? Do these provisions address that?

**Mr Goodwill:** That matter does not specifically relate to measures in AP2. Where possible, we will ensure that, as we construct the railway line, we do not rule out other connections, which is precisely the point that I made about the west coast main line.

The changes in total will not increase the overall project budget or target price for phase 1. They result in modest additional costs, but they will be accommodated within the contingency, which is provided for that very purpose.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will the Minister tell us what the total additional land take is for these provisions?

**Mr Goodwill:** I do not have those figures to hand, but it is minimal. In most of the additional provisions, which are in the document that has been provided for the convenience of the House, we can see that these are quite small additional areas of land. They are not major changes to the project, but tweaks. In many cases, they are changes made at the request of the landowner or farmer involved because it improves their situation.

As required by Standing Orders, we will be depositing an estimated expense, setting out the gross costs of these changes should the motion be approved. The motion instructs the Committee to consider these amendments and to hear petitions related to them. It is important to note that the motion does not ask the House to agree that these changes should be made; just that the Committee be allowed to consider them. If the House approves the motion, the additional provision and related documents, including an environmental statement describing the likely significant environmental effects of the changes, will be deposited in Parliament and in local authority offices in those locations affected by the changes.

**Michael Fabricant:** I am a little bit curious about the process. What is to prevent a ping-pong taking place, such as we have between the House of Commons and

the other place, whereby petitioners say that they do not agree with the changes, and so subsequent changes are made? How does the process end?

**Mr Goodwill:** In most cases, there will be support for these changes. Indeed, as I have already said, many of the changes are at the request of the landowners who are, in many cases, the only people who are affected. In future, it may be necessary to come up with more additional provisions, and we certainly have that option.

**Mrs Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that, from the moment of the publication of a document showing the new changes in the site, blight afflicts the properties that are close to the areas affected by these amendments? As a Member of Parliament, I received this document only this morning. My parish council was already aware of the changes. It is an interested party in these changes, but not the landowner.

**Mr Goodwill:** That document has been provided for the convenience of the House to help with today's process. The definitive document will be published on 13 July, and that will be the document on which any submissions on the petitioning process can be made. In addition, a supplementary environmental statement will also be deposited. That describes any new or different likely significant environmental effects that may arise, informed by new survey data that have become available since the deposit of the Bill, as HS2 Ltd has now been granted access to more land. As I have said, those deposits are all planned for 13 July. These documents will supersede the explanatory note made available in advance to MPs and published online last week.

I would like to make Members aware of two minor errors in the document. A change described on page 68 in Berkswell in the constituency of Meriden, while being correctly described and having the correct map, had the wrong plan. One other change relating to a footpath had the correct information provided, but did not clearly highlight the full extent of the footpath that will be amended on page 70. The documents to be deposited on 13 July will contain the full information.

As required by Standing Orders, notices in national and local newspapers will be published immediately after deposit, alerting the public to these changes and the opportunity to feed into the process by petitioning or responding to the consultation, as appropriate. In addition, HS2 Ltd will be writing to those near the proposed changes to highlight the consultation. Once the notices have appeared, a public consultation on the environmental statement lasting 42 days, in accordance with Standing Orders, will commence. This is planned to run from Friday 17 July to Friday 28 August. As with the main environmental statement consultation at the time of Bill deposit, the responses to the consultation will be analysed by Parliament's independent assessor and the assessor's report will be tabled in the House ahead of Third Reading.

**Mrs Gillan:** Is it not a great shame that once again there is going to be a truncated consultation period for this increase in land take? Also, has the Minister given consideration to the fact that the consultation is taking place over the summer? Many of the people who want to feed back on this may be away.

**Mr Goodwill:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend realises that people go on holidays at all times of the year. Indeed, if we moved into the September period, many would argue that that is the party conference season and therefore those involved in politics might not be available. I am aware that there is a major leadership campaign going on in at least one of our political parties, which could also be seen as a reason why one time or another might not be appropriate. I believe that the four-week period is absolutely appropriate. We have had no problems in the past with people being able to provide their petitions.

There will also be a petitioning period of four weeks for those directly or specially affected by the changes in this second additional provision, so that they can submit petitions. That petitioning period will begin on Friday 17 July and end on Friday 14 August for all petitioners.

I hope that the House will agree that these amendments demonstrate that while the Government recognise the vital role that HS2 has to play in transforming our transport network and our economy, we also recognise the need to listen to those directly affected by the railway and, wherever possible, seek to mitigate those impacts. I commend the motion to the House.

4.2 pm

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I am glad that we are holding this HS2 debate on national women in engineering day. I am sure the whole House would agree that the Government's investment in rail must be used to encourage more women to take up careers in engineering and in the rail industry.

I welcome the Minister back to his place. I had, of course, hoped to be speaking from his side of the House after the election. I was relishing the possibility of taking ministerial responsibility for the content of each and every one of the Bill's 50,000 pages, but I reassure the House that the Opposition will continue to subject the Government's delivery of this important project to close scrutiny.

I want to express our gratitude for the work undertaken by the Bill's Select Committee, including the Clerks of the Committee, my hon. Friends the Members for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) and for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), the hon. Members for Poole (Mr Syms), for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) and for North West Norfolk (Mr Bellingham), and Mike Thornton, the former Member for Eastleigh. I am sure the whole House will want to place on record its appreciation of the time and effort spent by residents and other affected parties who appeared before the Committee, and to thank the outside bodies and Members of this House who provided support to petitioning.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I would like to put on the record my appreciation for the Select Committee, which visited some of the problem areas that we have in Coventry and also visited those people the wrong side of the dividing line who would not qualify for compensation. I hope that the Committee, the Minister and the Secretary of State will remember that a lot of people's livelihoods depend on this, and their property has been rendered valueless.

**Lilian Greenwood:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of the Committee's going to visit those places most affected by the route and listening to the concerns expressed.

I know that the constituencies of several Members on both sides of the House are affected by these changes, and they will want to press the Minister on matters of detail, so I shall keep my remarks brief.

The Opposition support HS2 because we believe that it is the right project to address chronic capacity shortfalls on the rail network as well as historically inadequate connections between the cities of the north and the midlands. Those arguments were covered in detail in the House, not least on Second Reading, when the House endorsed the principle of building an initial route between London and Birmingham, so I do not propose to repeat them here. However, I will say that, although HS2 has provoked passionate debate, both sides have always accepted that the project's design could be improved as the route is refined.

Many of these revisions are undoubtedly positive, and the campaigners who secured changes, such as the reconfiguration of the route at the point it crosses the A38, deserve great credit. That is why the Opposition will not seek to obstruct this motion. Those changes will reduce planning blight for petitioners and provide some measure of certainty to many of those who live along the route. However, I know that a number of right hon. and hon. Members have concerns about these changes, including the relocation of the Heathrow Express depot, and I will make way for them shortly. Before doing so, I would like to put a few questions to the Minister.

I welcome the Minister's clarification of when the petitioning period will end, but can he say why the information was not included in the Department's press release, where arguably it would have been seen by more people? Does he accept that the maps published in his explanatory information document do not provide clear information on a number of issues that might be of interest to residents, such as the elevation of new structures or the net land-take of those changes? Will he give an undertaking that any petitioners or Members of the House who request that information will receive it?

As the Minister will be aware, the Bill's Select Committee has said:

"We have heard that HS2 Limited's record on engagement has been poor."

The Department has said that HS2 Ltd is being more timely in its dealings with petitioners who are due to appear before the Committee in June and July. Can he assure the House that that is not simply a case of officials catching up during Dissolution and that engagement between HS2 Ltd and petitioners will be improved permanently? That is of particular concern to those areas at the southern end of the route. In that regard, can he confirm that he expects to bring forward additional provision to cover Euston station later this year? Can he indicate when exactly those changes will be brought forward?

**Michael Fabricant:** The hon. Lady will recall that the former Member for Holborn and St Pancras, who was a doughty campaigner against HS2, had particular concerns about Euston. Has she given any consideration to the

Mayor of London's comment that, even if the changes can be made at Euston, it will be extremely difficult to get people on to London transport—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I think that I might be able to help. This motion does not relate to Euston, so we do not need to go into that now.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I will take your direction, Mr Deputy Speaker, but there are undoubtedly issues to be tackled at Euston. Three times now the residents of Camden have been presented with different plans for Euston station, with all the uncertainty that brings. Their treatment has clearly been inadequate, and I urge the Minister to shed a little light on when we can expect those additional provisions—I hope that I am still in order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Does the Minister agree that it is unacceptable that a number of my hon. Friends have not been informed of the fact that the additional provisions would affect their constituencies? I know from discussions with a number of Members that they have had no communication from HS2 Ltd, or indeed from the Department, and consequently have had only one day's notice that the changes are being debated. I know that the changes are a cause of concern to a number of hon. Friends. That situation is unacceptable, so I hope that the Minister will take it up with officials. The situation must not be repeated when further additional provisions are brought before the House.

**Mr Goodwill:** We are not debating the provisions; we are debating the fact that the Select Committee can receive petitions and consider the changes. We are not debating the provisions at this point.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I thank the Minister for his intervention, but this is clearly an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members who wish to make comments on behalf of their constituents to do so. It is only right that people are aware of the provisions that are being introduced and debated in this House. They will question what the value of these exchanges is if we do not raise concerns on behalf of our constituents.

I seek an assurance from the Minister that, when the Committee has issued an instruction regarding a particular section of the route, it will be acted on accordingly. This is a matter of particular concern in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). I would welcome a commitment that today's additional provision does not represent an end to the question of land-take at the Washwood Heath site, and that a mutually agreed solution will still be sought with the site's owners.

Residents face a plethora of compensation schemes, some of which have been withdrawn, while awareness of others appears to be low. As the HS2 residents commissioner has said:

“It is vital that those who are eligible for the Government's property compensation and assistance schemes get clear information and know what they are entitled to.”

Will the Minister take steps to clarify what support is available to residents, including those who live outside the rural support zone? This applies particularly to the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq).

**Dr Huq:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the residents of Wells House Road and Midland Terrace should be entitled to parity with people further up the line in rural areas? It should not be a case of special treatment for people in the Tory shires.

**Lilian Greenwood:** It is vital that the Minister and HS2 Ltd set out precisely the implications for the roads affected in my hon. Friend's constituency and the compensation that residents are entitled to. It is vital that those who live in the streets next to Old Oak Common, and other urban areas, are treated fairly. Perhaps the Minister will agree to meet her to ensure that she understands those implications.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** As I said, and I hope my hon. Friend agrees, Ministers should look again at the compensation package. I have constituents who will not get a penny out of this. In particular, it lowers the value of their housing. They are just outside the catchment area and have been treated very unfairly; they cannot qualify for compensation from anybody.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. We are straying outside the area of discussion, which is very tight. There are MPs who want to discuss areas of theirs that are affected. I want to be as generous as I can, but it would be wrong of me to allow us to move into areas that are not for discussion today.

**Lilian Greenwood:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank my hon. Friend for his comments.

The Committee rightly acknowledged that decisions made on compensation for phase 1 may have consequences for the compensation arrangements for phase 2. The Government's delay in finalising the route for phase 2 is causing planning blight. In the Committee's words, “the incoming Administration”—it was speaking in March—“should make an early decision on whether to proceed with Phase Two and, if it decides to proceed, quickly finalise the Phase Two route.”

That was two months ago. Will the Minister explain why a decision on phase 2 has been delayed, and will he commit to making a final decision by the end of the year?

We welcome the opportunity that the additional provision mechanism offers to refine the route, but as we look to the Government's record it is difficult to resist a verdict of “Must do better.” Labour Members continue to support this important project and will continue to subject the Bill to line-by-line scrutiny when it enters Committee.

4.14 pm

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is not often that I follow a Front-Bench Opposition spokesman and can say that I agree with almost every word she spoke.

Once again, I find myself on my feet to decry the process that is being used to put through high-speed rail. The motion before us is just part of a very complex process that is often unfathomable for people outside this House but also sometimes unfathomable for people inside this House. Some of my hon. Friends have not even been able to access the documentation that was made available at the eleventh hour.

[Mrs Cheryl Gillan]

Sadly, although the motion has high-level pointers to amendments that relate to my constituency, it does not contain the instructions that I would like to see for a fully bored tunnel to save the area of outstanding natural beauty in my constituency from the HS2 route and the damage and destruction it will cause. I live in hope that one day a fully bored tunnel under the Chilterns will feature in a similar instruction and that the valiant efforts of thousands of people who support that change will come to fruition.

Yesterday, the Select Committee came to Chesham and Amersham and visited Little Missenden, Great Missenden and the Lee, which are subject to the motion. I pay tribute to the members of the Select Committee, who are doing a very thorough job in examining the pain being caused by the project. It is obvious that they are getting a response from the Department and HS2 Ltd: I was so pleased to hear the cheers from my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) about the beneficial changes in his constituency. We look forward to similar changes in Chesham and Amersham. I also pay tribute to the hundreds of people who came out on a working Monday to impress on the Committee their antipathy to the horrors of the present construction plans, which will wreak havoc on the area, as well as to tell at first hand the poignant and desperate stories of their own personal circumstances.

Today, we are looking at the process, which, I say to the Minister, has once again been tested and found wanting. It was very short-sighted not only to let us know in such short order that the motion was to be on the Order Paper, but to not make available alongside it the full details. Members of this House expect to be fully informed of what is going on and to not be told that the matter will be addressed on 13 July. I raised a point of order on that very issue and then, miraculously, had delivered to me additional provision explanatory information, which is dated July 2015. Given that it is still June, it was probably not the intention to release it this month. It relates directly to the provisions and it should have been provided to all Members of Parliament so that they could fully examine the proposals.

The big problem, no matter how small or big the land-take or how big the disruption, is that there is uncertainty for our constituents. For the full details not to have been made available to the Committee to see in situ during yesterday's visit is not the fair and transparent process I would like the Department and HS2 Ltd to pursue.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I am glad that the right hon. Lady is sharing her experience with the House. Has she seen any evidence of High Speed 2 Ltd actually following a word that the High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill Select Committee has issued?

**Mrs Gillan:** As the right hon. Gentleman will know, I am concentrating on Chesham and Amersham. Fortunately, our petitioning process is at its initial phase. The Committee will hear about the tunnelling options worked up by my community and local authorities, and it will then hear from some 800 petitioners. As far as my constituency is concerned, I hope the best is yet to come, but the right hon. Gentleman's comments reflect some anxiety that HS2 Ltd and the Department may not be listening

entirely to what petitioners have to say. However, the Prime Minister assured me in a recent letter that the Department and HS2 are listening to petitioners, so once again I am optimistic and I hope my optimism will be rewarded.

The high-level changes that are indicated in the instruction lead me to question the way in which the explanatory information on the additional provisions has been presented. It is not clear who HS2 is responding to in instructing the Committee to examine a change in the plans. The instruction does not make clear whether it is petitioners or landowners, or whether it is a petitioner who is a landowner. It could be a new landowner—perhaps HS2 Ltd itself. We need further and better particulars on that in short order.

In my constituency, farmers will be affected by the taking of more land at Mantle's wood, which is a piece of ancient woodland. Yesterday, a lot of farmers made the point that the land-take will have an impact on their business and will not leave it in a "strong and viable condition". We need assurances that HS2 has considered that before instructions are given to the Committee that it should examine the parcels of land in question. One complaint from farmers yesterday around Great Missenden, Little Missenden and the Lee was that in some cases, their land will be taken for compulsory replanting of trees that are not suitable. I would have liked some more information from the Minister about that. As I said, the consultation period that has been announced is terribly short, and I urge him to look again at that.

**Mr Nick Hurd** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I share my right hon. Friend's concern about the scope and ambition of the additional provisions, which bear no relation at all to the concerns that my constituents are currently expressing to the Committee. There is a complete disconnect there. I also share her concerns about process. Will she join me in pressing the Minister at least to give us some reassurance at the end of the debate that the process will be improved, not least the timing of the provision of information to colleagues?

**Mrs Gillan:** My hon. Friend joins me and others in saying that we do not feel well done by by HS2 Ltd and the Department. It gives me great sadness to say that, but I would have thought that after this much time—after all, it is six years since the project was announced—the communications process could have been improved. I am afraid that, as the way in which the instruction was introduced shows, the process is still lacking greatly. If we are not informed, how can we inform our constituents and represent them properly?

I have taken up enough time, because I would like to leave time for others who are more severely affected by the additional provisions. I opened the papers this morning to see that HS2 Birmingham to London passengers want onboard GPs, shops and gyms. I repeat to the Minister that I hope we get a fully bored tunnel in the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty, because I do not want our precious landscape to be sacrificed for the novel experience of high-speed shopping and muscle toning.

4.23 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): As we have heard from the Minister, high-speed rail will have a great economic impact along

the route between London and the west midlands. An infrastructure project of such a size and scale will also have the knock-on effect of changing communities. There are many people and many views on route choices to consider, and we have heard today about some of the impacts.

Changes will also happen through the creation of jobs both during and after construction, leaving a long-lasting legacy for future years and for the generations to follow. Indeed, as the Minister said, they will transform the economy. If it is true that the Secretary of State's report on additional provisions has taken people's views on board, we shall be able to see where the views of the public and petitioners have been considered and where amendments have been made. I feel sure that hon. Members have also made their views clear on behalf of their constituents, and I have heard some of them this afternoon. We have heard praise for the Minister for putting constituents at ease.

Views on the alignment of the route have been taken on board in Chesham and Amersham, as they have in constituencies such as Birmingham, Ladywood. The changes to the routing of HS2 appear to have been made to accommodate the local voices of the public and those who represent them. Taking into account the view of the public, and their representations, is always to be commended, particularly when there is likely to be a positive economic impact that creates and supports employment, speeds journey times and increases connectivity to those who need it on the periphery and to those who have suffered a paucity of investment over the decades.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): My hon. Friend rightly mentions the economic benefits in terms of jobs and communities. Does he agree that on the route there could be benefits in terms of greater opportunities for business growth of all types, including expanded tourism and faster links with partners in Europe? That being the case, should Scotland not also benefit from a guaranteed connection with HS2 and be formally included in the forthcoming development of the route?

**Drew Hendry** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle)**: Order. You do not need to answer that, because unfortunately we are having a very tight debate. As important as it may be to your constituents, the fact is that we are discussing the constituents affected by the route that is being talked about today. Unfortunately, I cannot allow the debate to wander further than where we are at the moment.

**Drew Hendry**: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Notwithstanding that, I think there are points—especially in local and national economies—that have to be developed through participation. We heard earlier that projects that have been designed can be improved, and the Minister said we need to avoid minor errors; he covered that earlier in terms of the report. We also need to avoid major errors, so I ask him to put more constituents at ease, to go a little further with additional provisions and to listen to the demands of the people of Scotland. He should ensure there is another alignment much further north of the west midlands and make sure that Scotland is connected.

**Mr Deputy Speaker**: Order. I am trying to be helpful. Quite rightly, you are the SNP spokesperson, but even the spokesperson must stick to what we are discussing. It is not a free for all, unfortunately.

**Drew Hendry**: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I accept that mild rebuke.

4.26 pm

**Mrs Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): I know a lot of other Members want to get in, so I shall focus on some of the changes that the motion before us will facilitate.

My main concern is with the additional provisions as they affect the approach to Birmingham International railway station, the new interchange station. Hon. Members will appreciate that its location is very important in terms of the orientation of the route, and one proposed change, on page 108 of the report, would appear to change the road infrastructure on the approach to the station. The road in question is Diddington Lane, and the document refers to the changes that the “Landowner/Petitioner request”. But my difficulty, a common problem that all Members will have, is that there is more than one petitioner on some of these things. As I said in an earlier intervention, at that location there are differences of opinion. The lane has along its length an Island Project school for children with severe learning difficulties, for whom relocation remains unresolved.

I just cannot tell from the map, frankly, what the new route is, and that makes it very difficult for me to know how the change to the road network is going to affect various people in my constituency. At that point the line severs a number of landowners' holdings, to the point where some farms might no longer be viable, so I impress upon the Minister how important it is that Members of Parliament have a better quality map than the one provided, because I cannot understand the one I am looking at.

There are some other provisions that affect my constituency. The Minister said that between pages 68 and 70 a correction is required to the map, but as far as I can tell from the original document, five existing landowners will be affected at that site. If he could let me have the corrected version as soon as possible, I would be very grateful.

At page 104, the additional provisions describing the additional land for the Kenilworth Greenway, in order to improve the HS2 design, have come at the request of the petitioners. A design change was sought, but at that very location there are considerable difficulties with the visual intrusion of High Speed 2 on a flyover, 40 feet in the air, through the village of Balsall Common. HS2's own promotional literature describes properties in one lane in particular, Truggist Lane, as blighted, yet I have constituents on that lane who have so far been unable to secure compensation for those properties. I am anxious to know how the change on page 104 might affect residents close by.

Page 105 describes additional land required for road infrastructure at the Park Lane/A452 interchange affecting one existing landowner, but I have a constituent with an unsettled compensation claim and am anxious to know how the proposed change will affect that claim, as I cannot divine that from the document.

[Mrs Caroline Spelman]

Although I am glad that there is a period of consultation for my constituents, as well as additional time for consultation and for petitioning the Select Committee, some of the additional proposals blight further properties, perhaps inevitably.

May I finish by recording my thanks to the Select Committee, whose members have done a Herculean job? They will certainly be familiar with all the locations to which I have referred, and the way in which they have been willing to serve across the old Parliament and into the new shows one of the best attributes that Parliament has to offer our constituents, who need people to stand up and represent them, listen to them and, where possible, to mitigate the impact of the line.

4.31 pm

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I very much welcome today's debate and the motion, which are about both process and detail: the process of ensuring as far as possible that the HS2 project, required in the national interest to improve national infrastructure, can be developed as part of the national network in a way that maximises employment; and the detail of taking properly into account the concerns of individual people and individual localities. I am very pleased to hear the praise that has been given by hon. Members to the work of the special Select Committee in considering this detail, although it is of some concern that a number of hon. Members say that they have not had sufficient information in time and, in some instances, that there is a lack of clarity about certain maps and charts that have been made available.

Whenever there is a scheme in the national interest such as HS2, it is inevitable that there will be local problems. It is vital that those issues are considered properly and objectively and that changes are made to the route where possible—today, we are considering the details for the part of the route that is under consideration—and where that cannot be done that adequate compensation is given. It is critical that those issues are considered properly, not just in the special Select Committee but elsewhere.

I welcome the debate. The work of the special Select Committee is essential in progressing a scheme of national importance in a way that considers proper and legitimate concerns.

4.33 pm

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): When the debate began, a colleague whispered in my ear, "Oh, so you've been bought off then." I can tell the House that I have not. I believe that the route is profoundly wrong for the reasons given in my amendment on Second Reading of the original Bill. For example, it does not even connect directly with the channel tunnel. However, I welcome the orders as the changes being made in this document mean that in Lichfield we will not have the blight or damage to the environment that we would otherwise have had. The original proposal was for a flyover, some 120 feet high, soaring over the plains of the Lichfield Trent Valley. It would have been visible from Lichfield Cathedral; it would probably have been visible from my house in the close of Lichfield Cathedral, although I am not declaring an interest. However, at last we have seen sense.

I have to give credit not only to the Committee, as I and others did earlier, but to Staffordshire County Council, Lichfield District Council and individuals who petitioned about this issue. I pay particular tribute to a local farmer whose son demonstrated to the Committee the height of the flyover by getting a drone with flags attached to it running to and fro. I was slightly worried that an Exocet missile or something would shoot it out of the sky, but it demonstrated clearly to the Committee and to some people working for HS2, who accompanied the Committee when it came to Lichfield, the damage that the high viaduct would have done.

There are further changes, too. Those who know me well know that I am a keen narrow boater, and we have some beautiful canals in the Lichfield area. Originally, the HS2 route would have crossed the canals at two particularly beautiful points. Changes have been made there, too. Although, as the Minister said, the cost has been reduced by the making of those changes, I will nevertheless say that he did it because he knew it was the right thing to do, and it means that these canals are now going to be protected.

In short, I welcome the motion and I welcome, for once, the Minister, who is a good friend of mine, presenting it to the House. If it comes to a vote, I, for one, will be voting for it.

4.36 pm

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): Unlike the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), I do not welcome the order.

I have to say thank you to the Minister, who has been very courteous in informing me of what is coming up. That is in quite a degree of contrast to the HS2 project team, which has not kept Slough Borough Council fully aware of what is being proposed, and it has come to a bit of a shock to the council. As a place, Slough is very supportive of big transport infrastructure projects. Heathrow airport's third runway will come into the borough of Slough, if it happens, yet we are backing it because we realise that these kinds of projects are essential to national economic growth. However, Slough has not been kept fully informed of what has happened, and therefore, I echo the concerns of the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) about the consultation period on these areas happening in July and August. Although the Minister is right to say that not everybody goes on holiday in July and August, that is when most of my constituents with children do. Because Slough thought that HS2 was to do with other parts of the world and had nothing to do with Slough—none of the original proposals involved anything to do with Slough—it will not be geared up for petitioning, whereas communities on the route of HS2 were geared up by newspaper stories and so on. That is a real issue.

The other issue is that paragraph 1(b) of the proposal has nothing to do with HS2; it is about the Heathrow Express. It turns out that the Heathrow Express terminal is to be moved. I wonder why. I hate to speculate, but is it possibly because, owing to the land values at Old Oak Common, the land can be flogged off for expensive housing? Those land values are rather bigger than land values in Langley, where that will not be possible. It strikes me that a possible reason for our suddenly finding that we need to move the Heathrow Express

terminal is that we can make more money out of what happens in Old Oak Common. I do not know that, and if the Minister would like to intervene and assure me that that is not true, that would be nice.

**Mr Goodwill:** I point out to the right hon. Lady that I talked about operational problems, and one of the problems with the North Pole East depot is that it would require train movements across the Great Western main line. Maintenance works on the Great Western towards Paddington would also mean that the Heathrow Express depot at North Pole East would not be able to operate.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** That is what the Minister is told, but at least that depot is somewhere on the Heathrow Express route. The proposed depot is not on that route; it is actually to the west of the Heathrow Express route. I point out that the Heathrow Express franchise expires in 2023, so this is not necessarily a long-term need. I am deeply concerned about the western link into Heathrow, which is critical, and I am grateful to the Department for the way it has proceeded on that. It is obvious to me that at some point the western rail link into Heathrow and the Heathrow Express will become a merged franchise. There is land at Reading where the depot could be situated at that point.

I am worried that this is a short-term solution that has been invented because someone faced a problem with the Heathrow Express. In the motion, we are being asked to solve a short-term problem, which I accept exists, in a way that is not long-term and strategic. The Department could say, “This franchise expires in 2023 and, until then, Heathrow has a monopoly on it, but if Heathrow wants its third runway”—we do not know what the Davies commission will say—“perhaps there should be a price. Perhaps the price should be giving up the franchise and looking at how we can integrate it more intelligently into the rest of the rail network.” That would be a strategic way of dealing with this matter and it would help us to accelerate western rail access into Heathrow.

In the Minister’s courteous letters to me today, he wrote:

“The relocation of the Heathrow Express depot is both an opportunity for Slough and important part of the Phase One project”.

I do not think that it is an opportunity for Slough, because the jobs that come with it are just ones that are being moved down the line from Old Oak Common, where they are at the moment, to Langley. I tell him that that does not mean more jobs for my constituents; it means that people will commute from where they currently live to Langley.

**Mr Goodwill:** Some of the land that is required for construction will be returned once the depot is complete, so that land will not be lost altogether in respect of job creation in the right hon. Lady’s area.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Actually, most of the land that the depot will be on is housing land. I represent the most overcrowded borough in the country, outside London, in terms of housing. In fact, it is more overcrowded than most London boroughs. There is a real need for housing in Slough. I am told by the council that this

land has been identified as being able to provide 200 to 300 homes for local people. It will not be available for those homes when it has been used.

The construction of the depot will have an impact on air quality in an area that is already affected by a big incinerator, Heathrow and the biggest motorway junction in Europe, which will affect my constituents. As the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) pointed out, these plans will frustrate other issues, such as HGV links and western rail access to Heathrow.

I know that there will be petitions from Slough, but I also know that there will not be as many petitions from Slough as there have been from other communities on the route, because it came as a big surprise to the people of Slough about a week ago that this was happening to them. They can only intervene over the next few weeks—a very short space of time—when some of them will be dealing with their children’s end-of-term plays and planning to go on holiday. I predict that my constituents will be panicked about this and that, although they welcome major transport infrastructure projects because they know that we need them to create prosperity for Britain, they will think that they have been badly treated in this process. I have to say, I believe that they are right.

4.44 pm

**Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con):** I will make a brief contribution on the plans, so far as they concern Iver. The right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) raised the consequences of the new depot for Slough. As my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, if one looks at the plans, they show that the land take extends beyond the boundary of Slough and as far as Iver station.

My constituents in Iver obviously live some distance from the main HS2 route and have not previously been concerned with it, except in so far as the Heathrow link plan affected them before it was withdrawn. The scheme raises two distinct problems. First, it is difficult to understand what effect it will have on the western rail link into Heathrow. I would be interested as soon as possible to hear from the Secretary of State and from my hon. Friend the Minister as to how that impact will work in practice.

Secondly, I have in the past written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to point out to him that Iver is experiencing a catastrophic problem with heavy goods vehicle movements. The number of transport depots in the immediate vicinity of the village, many of which have grown up out of existing planning uses that predate the arrival of planning control, mean that the village is slowly being strangled by the HGV movements. If one stands in Iver village high street, one will see a heavy goods vehicle coming through every 58 seconds on average. It is a narrow village shopping street and the planning development has taken place in complete disregard of those facts.

There is a possibility of relieving that by the construction of a relief road running into the back of one of those sites, but the road has to cross the path and the line of the proposed new depot. My constituents’ anxiety is that that long-sought road project will be rendered even more difficult to achieve because it is not factored in to the construction of the depot. The construction of the depot might provide the ideal moment for the construction

[*Mr Dominic Grieve*]

of road, but if that does not take place when the depot is constructed, it might be impossible thereafter for it to occur at all.

As I have said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been aware of my concerns for some time. I was aware that the scheme was around in the background, but there has been no prior notice to me of any kind that it would finally be brought to fruition. I am concerned that the Committee may not be in the best position to evaluate those issues when it comes to consider them under the petitioning process. I want to take the opportunity today to flag up my serious concerns about the knock-on consequences of the project. I can reassure my hon. Friend the Minister that, if we could use the process to provide reassurance that we will have such a back route into the Ridgeway trading estate, I am sure many of my constituents might even see some positives from the proposal, although I am mindful from what the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) said about Slough's housing requirements that there are serious knock-on consequences.

I hope my hon. Friend the Minister can take those concerns on board. I want to flag up at this stage and repeatedly that the proposal will be unacceptable if it leaves Iver even more isolated and prey to the HGV traffic it suffers from currently.

4.47 pm

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly on the motion, and grateful to the Minister for setting out the process, but I am afraid the measure raises some serious questions about the integrity of the process. It raises the question of whether High Speed 2 is listening to the petitioners, to the Minister or to the Bill Select Committee, which has begun considering petitioners' concerns with interest.

The integrity of the process is fundamental. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), the shadow Minister, said, we do not expect some kind of celestial design from High Speed 2. There are bound to be problems and they will need correcting. That is why the Bill Committee, to which I again pay tribute, is so important, and why hon. Members are so grateful that it is doing such a magnificent job.

The motion contains a couple of provisions for the Saltley business park that are intimately connected with the proposed rolling stock maintenance depot, which takes out a considerable chunk of the north of my constituency. I do not want to detain the House with the details of the proposal because I have mentioned it on the Floor of the House a number of times. Suffice to say that that area of land is the size of 100 football pitches. It represents one third of the available industrial land in the whole city of Birmingham, and it is located at the junction of two of the constituencies that are among the four most unemployed constituencies in the whole United Kingdom. If we develop the site in its entirety, we could generate 7,000 jobs, which is my estimate, or 3,000 to 3,500 jobs, which is the Minister's estimate. That is still a very considerable number that could knock off something like a third of the unemployment in the city of Birmingham.

This is a site of such economic significance that the High Speed Rail Bill Committee has considered it in considerable detail. I was incredibly grateful that although the Committee did not side completely with my argument, it recognised that the issue of unemployment in and around the rolling stock maintenance depot had to be considered. The provisions set out today on the Saltley business park do nothing to address the Committee's concerns; in fact, they take out even more industrial land in the city of Birmingham. It could be that the site is proposed today for the relocation of business, but we simply do not know.

The Committee said:

“We impress on HS2 the need to adjust the scheme”

to reach agreement with the site owner, AXA, to maximise the number of jobs and to minimise the time for which land would be required. HS2 was directed by the Committee to work with the site owners to deliver that solution. That judgment was passed down in December. Although there have been detailed technical committee meetings and the site owners have now presented a detailed redesign of the site that would minimise land take, we have seen nothing of those discussions reflected in the provisions this afternoon.

**Mr Goodwill:** It is precisely on that point that I wish to intervene. As the Select Committee's interim report recommended, we are working with the owners and Birmingham City Council on land take to see how far land can be returned for development as early as possible to secure that development that could result in jobs being created.

**Liam Byrne:** I am very grateful for the Minister's clarification, but I urge him to go further in his winding-up remarks. It is of course important to me that land is minimised and jobs are maximised, but it will be of interest to all right hon. and hon. Members of this House that HS2 not only responds to the petitioners and the Committee but is seen to do so. Frankly, we have scant evidence of that in the provisions we have seen this afternoon.

I hope the Minister will take the opportunity to endorse once again the Committee's recommendations on the rolling stock maintenance yard. I hope he will urge HS2 to do the deal and come to an agreement with the site owner, AXA. I personally do not want to occupy the site in order to ensure that HS2 honours a recommendation from a Select Committee of this House. I hope the Minister will spare us all that spectacle and use his very good offices to ensure that HS2 will buckle down and listen to a Select Committee of this House and its recommendations.

4.53 pm

**Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I want to comment briefly on paragraph 1(c), which asks the Select Committee to consider providing Crossrail with sidings at Old Oak Common as a way of future-proofing a possible link between the Great Western main line and the west coast main line. Such a link would be a very important safeguarding measure for two principal reasons.

First, in the long term, when HS2 is constructed and capacity is freed on the west coast main line for classic services, I very much hope that we will explore the

possibility of extending Crossrail up the west coast main line, even as far as Milton Keynes to serve my constituents. That would be a very good enhancement of commuter services in and out of London.

Secondly, and perhaps even more significantly, having the option of Crossrail going up the west coast main line during the HS2 construction phase, in particular while construction takes place at Euston when there will inevitably be some disruption to both inter-city and commuter services, could see the transfer of some commuter services from the west coast main line into London via the Great Western main line. That could provide relief during the construction phase and minimise disruption to my constituents and many others along the line. It is for that reason that I commend the motion, in particular paragraph 1(c). I hope the Select Committee will consider it in due course.

4.55 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I support HS2 and the potential for jobs, homes and regeneration in the Old Oak Common area in my constituency. I even appreciate some of the difficulties that everyone, from the Minister down, has with this scheme—not least because Old Oak itself must be one of the most complex as well as the largest development sites in London, and possibly in the country. It involves not only HS2, but Crossrail, Overground, the Great Western main line and, of course, the commercial and residential developments. The Minister will anticipate a “but” coming here.

The first I knew of some of these proposals was when I picked up the additional provision document yesterday, certainly in respect of the relocation of the Heathrow Express depot to Langley. That does not feature. Perhaps it is thought that it is more significant for my right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), where it is going, rather than for me, from where it is being removed. Nevertheless, these are—as acknowledged by HS2 itself—significant changes. Indeed, I received an e-mail today from HS2, saying:

“I understand there is a motion tabled for debate tomorrow on changes along the proposed HS2 route, including some substantial changes to the Old Oak Common area.”

It went on to mention

“three turnback sidings for the Crossrail service and passive provision for a West Coast Main Line Crossrail link”, which I shall return to in a moment. It referred to the need to acquire additional land

“for the diversion of a sewer...for the construction of a temporary logistics tunnel...for...a construction compound...for...a conveyer route”,

and, as an afterthought, to the relocation of the depot. There is a public meeting on Saturday, which I cannot attend, advertised to my constituents, but no mention is made of some of these changes taking place.

It is right to say that some prior notice of the west coast main line-Crossrail link was given. HS2 was very clear to me that this was not an HS2 project, but a Crossrail project. Crossrail was very clear to me that it was not really part of the Crossrail scheme either. As the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) said, it is a temporary measure to deal with the construction phase. It must be the most expensive “diversion” ever in the history of the country. I am not quite sure exactly how many millions of pounds it is costing. It may be a

nice adornment to the railway network, but nothing more than that. During the construction and when it is built, it is certainly going to cause very severe disruption.

As I say, I do not object to the proposals, and I am sympathetic to the difficulties of the logistics of the task, but I do find that HS2 acts in a vacuum and often in a way that does not appear to take account of anything else going on around it—and that includes other railways. I am pleased to have one of the country’s major interchanges in my constituency, but the way things are going at the moment, it is going to be a dog’s breakfast of an interchange. I missed the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Slough, but I suspect she asked why she was getting the depot rather than it being in Shepherd’s Bush. I suspect that the real answer—the Minister cites purely logistical reasons—is that it is better to put it somewhere where prices are probably a little cheaper than in Shepherd’s Bush.

**Mr Goodwill** *rose*—

**Andy Slaughter:** I will give way to the Minister in a moment. There will be room for more of “Boris’s mini-Manhattans”, which is what we will be graced with: these sky-high blocks of flats—all of which are empty, all of which are sold overseas and all of which are safe deposit boxes for dirty money from abroad—that will loom over Wormwood Scrubs for the foreseeable future.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I think the Minister needs to come in on this.

**Mr Goodwill:** I wish that that were the cheapest option. We considered a number of options including North Pole East, the Crossrail depot, Reading, Southall, Ealing and Langley. Langley was the best option, as all the others involved operational issues, but it was certainly not the cheapest.

**Andy Slaughter:** I realise that the Minister is reading from his brief, and that he cannot be expected to know every single detail of all the immaculate plans that are in the document. However, those who are in the middle of this—and a very large part of my constituency is being developed: it is the largest development site in London—are genuinely worried. I plead with the Minister to talk to his colleagues in the Government, and to appoint a tsar, a sultan or whatever the title of such a person might be, to oversee what is happening at Old Oak Common, because otherwise we shall end up with a terrible, terrible mess.

**Mrs Gillan:** Obviously the hon. Gentleman and I do not see entirely eye to eye on this project. However, he may agree with me that it is time for the Department for Transport to sit down, have a look at the administration of HS2 Ltd, and come up with a proper communication strategy that keeps all of us informed, whether we are pro or anti. We need accurate and detailed information to be provided on a timely basis.

**Andy Slaughter:** I agree with the right hon. Lady, who is assiduous in her pursuit of this issue. I think that, in time, HS2 Ltd may even thank her for that. There is nothing better than a well-informed critic to keep people on their toes. I am even sympathetic towards HS2 Ltd. I know that the Government are saying, “Make sure that

[*Andy Slaughter*]

you keep within budget and keep to time, because any further increase in the costs will not be sustainable.” However, HS2 must be clear about the fact that it is not just building a 21st-century railway, but engaging some of the major regeneration projects in the country. It needs to think about the potential for collateral damage, and I am not referring just to the obvious problems.

Members have rightly objected, on behalf of their constituents, to the fact that the development is despoiling countryside, or causing noise or other pollution. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) intervened on behalf of her constituents in Wells House Road and Midland Terrace, who are right up against it. I visited the area, which is in my old constituency, with other members of the Select Committee. My hon. Friend’s constituents will be surrounded on three sides by the development for 15 to 20 years, which is horrific, while on the fourth side the main road, Old Oak Common Lane, will be closed for a year or two. That does not bear thinking about, and I am afraid that it either has not been thought about, or has been thought about and then dismissed and put in the “too difficult” box.

The issue that I raised in a short 80-minute speech in Westminster Hall at the end of last year, when I spoke about the effect on my constituency—particularly the environmental effect, and notably the effect on Wormwood Scrubs, a unique and very large piece of open land—has still not been addressed. I do not believe that the meetings that we were told would take place with amenity groups, environmental groups, residents’ groups and, indeed, transport groups have indeed taken place. I do not believe that the voice of local residents is being listened to. Those residents may be speaking in an entirely parochial way—quite properly—about their property or land and their need for adequate compensation, which we in the urban areas are certainly not receiving. They may be speaking for the wider public good and the environment, or coming up with innovative and better transport schemes. In any event, I plead with the Minister to go back to HS2 and say that it must take a more responsible attitude. It must balance its duty to build the railway, which I support, with its duty to the constituencies through which it passes.

5.3 pm

**Mr Goodwill:** With the leave of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The first point that I should make is that the motion is about the process. It is about kicking the ball into play, and it is for those who are directly affected, and the Select Committee, to carry out the game. Having said that, I should add that many Members on both sides of the House have made very effective points on behalf of their constituents and the interests of their particular areas.

I want to make it clear that I will always be pleased to engage with colleagues around the House on these and future additional provisions. We are expecting to bring forward AP3, which will relate to Euston, before the end of the year. If Opposition Members have concerns, it might be easier to arrange visits to their constituencies through the pairing Whip, and I would be happy to do that if it is at all possible.

The consultation period was mentioned. A period of 42 days is set out in Standing Orders, and I believe that that is appropriate. Looking back over the whole scheme, we have had about two years’ worth of consultations on one aspect of HS2 or another, so it would be hard to say that we have consulted too little. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) raised some important points. I should point out that, of the 20.8 kilometres in her constituency in the Chilterns, only 3.3 kilometres will not be in a tunnel. I am sure that is largely due to her doughty campaigning.

**Mrs Gillan:** The Minister knows that it is impossible to over-flatter a fellow politician. Let me make it clear, however, that 45% of this railway will be in a fully bored tunnel in my constituency, and that 55% will be in a green tunnel or in cuttings, which will be a scar on the landscape and will damage the area of outstanding natural beauty. This is a PR exercise too far. We want a whole tunnel.

**Mr Goodwill:** My right hon. Friend raises a point that I am well used to hearing, and I know that the Select Committee is in no doubt about the strength of her feelings and those of her constituents on this matter. I would remind her that one of the major political parties stood in the election on a Stop HS2 platform and that, despite that, her majority was increased. I am sure she would argue that that was due to the strength of her campaigning, rather than to the scheme itself. Two of the four changes in the additional provision that relate to her constituency have been made at the request of landowners. That shows that we are reacting to people’s very real concerns.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) asked about certain concerns in her constituency, and I will certainly write to her with full details, but many of them will be in the environmental statement. For example, the Berkswell greenway change extends the greenway to Berkswell station, which will benefit existing users.

The hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) asked why information on the petitioning period was not included in the press notice. The petitioning process depends on the motion being passed today, and we would therefore have pre-empted the will of the House if we had announced that information in a press notice. She also mentioned the maps and the information on land take. That information will all be provided in the environmental statement that will accommodate the deposit if the motion passes.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) mentioned western rail access, which is important to the future connectivity of our country. I can reassure him that the depot at Langley is compatible with the western rail access to the Heathrow scheme.

The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) raised the very real concerns of her constituents about the compensation arrangements. I should like to point out to her that the residents of Wells House Road are eligible for the need-to-sell scheme. Indeed, properties in that road that are in safeguarding can issue blight notices to have their properties purchased.

As I have said, many of the points raised in the debate should be raised in petitions and through the process that is commencing today. I congratulate the Chairman

of the Select Committee on Transport, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), on retaining that position unopposed. She and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) talked about the quality of the process. The process is about the people involved in it, and that means not only the members of the Select Committee that is considering the Bill but those involved with HS2—I know that they have had a bit of stick today, but by and large they are doing their best to address these problems—and the many people up and down the line of route who are being affected and who have engaged with the process in such a commendable way.

**Liam Byrne:** Do I take it, therefore, that the Minister will use his good offices to ensure that HS2 will indeed honour the recommendations that the Committee hands down to it? If those commitments are not honoured, the integrity of the process will be called into serious question.

**Mr Goodwill:** Absolutely, and I think I have already given that assurance about land being released as soon as possible. If necessary, I will have a meeting with the right hon. Gentleman, with officials, so that we can get some assurances that, I hope, will satisfy him.

I commend the motion to the House. The hybrid Bill process is working for people.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** In response to the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), the Minister said that this scheme is fitting in with western rail access. As I understand it, however, the Hollow Hill Lane bridge was to have been raised in order to improve the problems with HGVs, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman discussed. As an alternative is being proposed, those issues will not be dealt with by this scheme unless it is changed. Can the Minister answer on that point?

**Mr Goodwill:** I would certainly be happy to meet those concerned to get my head around precisely how we could improve the scheme to address those concerns. It is not an issue I am absolutely on top of, and I apologise for that—

**Mr Grieve** *rose*—

**Mr Goodwill:** But I am going to be put right by my right hon. and learned Friend.

**Mr Grieve:** I assure the Minister that if he has a discussion with his officials, he will see that I have had correspondence with them about this issue. It does provide a real opportunity but, as I have suggested on previous occasions, it is going to need a bit of a push from his Department if it is going to be brought to fruition. What I certainly cannot accept is that this scheme goes ahead and leads to it becoming impossible to implement a relief road, as that would be a catastrophic state of affairs for my constituents.

**Mr Goodwill:** I absolutely understand that this scheme should neither confound some of our other rail plans on western access, nor confound plans for highways

improvement. I am therefore more than happy to meet my right hon. and learned Friend to get my head around these issues in particular.

The motion introduces changes to address issues that have been raised. It will put these proposals under the scrutiny of the Committee, and I am sure the House will be delighted to approve it.

**Lilian Greenwood:** Before the Minister finishes, will he clarify when he expects to introduce the additional provisions relating to Euston and when the Government expect to confirm the line of route for phase 2?

**Mr Goodwill:** We expect to bring forward provisions for Euston later this year. I am working actively with officials from HS2 to ensure that we are in a position to introduce a proposal that will address some of the problems, particularly the issues about continuing to use that station for the west coast main line at the same time as construction is taking place. I will certainly give the hon. Lady some more information on the other point she raises when appropriate.

I commend the motion to the House and I hope the House will approve it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That it be a further Instruction to the Select Committee to which the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill is committed—

(1) that the Select Committee have power to consider—

(a) amendments relating to the vertical and horizontal alignment of the proposed railway in the vicinity of the A38 and Trent and Mersey Canal in the parishes of Fradley and Streethay, King's Bromley and Whittington in the County of Staffordshire;

(b) amendments conferring additional power to carry out works in the Borough of Slough and in the parish of Iver in the County of Buckinghamshire for the purpose of providing a new Heathrow Express depot in the Borough of Slough (to the north east of Langley railway station), in consequence of the displacement of the existing depot because of the exercise of powers conferred by the Bill;

(c) amendments conferring additional power to provide sidings for Crossrail services at Old Oak Common in the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hammersmith and Fulham that could be extended in the future to create a connection between the West Coast Main Line Railway and the Great Western Main Line;

(d) amendments to accommodate the requirements of landowners and occupiers in

i. the London Boroughs of Brent and Ealing;

ii. the parishes of Barton Hartshorn, Calvert Green, Chetwode, Great Missenden, Grendon Underwood, Little Missenden, Preston Bissett, The Lee and Twyford in the County of Buckinghamshire;

iii. the parishes of Godington and Mixbury in the County of Oxfordshire;

iv. the parishes of Aston-le-Walls, Boddington, Chipping Warden and Edgcote, Greatworth, Radstone, Thorpe Mandeville and Whitfield in the County of Northamptonshire;

v. the parishes of Burton Green, Coleshill, Curdworth, Kenilworth, Ladbroke, Lea Marston, Middleton, Offchurch, Southam, Stoneleigh, Stoneton, Wishaw and Moxhull and Wormleighton in the County of Warwickshire;

vi. the parishes of Armitage with Handsacre, Drayton Bassett, Hints with Canwell, King's Bromley, Swinfen and Packington and Whittington in the County of Staffordshire;

vii. the parishes of Balsall, Berkswell, Chelmsley Wood and Hampton-in Arden in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull; and  
viii. the City of Birmingham;

(e) amendments to accommodate changes to the design of the works authorised by the Bill in:

i. the London Boroughs of Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hillingdon and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea;

ii. the District of Three Rivers in the County of Hertfordshire;

iii. the parishes of Chetwode, Denham, Ellesborough, Great Missenden, Grendon Underwood, Little Missenden, Preston Bissett, Quanton, Steeple Claydon, Stoke Mandeville, Turweston, Twyford and Wendover in the County of Buckinghamshire;

iv. the parishes of Godington and Mixbury in the County of Oxfordshire;

v. the parishes of Aston-le-Walls, Boddington, Greatworth, Marston St Lawrence, Radstone and Thorpe Mandeville in the County of Northamptonshire;

vi. the parishes of Coleshill, Curdworth, Kingsbury, Lea Marston, Middleton, Offchurch, Radbourne and Stoneleigh in the County of Warwickshire;

vii. the parishes of Colwich, Drayton Bassett, Fradley and Streethay, Hints with Canwell, King's Bromley, Swinfen and Packington and Weeford in the County of Staffordshire;

viii. the parishes of Berkswell and Bickenhill in the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull;

ix. the City of Birmingham;

(f) amendments to the definition of “deposited statement” in clause 63(1) of the Bill to refer to supplementary environmental information provided in relation to matters which do not require an extension of the powers of the Bill to construct works or acquire land;

(g) amendments for purposes connected with any of the matters mentioned in subparagraphs (a) to (f);

(2) that any petition against amendments to the Bill which the Select Committee is empowered to make shall be referred to the Select Committee if—

(a) the petition is presented by being deposited in the Private Bill Office not later than the end of the period of four weeks beginning with the day on which the first newspaper notice of the amendments was published, and

(b) the petition is one in which the petitioners pray to be heard by themselves or through counsel or agents.

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

## Use of the Chamber (Youth Parliament)

5.13 pm

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the work of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament in providing young people with an opportunity to engage with the political process and accordingly resolves that the UK Youth Parliament should be allowed to meet once a year in the Chamber of this House for the duration of this Parliament.

The motion stands in my name, along with those of the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and the Scottish National party's shadow Leader of the House.

The United Kingdom Youth Parliament has now met in this Chamber annually since 2009, giving younger people an opportunity to debate motions, which have recently been decided upon by a national poll under the name, Make Your Mark. The number of votes cast in the Make Your Mark ballot increased from 478,632 in 2013 to 876,488 in 2014. Last year, that led to debates on exam resits, the living wage, careers advice and the voting age, as well as a commemoration of world war one.

It is important that our young people learn a sense of respect and ownership of our democracy and its institutions, just as our democratic institutions need to respect them. Giving young people the chance to debate here in this Chamber is a great privilege, which I know they value. The motion would allow the UK Youth Parliament to meet annually for the length of this Parliament, and I commend it to the House.

5.14 pm

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** It is an absolute delight, Madam Deputy Speaker, to see you in the Chair. It is something that I support very warmly. I suppose that it is fitting that you are in the Chair for this debate, as this is a subject that you have always felt very strongly about, for which you have earned the thanks of many young people. I also appreciate how keen you were to get on to my speech, which is probably a first—it will probably be the last time as well.

It is customary for me to speak in these debates on the sittings of the Youth Parliament. It is an unexpected pleasure for us to have the opportunity to debate this motion; earlier today, it appeared unlikely.

It is important to set out the background to how we have ended up in this situation. As many hon. Members will know, I do not support this state of affairs. The use of our Parliament came about as a result of a promise made by the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown to some young people at an event. He made an off-the-cuff promise that he would allow them to use the House of Commons Chamber for their annual sitting. It was a promise that he was in no position to make, as it was not his Chamber to give up. It was typical of him. He would say anything and do anything in order to curry favour with a few people so that he could get a few extra grubby votes.

Gordon Brown made a promise that he could not deliver on, could not keep and was not his to make. Basically, he asked Parliament to dig him out of a hole that he had created for himself. As his party had a

majority, it decided to pass what was called the “Spare Gordon Brown any embarrassment” motion, in order to allow the Youth Parliament to sit for one year only in this Chamber. It was appreciated that it was quite extraordinary and not really in order.

Therefore, for one year only, we had the “Let’s dig Gordon Brown out of a hole” motion to allow the Youth Parliament to sit here. The House divided on the issue and the motion went through, because of the Labour majority at the time. But it was done on the clear understanding that it would be a one-off occasion. The reason why some of us are against this annual routine is that it brings inconsistency to our proceedings.

I must say at the outset that I am a huge supporter of the Youth Parliament and the people who contribute to the debates. In fact, I have attended Youth Council debates in Bradford Council chamber. To be perfectly frank, the quality of the debate has often been higher than that which normally takes place there. I have attended the Youth Parliament debates in this Chamber as well, and know that no one could argue about the quality of the debate and the passion with which people spoke; no one has a problem with that. This is about not whether Members are in favour of, or against, the Youth Parliament, but whether it is appropriate for this Chamber to be used by other groups.

As the former Prime Minister made a promise that he should not have done, he was dug out of a hole. What I do not understand is why it is only the Youth Parliament that can sit on these Benches like Members of Parliament. My fear is: if it is fine for the Youth Parliament to sit and use these Benches, why not other groups that want to meet and congregate and have a debate here? The Muslim Council of Britain may want to have a debate in the House of Commons Chamber. We have always had a rule that these Benches are only able to be used by MPs and that it is a great privilege to be here. When my constituents come and visit the House of Commons, there is a big sign up that specifically tells them that they are not allowed to sit on these Benches. They are told quite politely by the staff here that these Benches are for MPs only and that they are not allowed to sit on them. If Members of the Youth Parliament can sit on them, why can my constituents not sit on them?

What is the difference? If the Muslim Council of Britain wants to use this Parliament, why can we say no to the Muslim Council of Britain but not to the Youth Parliament? On what basis is it right for one organisation to use it but not another? If one of the parish councils in my constituency decides that this Chamber would be a rather nice setting for its annual general meeting, why should it not be allowed to meet here, given that the Youth Parliament is? There is absolutely no logic or consistency to the current arrangement. Either we let other people use these Benches or we do not. My preference is that we do not, but I do not see why we should have one rule for everybody else and a separate rule for the Youth Parliament.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am sorry that the debate started so quickly that I missed the beginning of my hon. Friend’s speech, but I probably heard it last year, the previous year and 10 years ago, because it is the same speech every time. The only thing that is different about all the groups that he has mentioned is that all of them are 18 and plus, and have

the opportunity to vote. Those Members of the UK Youth Parliament who come here do not have the opportunity to vote or stand in elections. That is what makes them different, amongst many other things.

**Philip Davies:** If my hon. Friend is chastising me for being consistent, that is a chastisement I will take. I know it is a novel concept in politics to actually stick to your guns about something and believe in something and not change your opinion in response to the prevailing political wind. My hon. Friend may think it is a great thing to change one’s mind every five minutes, depending on the prevailing political mood. I rather think that being consistent is a virtue in politics, even if he disagrees.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Should we not do everything we can to encourage more younger people to be interested in this place, and to prevent them from thinking of it as something distant that they should not be involved in?

**Philip Davies:** I am grateful for the interventions of the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend. We were told originally that the Youth Parliament was different because we needed to get more young people interested in politics. By definition, the Members of the Youth Parliament are already interested in politics and political issues and are taking the lead on these things. If we want to find a group of young people that are not already involved in the political process and inspire them to get involved, we should invite everybody other than the Youth Parliament to come and sit on these Benches, because presumably they are the ones we need to reach. Those in the Youth Parliament seem to be the last people we should invite to sit on these Benches if our reason for doing so is to get more people involved and interested in politics. So I am afraid the hon. Gentleman’s arguments disintegrate straightaway.

What we have here is the usual rather sad charade of middle-aged Members of Parliament trying to curry favour with the youth and with the young vote. They ask themselves, “How can we give youthful voters the impression that we are trendy?” Basically, one way is to advocate motherhood and apple-pie tripe like this. They think that by doing these sorts of things they will prove that they are in touch with the youth and are really trendy, and that young voters will all go out and vote for them. I do not think young people are as stupid as hon. Members seem to think they are—that just because they are allowed to sit here once a year, they will all go flooding in and vote for those Members when the election comes. Hope is triumphing over reality, and it does not make them look trendy at all.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one way to call out those people who are trying to court favour is to give the vote to 16 and 17-year-olds? Then they can make their own decision.

**Philip Davies:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not want to test your patience by going off on a tangent about the merits of votes for 16 and 17-year-olds. I do not agree with giving them the vote; I make that clear. I do not want to dodge the hon. Gentleman’s intervention. I may be right in saying that Madam Deputy Speaker probably would not tolerate a lengthy debate on that. I think we

[*Philip Davies*]

are really debating whether the Youth Parliament should sit in the Chamber, so I do not want to incur Madam Deputy Speaker's wrath so early in her career as Madam Deputy Speaker. There will be plenty of other occasions when that happens.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to allow me to curry favour with youth, which I am always aiming to do. I just wonder whether he might be a convert to votes for 16 and 17-year-olds, because on the argument we heard earlier, that would mean that they did not need to come here to have the Youth Parliament.

**Philip Davies:** As ever, my hon. Friend makes a telling point. However, the problem with his point is that that will indicate some kind of logic on the part of those people who so strongly advocate that the Youth Parliament should sit in this Chamber. He has probably missed out on its implication—that once 16 and 17-year-olds had the vote, and therefore that group of people did not need to sit in this Chamber for the Youth Parliament, a group of 14 and 15-year-olds would be exclusively invited to sit here because they did not have the vote, and they could sit here until enough weight built up behind their campaign to grant 14 and 15-year-olds the vote, and so on.

I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for his earlier intervention. His argument is that members of the Youth Parliament should be able to sit here because they cannot vote. My children are 12 and 10, so they cannot vote either. I will happily go along to my children's school and suggest, following my hon. Friend's logic, that they should be able to have their annual debating competition here. They are not allowed to vote and we want to encourage them to get involved in politics, so presumably my hon. Friend would be all in favour of that.

**Tim Loughton:** Of course, my hon. Friend is talking rubbish. The main thrust of my argument was that those young people are not entitled to stand for election, in contrast to the members of all the other bodies he trotted out in support of his argument.

**Philip Davies:** I am surprised that my hon. Friend thinks that regurgitating his argument is absolute rubbish. I was trying to make that point myself, in a spirit of compromise and consensus. He said in his latest intervention that Members of the Youth Parliament should be able to sit here because they cannot stand for election. My 12 and 10-year-old sons cannot stand for election, so presumably, following his logic, and given that we are trying to encourage more young people to get involved in politics, their school should be able to hold its annual debating competition here. Presumably that meets his criteria.

**Drew Hendry:** The hon. Gentleman is incredibly generous to let me intervene twice. Does he agree that if the public pay for a facility, they should get maximum access to it, and that we should be allowing people to use the public buildings they have paid for?

**Philip Davies:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I may not agree with him, but I admire his consistency. If I follow his argument correctly, he is suggesting that any group should be able to use the Chamber if they think that would be worthwhile—for example, a parish council holding its annual meeting. He argues that they paid for it, so they should be able to use it. I do not agree with him, but I admire his consistency. What I cannot understand is the argument that nobody should be able to use the Chamber because it is absolutely sacrosanct and only Members of Parliament who have been elected should have the right to sit on these Benches—apart from members of the Youth Parliament. There is absolutely no logic to it. At least the hon. Gentleman's position is logical.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I was intrigued by the idea that people should be able to come here and debate if they are not allowed to stand for Parliament. Were that argument to be taken further, I wonder whether we would allow criminals to come here, or Members of the House of Lords.

**Philip Davies:** I do not want to go into the history of the expenses scandal, but many people would argue that criminals did sit on these Benches for a while, so I am not sure that my hon. Friend should push that particular line too hard, because that has already happened. My hon. Friend's point is that we could have an annual prisoners' outing to Parliament so that they could sample democracy and be inspired to engage in the political process once they leave prison. It is the same argument. I suspect that the problem with that argument, however, is that whereas those Members who are such strong supporters of the Youth Parliament sitting here think that they can get a few grubby votes by supporting it, they would probably think, even though the logic is the same, that allowing prisoners to sit here would probably not go down so well with their constituents. This is not about high principle at all; it is about people who are prepared to say anything and do anything to get a few cheap votes back in their constituencies at the next election. They think that the best way of doing that is to say, "I am all for the youth. I think that young people should be able to sit in the House of Commons Chamber."

But why just the Youth Parliament? That is what I want to know. What about all the other young people who would love to use these Benches to sample the atmosphere and further their political ambitions? Why are they excluded? Why are we being so exclusive? What is wrong with all the other young people out there whom we want to inspire?

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in an approach to the Speaker to discuss broader access to this Chamber for other groups to iron out the anomaly he is talking about?

**Philip Davies:** I want to iron out the anomaly but in a rather different way from the hon. Gentleman, I fear. His way of dealing with the anomaly is to allow all and sundry to use the Chamber; my way is to stop the one group of people who are currently allowed to use it.

We had the Youth Parliament taking part in debates in Parliament before they were allowed to use this Chamber. I think they used Westminster Hall on one

occasion. They may even have used the House of Lords, and perhaps Committee Room 14. I am very supportive of that; I have no problem with it whatsoever. One of the arguments made for them moving out of the House of Lords and Westminster Hall was, “Well, they’ve already been there. They’re bored now—they want to go somewhere else.” In that case, why do they need to come and sit in here year in, year out? If they were so bored after just one sitting in the House of Lords, and they want to be on this sort of merry-go-round, they can find somewhere else to go. They must surely be bored with sitting in here by now. I am certainly bored with them sitting in here, and I am sure that they must be too, so let us relieve them of their boredom and let them find somewhere else.

Given that we are having to decide whether we stay here in future years, we will probably end up in the ridiculous position of having the UK Youth Parliament still sitting in here while we have been kicked out. That is probably how politically correct we have got these days. No one will be prepared to tell them that they cannot sit in here any more. We will all be told that we have to move, but they will still be here once a year, every single year, using these facilities. Perhaps they could do us all a favour and go away to try to find somewhere else that we might be able to use ourselves when we might have to be removed. They could do a public service by going out over the next four or five years and looking at different locations to see how they work for these grand debates. That would be much more use than having them sit here.

I do not intend to call a Division; I would not want to test the patience of my hon. Friends in that way. However, we should not just be nodding this through and saying it is absolutely fine for one group of people to be allowed to use these Benches every year without any thought. Let us have a proper rationale. My constituents are not allowed to sit on these Benches when they come to visit Parliament. I have not yet heard anybody argue that they should be; everyone is quite happy for that to continue. Why is this narrow group of people be treated—

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): It has been fascinating listening to these speeches, but a convoluted argument is being made. Why can we not do one nice thing for the youth? They are very serious about coming here. It is a terrific honour to sit on these Benches, and it really shows that they are interested and encourages them from then on. We should make it a one-off. Let us not bother with any of the arguments and just let it happen.

**Philip Davies:** The hon. Gentleman perfectly sums up the argument—let us just curry favour with a few young people. But why just this group of people? There is no logic to it whatsoever. Either one is allowed to sit on these Benches or one is not. He must accept that there is no logic to his position; it is just a load of motherhood and apple pie guff.

I shall draw my remarks to a close because I do not wish to test the patience of my colleagues any further, but it is important to put on the record the fact that not everybody is happy with this. I am sure it will be agreed, and I genuinely hope that the people who come to speak on that day enjoy themselves and feel inspired to come to Parliament, but I do not accept that the only way a young person—

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Will my hon. Friend give way before he finishes?

**Philip Davies:** Because it is my hon. Friend, I will.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. I thought I should assure him that he is not testing the patience of the House; the House is thoroughly enjoying his speech. He may not know that while he has been speaking the only people he has been inconveniencing are the Executive, because Back Benchers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries are now on a one-line Whip.

**Philip Davies:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for telling me about the whipping advice. I shall seek him out more often. It may well pay dividends for everybody to know that I know the whipping arrangements.

I do not think it is right to say that the only way we can inspire people to get involved in politics is to allow them to sit in here and have a debate. When I was first elected to Parliament in 2005, it was an absolute honour and privilege—[*Interruption.*] It absolutely still is a privilege, but to be able to sit on these Benches for the first time was an absolute privilege and an honour, and I thought it was very special.

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Philip Davies:** I would like to finish, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Graham Jones:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could finish with this thought: did he canvass the young people of Shipley and ask them for their views before he came here to represent them in this debate?

**Philip Davies:** I know that the hon. Gentleman’s part of the world does not bother with elections, but Shipley, in common with most other places, had an election a few weeks ago. It obviously bypassed the hon. Gentleman, who clearly does not have to worry about trifling matters like elections. What was put to the test in our election was whether I or somebody else should represent the people of Shipley in this House. I can report—I do not think I would be here otherwise—that 50% of the people of the Shipley constituency voted for me, and I am therefore exercising my democratic right to represent them.

**Graham Jones** *rose*—

**Philip Davies:** Now that the hon. Gentleman has learned what elections are all about, I will give way to him again.

**Graham Jones:** My question was whether the hon. Gentleman had asked the young people in his constituency. The voting age is 18 and I would like it to be 16, but the hon. Gentleman voted against that.

**Philip Davies:** The young people of Shipley have different views on different issues. Has the hon. Gentleman canvassed the opinion of every 16-year-old in his constituency? I suspect not, because how would he identify every 16-year-old in his constituency in order

[Philip Davies]

to be able to canvass them? In fact, I suspect I probably canvass more people in Shipley than he has in his constituency over the years.

**Graham Jones:** For the record, I believe that my constituency is one of the most canvassed in the country.

**Philip Davies:** In which case, it is a shame the hon. Gentleman did not realise there was an election on which to canvass a few weeks ago. I am here to represent my constituents in Parliament. If they want someone else to represent them, they know exactly what they need to do at an election and I will always respect their decision.

I thought it was a great privilege to sit here for the first time after I was elected and I do not want young people to feel blasé about the fact that they have already been here and say, “I don’t need to stand for Parliament, because I’ve already sat there—been there, seen it, done it.” It should be something that people who want to get involved in politics aspire to do: they should aspire to come to sit on these Benches and feel as proud as I did when I was first elected in 2005. I fear that this is gesture politics of the worst kind. It is motherhood and apple pie guff. I am opposed to it and I will always remain opposed to having an exemption for one single group.

5.38 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is completely right to say that the quality of Youth Parliament debates in this Chamber continues to be exemplary. The hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) was also right to mention the inspiration given to the young people of the Youth Parliament by allowing them to come into this Chamber and debate.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I want to commend the member of the Youth Parliament for my constituency, Aaron Addidle, who attends Regent House school and has all the qualities of a potential MP or Member of the Legislative Assembly. He shows that today’s youth are interested. Sometimes people deride them, but today’s youth in my constituency have great qualities.

**Nic Dakin:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to commend that young person, and there are many similar young people up and down the land. School councils meet daily, weekly and monthly for debates and conversations. Indeed, I recently met the school councils of Lincoln Gardens and St Augustine Webster primary schools in my constituency. They are typical examples of what is going on.

The Deputy Leader of the House made a good point when she drew attention to the way in which issues have been raised for debate in the Youth Parliament. There have been regional meetings of young people across the country to discuss a variety of issues, and those issues have eventually been brought here. It is right and proper that the debates happen here as the pinnacle of all those activities, and that is why I am happy to support the motion.

5.40 pm

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I did not think that we would be debating the motion this evening, so my apologies again for being late, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There is a sense of déjà vu all over again, because we have debated motions such as this several times in my 18 years in the House, and my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) has been entirely consistent in speaking against the motion and trotting out the same arguments every single time. I respect his consistency, but I absolutely take issue with the basis on which he has trotted out his view yet again. Indeed, I think it is patronising to young people. To hear comments such as he made may amuse us—it is good knockabout stuff—but there is a serious point. The young people who have made the commitment to put themselves in front of their peers and stand for election, just as he and I did a few weeks ago, have made a sacrifice, often at a very young age, and expect to be taken seriously. When they hear comments like his in this place, it can only serve to undermine their confidence. That is a great shame.

I speak as an absolutely unswerving supporter of the UK Youth Parliament. I was the Children’s Minister responsible for the UKYP, and the Government rescued it when there was a financial problem with it some years ago. It was taken on by the British Youth Council, under whose tutelage it has flourished ever since. I have sat on these Benches along with 400 members of the UKYP in their November sittings, and you have addressed those sittings yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker. It has always been a huge privilege, and we take great pride in what those young people do. We are cutting off our nose to spite our face, though, because when we come back on the Monday, Mr Speaker will remind us without fail how well behaved, well turned out, succinct and concise those young people were on the Friday, and how well they made their arguments. He inevitably says what a shame it is that the Members of Parliament assembled on the Monday cannot act and behave as well as them. They set quite an example.

The UKYP is not some random cluster of young, enthusiastic people who have some interest in politics. It was set up by one of our colleagues, Andrew Rowe, the former Member for Mid Kent, back in about 2000 or 2001. Some years ago, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley said, we granted it the use of this Chamber, which was recognition of just how important a body it had become.

One of the key things that I wanted to push in my time as Minister responsible for children and young people, and which I continue to push, was the expansion of youth engagement in this country’s political process. Whether or not we believe in votes at 16 or 17, we have a looming crisis, because the number of 18 to 24-year-olds who vote in elections is derisory. In 2010, something like 43% or 44% voted, and early indications suggest that the figure fell in the general election that we have just been through. We have a crisis of engagement among young people who are already entitled to vote, so we should support anything that we can do to encourage bodies such as the UKYP, which can act as a good example of how young people can be engaged in politics and be taken seriously by people in positions of power.

I would like the UKYP to have more powers in this place. You and I have talked, Madam Deputy Speaker, about the Youth Select Committee—I am proud to be one of those who set it up some years ago, and I was the first Minister to appear in front of it. It was the biggest grilling I have ever had in front of a Select Committee. I have appeared as a Minister in front of many Select Committees. None was better prepared, and not prepared to take rubbish for an answer and to be palmed off, than the Youth Select Committee, whose members really did their homework and produced an excellent report—in that case on transport for young people and, subsequently, on education for life and other subjects.

The big issue with those young people—to take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley—is that they are not random groups of young people; they have been elected. The turnout to elect UKYP members is rather impressive; in many parts of the country it is better than for Members of Parliament. Hundreds of thousands of young people have voted for members of the UK Youth Parliament and, locally, for youth councils, youth cabinets and, in some cases, the youth mayors that we have in different parts of the country.

**Jim Shannon:** Was the hon. Gentleman encouraged in his constituency, as I was in mine, by the young people who put their names forward for election and who were elected? The interest was phenomenal, and some of it spilled over into the elections to Westminster this year, when people voting for the first time introduced themselves to candidates. I am encouraged by that in my constituency. Is he encouraged by it in his?

**Tim Loughton:** I am hugely encouraged. It is a big ask, at the age of 13, 14 or 15, for someone to put their name forward, to stand up on a public stage in front of other young people and to strut their stuff—to put forward their manifesto and take questions. We take it for granted—we do it for a living; many of us have done it since we were anoraks in our teens—but doing it for the first time is a big ask. Coming to this place is hugely daunting. I have spoken to many young people, before they have come here and after they have spoken. What a huge privilege it is. They are not going to keep coming back and doing it every year; they get the opportunity only once to sit in this place. They will not have an opportunity again until they are over 18 and may then put themselves forward for public office, which they cannot do when they are under 18.

**Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that one thing we could do is ensure that we, here in this Chamber, have a debate about the issues that those young people have discussed? That would give a certain resilience to what they have been doing.

**Tim Loughton:** That is exactly the point I was coming to. Something that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I have discussed—alas, you are not now in a position to advocate it so much, certainly from the Benches—is the report that the Youth Select Committee produces with the aid of resources in the House and the advice of hon. Members and House staff. The report receives a formal response from the Department responsible for that policy issue, and it should be automatically debated in this House. We should show that we take it seriously. Those

people would take something like that much more seriously, and much better, than the patronising comments that a few dinosaurs—a very few—in this place still trot out every few years in this debate.

I should like to see the role of the UKYP in this House extended. It is always a huge sadness and very frustrating—despite all the time and effort that goes into the meeting every year, as well as the summer sitting which I have been to for many years, where some very grown-up, intelligent debate takes place—to see how little coverage it gets in the media. Today's proceedings will probably be reported in the press tomorrow. I am pretty sure that some of my hon. Friend's *bons mots* will make it into some of the Commons sketches tomorrow, but very rarely do we read anything about the deliberations of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament, even when they come to this Chamber, in the mother of Parliaments, to discuss their issues for the year and when they produce their Select Committee reports. That is a huge sadness, and we should do anything we can do to promote greater awareness among the public at large of the UKYP's existence, making other young people more confident that it is something they should get involved in if they want to influence things in their community and nationally, and that Members of this Parliament are just as much there for everybody under 18 as they are for everybody over 18 who happens to be able to vote in their constituencies.

I have an electorate of 74,500 in East Worthing and Shoreham, but I always talk about having a constituency of 91,000 because I am there for everybody under the age of 18, whether they are interested in politics or not.

I am absolutely in favour of the motion. I always have been and I have always spoken on this subject.

**Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): My hon. Friend has denigrated some of the arguments put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), but one of the points that he has not covered is whether there are any other groups he feels would be as well behaved as the Youth Parliament that should also sit in this honourable Chamber?

**Tim Loughton:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. There was a lot of denigration going on from my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley, as well, although in good odour. The UKYP is unique. One reason is that it is a body of young people who are not yet able to stand for public office, which would entitle them to sit in this place as we do. I can also think of no other national body based on election with an electorate similar to that which elects us, but based on age. They represent constituencies, albeit rather wider constituencies—in west Sussex, we have four constituencies electing four Members of the Youth Parliament, and this Friday I will meet my local MYP, Stephen Gearing. We need to do something to inspire young people to get engaged in the political process and to feel that this place is not something out of their reach that they can never influence. They should not feel that MPs are not there for them and are in some other world; they are just as entitled to have access to us, to have us engage with them and to be taken seriously by us.

I feel that we should extend the remit to allow the Youth Parliament to sit in this House once more. Over the past few years its Members have proved wrong all

[*Tim Loughton*]

the scare stories that they would be hanging from the chandeliers or leaving chewing gum under the seats, and they treat this place with rather greater respect than some hon. Members who sit here day after day. They have earned the right to continue to sit in this House once a year and, more than that, I feel that they have earned the right to be taken rather more seriously, so their proceedings should become a matter for automatic debate by this House in future years.

5.52 pm

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): I think that some age solidarity is needed when we talk about young people, and I shall come to that in a moment.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), not because I agree with a single word he said but because of his determination to put his point of view however much he is in the minority. One lesson he teaches us, which we should not forget, is that if someone has a consistent point of view—even though it might be totally wrong—they should put it in the House of Commons. In some respects, I consider the hon. Gentleman's politics as nearing those of the 19th century and I can well imagine him opposing every reform that came before the House. If he had been a Member 100 years ago, no one would have been more steadfast in opposing votes for women, and I am sure that in the post-1945 era he would have voted against all the social reforms that we now accept. He spoke about middle-aged people and I must confess, though it might not appear so to hon. Members, that I am beyond middle age. My age group could certainly not be considered middle aged, although I was very pleased to be in this place when I was.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and my hon. Friends have mentioned how well behaved the Members of the Youth Parliament are. I am not so concerned about good behaviour. They were hardly going to throw apples at each other and all the rest, but I happened to watch the parliamentary programme about their proceedings, which I knew was going to be on—I am not such an obsessive about being a parliamentarian that I want to watch parliamentary programmes over the weekend—and I was so impressed by the level of debate and the exchanges that took place that I am sure I watched it for one and a half hours or more. The hon. Gentleman and others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), have made the point that it should be a matter of the utmost concern to us, as people involved in politics who want to see our democracy defended at all costs, that the number of people who vote in the 18-to-24 age category is small compared with other age groups. We must encourage such people to vote.

I accept, of course, that having a Youth Parliament as such, and debating, will not necessarily increase voting. I have my own views on how voting should be increased, and I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill in the closing stages of the last Parliament for a voting system more or less modelled on Australia, with an obligation to vote.

On Members of the Youth Parliament coming here, I say to the hon. Member for Shipley that this is not a sacred place. When we are sitting here, we have our privileges, such as the right to debate and to ensure that

no one interferes with our debates. That is when we are in session, but when we are not sitting, there is no reason on earth why this place should not be used by the Youth Parliament and perhaps other groups as well. I do not understand his view that in our absence, nothing should occur here and there should be no debates by other groups and the rest of it. I do not accept that view for one moment.

When the matter first became before the House a few years ago, a number of Conservative Members opposed it—certainly no Labour or Liberal Democrat Members did. It is interesting that today, only the hon. Gentleman is opposing it. I have already praised him for putting forward his point of view, however much he appears to be in a minority of one. The fact that what was controversial a few years ago no longer is—it is more or less accepted—is an indication that people now recognise that the Youth Parliament has a role to play in this House.

Incidentally, when I watched that parliamentary programme, one other thing impressed me: the Speaker of the House of Commons was in the Chair. It was not a Deputy Speaker—that is no reflection on any of the Deputy Speakers in the last Parliament, let alone in this Parliament—and it was impressive that the Speaker of the House of Commons chaired the whole sitting. Those who participated in the Youth Parliament also respected the fact that the Speaker took the matter seriously enough to be in the Chair all the time that the proceedings were taking place.

I hope that the motion will be carried. I hope that not only this year, but in future years, the Youth Parliament will sit where we sit. It may well be that after 2020 we will be in a different place for a few years. Wherever that place may be, it will be the House of Commons, and the Youth Parliament is most welcome.

My age is such that I, perhaps more than other Members, look around the Chamber and see Members of ages that are nowhere near my own. As someone who has reached their 80s, I want to make it absolutely clear that, as my colleagues have said, younger people should have the vote. That the people involved in the Youth Parliament are so interested to come here and to participate in political debate—hopefully some of them will become Members of Parliament and, even more hopefully, Labour Members of Parliament—is an encouragement to me.

5.58 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Gentleman. He is but a boy in this House, and it would be unthinkable for this Parliament to be without his presence in his traditional place.

It is obviously a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). I commend him for his work as children's Minister and for his work with the Youth Parliament. He has been massive supporter of the UKYP and, like him, I hope to continue to see many more such meetings in the House of Commons.

It is also the first time I have been able to address the House with you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, so this is my opportunity to pay congratulations to you on your rightful ascent. I served under you when you were the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, so it is a pleasure to serve under you as Madam Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons.

This debate would not happen in Scotland, because we are going to give the vote to 16 and 17-year-olds. I pay tribute to my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament, who last week passed legislation to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in Scottish parliamentary elections. It is such a shame that probably in the same year as those young people go and vote in a Scottish parliamentary election, this House will deny them the opportunity to vote in the EU referendum.

**Karl McCartney:** Is the hon. Gentleman saying that if 16 and 17-year-olds were given the vote, the Youth Parliament should not meet in this place?

**Pete Wishart:** If 16 and 17-year-olds were given the vote, it would not make sense for 16 and 17-year-olds to meet here as a sub-Parliament.

I wish that the hon. Gentleman would take a cursory glance at the galvanising effect of involving young people in the democratic process. All of us on the SNP Benches are recipients of the engagement that we have seen in Scotland. Like all my hon. Friends, I visited most of my local schools during the referendum campaign. People would not believe the outlook that those young people had. Being questioned by 16-year-olds about “sterlingisation” and Barnett consequentials is something that I will never forget. That was a feature of the involvement of young people in the referendum campaign.

We felt that it was important to continue that involvement for every election to come. Where we have jurisdictional responsibility, 16 and 17-year-olds will continue to have the vote. It is just such a shame that they will be deprived of the opportunity to participate in the EU referendum and in elections to this House, when they should have that opportunity.

I am a signatory to the motion. I think that I speak on behalf of all my colleagues in saying that we really enjoy the fact that the young people of the UK can come to this Parliament and participate in debate. Like the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, I observed their proceedings in this House and saw their mature response, the effective and real debate that they had on a variety of issues, the way that they conducted themselves, and their sheer joy and pleasure at being in this House with Mr Speaker in the Chair, directing the debate. It is something that I am sure none of those young people will forget. Now that they have had that taste of democratic, electoral politics, I am sure that they will play a full part in the democratic process.

**Mr Winnick:** I am sure that *Hansard* will correct the hon. Gentleman, but my constituency is Walsall North.

**Pete Wishart:** I am so grateful to the hon. Gentleman for putting me right. How could I possibly get his constituency wrong? Of course he is the hon. Member for Walsall North, and a distinguished Member at that.

I am very fond of the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), as he knows. I hope that he comes to Perth racecourse this year, where he and I can have a little flutter on the gee-gees at Scone Palace. However, I have heard him make the same speech again and again. When he started making it, he was dinosaur junior. Now, he is dinosaur senior, such is his elevated position among right-wing Conservative Members of Parliament. He is almost the sole and exclusive representative of one of the most dwindling clubs of Conservative Members

of Parliament. It is heartening to see him in a minority of one in addressing the House on this issue because he is totally wrong.

This place should be opened up to young people. This is a fantastic opportunity for them to come to the House of Commons and participate in its debates and proceedings. I hope that, in years to come, we will continue to open our doors to the young people of the United Kingdom.

6.3 pm

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is the first contribution that I have made with you in the Chair and it is good to see you there.

I am not somebody who talks in this place for the sake of talking, but I feel motivated to participate in this debate because it is on an important issue that goes to the heart of our democracy and its future. I hope that I do not cause offence to anyone but, having looked around the Chamber, I think that I might be the youngest Member here. It is a sad state of affairs when the youngest Member in the Chamber is someone with quite as much grey hair as I have and someone who has very recently celebrated their 40th birthday.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), and the hon. Members for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), for their excellent contributions. I agree with all they said.

I put on record my full support for the UK Youth Parliament using the Chamber. I find it utterly remarkable that we are having this debate at all. The fact that we repeat this debate almost yearly will seem anathema to many of my constituents. It is a no-brainer that the UK Youth Parliament can use the Chamber. It has my full support in doing so.

It is important that hon. Members remember just how remote we are to many people. I hope I will not cause offence, but when people look around the Chamber today, they could be forgiven for thinking that it is quite male and pale, and some people would say it is quite stale. The same could not be said when people watch debates of the UK Youth Parliament and the people who sit on these Benches. We have had some excellent Members of the Youth Parliament from Lewisham. The current Member, Saffron Worrell, was out campaigning during the general election. They bring great energy to this place. Long may it continue.

It is a crying shame that, when I have work experience students visit the House of Commons and sit in the Public Gallery, often, one of the first things they say to me is, “Do you have to be posh to be an MP?” Lots of people watch the debates in this Chamber and think that it is an episode of “Downton Abbey”. We have to change that. Making the Chamber accessible to young people is one way we can do so.

I do not want to detain the House. I just wanted to put on record my strong support for the UK Youth Parliament using the Chamber.

6.6 pm

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** It is a pleasure to reply to the debate. I thank my hon. Friends the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) and for East Worthing and

*[Dr Thérèse Coffey]*

Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for their speeches. I also thank for their contributions the hon. Members for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander), the youngest person in the Chamber, although, as we know, not the youngest Member of Parliament elected in 2015.

All I can say to the Scottish National party Members is that, to some extent, they have been treated to a bit of a taster, if not a short masterclass, of Friday sittings. Five years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley spoke for 77 minutes, but today he spoke for only 24 minutes. In that regard, this has been a shorter debate. Nevertheless, he has shown consistency and, I would say, intellectual rigour. It pains me to think that I might be supporting a dig-Gordon-Brown-out-of-a-hole motion, but that is not the case today. Just as the House did five years ago, we are giving permission to another group of special young people to participate in a debate in the Chamber.

The point about other groups has been made. I am not aware of any other groups that have asked to use the Chamber. It would be for them to approach the House and for the House to decide, but I recognise that the House has, on the previous two occasions it has debated this matter, endorsed having the Youth Parliament sit in the Chamber.

I was intrigued by the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham. He spoke passionately about the UK Youth Parliament and behaviour. I am sure Mr Speaker will be looking to him to be a role model to colleagues during Prime Minister's questions for the next five years.

I want to say something that might jar. It is not strictly accurate to say that Members of the UK Youth Parliament could not be elected to the House, which addresses the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karl McCartney) made. The UK Youth Parliament is open to anybody from age 11 to 18 and their term lasts for two years, so we could technically just about have a 20-year-old being a Member of the Youth Parliament, which, as the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Ms Black) proved, is young enough to be elected. Nevertheless, I recognise that the majority of Members of the Youth Parliament are under 18.

I was taken by the comments of the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan), who is no longer in his place—he is probably off answering his trendy ringtone. He extended across the Chamber the branch of friendship to look at this particular situation, but I come back to the fact that it is a special occasion for the Members of the Youth Parliament. The hon. Member for Lewisham East was perhaps the first hon. Member in the debate to refer to a Member of the Youth Parliament. Five years ago, lots of Liberal Democrats did the sycophantic thing of naming every one they could. I had a Deputy Member of the Youth Parliament campaigning for me in the general election. It was good to see people getting involved in the campaign.

I hope that the House, having had a wide-ranging debate, endorses the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House welcomes the work of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament in providing young people with an opportunity to engage with the political process and accordingly resolves that the UK Youth Parliament should be allowed to meet once a year in the Chamber of this House for the duration of this Parliament.

## BUTEC Facility (North-West Scotland)

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(George Hollingbery.)*

6.10 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I congratulate you on your appointment, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate with you in the Chair. I welcome the opportunity to raise this issue. I have heard many hon. Members in the past couple of days asking, what is BUTEC? It is the British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre, which is operated by QinetiQ on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

BUTEC operates facilities at Kyle of Lochalsh, the Island of Rona and Applecross, with testing taking place off Rona and in the Inner Sound between the Island of Raasay and the mainland at Applecross. The area off Rona will, from time to time, be closed to local fishing interests, with an area off Raasay being permanently closed—the so-called no take zone. When there is no activity off Rona, creels can be placed there. The fishermen are compensated when the area is closed and the creels have to be moved.

On 23 February, the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence, now the Minister for Defence Procurement, informed this House that there was to be a £22 million investment at QinetiQ. We do not know the details of that investment, but among other things the Rona facility will be closed and there will be a net loss of jobs. Perhaps the Minister could detail what the planned investment will actually result in as far as jobs are concerned. There has been considerable local coverage of the plans, including the publication of a map. I have the map with me and it shows at least a doubling of the exclusion zone for fishing, right up to the shore line at Applecross.

To a large extent, the interests of BUTEC and the local fishing community co-exist, or can be more accurately said to have co-existed up until that proposal was announced. There are legitimate concerns that the proposed expansion of BUTEC offers a real threat to the local fishing industry. My first question is: why could we not have the same circumstances that exist off Rona, where fishing is allowed when there is no activity? The same should apply to any extended area. I also want to ask why this is being proposed now. Is it, for example, to do with the existing Trident fleet, or is it, as some expect, to do with a future replacement of the Trident fleet, something that we on the Scottish National party Benches would resolutely oppose?

Since February, very little has been stated publicly. We were promised a public consultation, which was initially suggested for April and then conveniently moved until after the general election and put off until June. I now understand that it has been put back to late summer. That is simply not good enough, particularly in the light of what is happening at Applecross. People in my constituency deserve to know what is going on and the nature of the threat to employment in Ross, Skye and Lochaber.

On 29 May, one of our local papers, the *West Highland Free Press*, stated that a Ministry of Defence spokesman had said that no work had started on the expansion. However, the “Applecrosslife” blog of 6 June tells a different story:

“The ‘investment’ on the shore side of the Range expansion has already begun which leads me to think that the upcoming consultation may be little more than a paper exercise. No one is going to tell me that everything is not in place and that this is not going to stop if a few fishermen complain their livelihoods are going to be adversely affected.”

There is also photographic evidence on the blog of ongoing work. My questions are as follows: when will the consultation exercise start? Why has the consultation process not started? Who is responsible for commencing the construction activity? When the consultation starts, why should we believe that it will be meaningful if the construction work is already under way? Why is there a proposal to take the exclusion zone right up to the shoreline? Why are the expansion plans necessary? Let me also ask: who will be responsible for the consultation exercise? Who will conduct it and who will be consulted?

Why is this important? I welcome the jobs associated with the range. However, we understand from what has appeared in the press that, with the ending of the Rona capabilities, there will be a net reduction in jobs. I want to speak up for the work force at QinetiQ, and in doing so, I ask that the company restore union recognition for the work force and allow them to be properly represented on this and on other matters.

I turn to the implications for the fishing industry. Particularly active in this area is the Mallaig & North West Fishermen’s Association. The association was formed to promote the idea of responsible fishing within the Inner Sound between Raasay and the Scottish mainland, with the intention of maintaining the viability not only of the available stocks of fish and shellfish, but of the diverse fishing communities situated on the fringes of the area. The association fully understands the role played by the fishing industry in keeping these communities alive.

The area has a reputation for producing high-quality prawns, which are eagerly sought by shellfish buyers for the export markets in mainland Europe. The membership of the association currently numbers some 70 vessels and 120 owners and crewmen. The reports of an expansion of the BUTEC range caused considerable disquiet among the membership, and a number of meetings have been held to discuss the issue. The current situation whereby fishing activity has been banned in a swathe of the Inner Sound was accepted by the association—but with some reservations.

The area currently used by QinetiQ consists mainly of deep water—100 fathoms, or 600 feet, where the BUTEC activities are carried out. Over the years, the fishermen have learned to operate outwith this area, to rotate their activities to suit the available stocks in each location and to maintain and preserve their integrity while allowing themselves to make a living and retain the viability of the communities they live in.

The fishing industry supports not only the livelihood of the 120 people directly employed within it, but a large—and some would say equal—number of jobs associated with it. That is some 240 families in the area whose main wage earner is dependent on this industry. As I have stated, 70 boats will be affected by the proposals with a larger knock-on effect across many communities. What sustainability studies have been carried out on the issue?

The current system of rotating fishing activities to suit the available stocks would be severely hampered should any further areas be declared “no fishing zones”.

[Ian Blackford]

It is simple mathematics: 70 vessels concentrated into a much smaller area would catch the available stocks faster. That would lead to overfishing of the area and removal of too many shellfish to allow natural regeneration of the stock. The result would be a collapse of those stocks and the end of the local industry.

There is the issue of the threat to employment in the fishing industry and at BUTEC. The current proposals will see 13 jobs at the Rona listening station at the north end of Raasay being surplus to requirements. Those jobs do not appear to be being replaced by civilian staff at the new facility being mooted under the extension scheme. If the extension is allowed, it is a certainty that those 13 jobs will be lost.

The loss of fishing grounds will no doubt force a number of fishermen to leave the industry at the very least. That will have a knock-on effect in the local communities and the whole downward spiral of depopulation will be exacerbated, leading to further local decline. These communities operate within a finely-tuned mechanism of co-dependence. Loss of a part of one commercial area impacts upon all the others; the local economies are intertwined, with the long-term viability of the area depending on that relationship. If one aspect of the local economy declines, the revenue declines elsewhere. The communities are indeed living on the edge. The loss of fishing industry jobs will mean families without any secure full-time employment being forced to leave. The ripples of that departure will resonate throughout the entire community, affecting other local businesses, schools and myriad other institutions.

It is not known how many civilians are directly dependent on the BUTEC facility. That information is apparently “classified”, but it can be safely assumed that the number does not come close to the numbers directly or indirectly connected with the local fishing industry. As a result of the range extension, the local area could lose a considerable number of full-time, year-round jobs, which would devastate the area and lead to irreversible decline.

This proposal comes at the same time as further revelations concerning the safety aspects of the UK nuclear fleet and the Trident programme. When new safety allegations are added to the well-documented grounding of a nuclear-powered submarine in the area in recent years, the general disquiet that is felt about the possibility of another accident must be considered. It would take only one mistake to devastate the entire area.

Questions are rightly being asked about why the new area is being considered for the BUTEC programme. The waters there are relatively shallow in comparison with those in the current restricted zone. It is one thing for nuclear-powered submarines to operate in depths of 100 fathoms, but it is an entirely different matter for those same vessels to operate in much shallower waters.

Those who are familiar with the history of the area will know that there used to be crofting communities all the way along the Applecross peninsula. They were hampered by very poor communications with the outside world, and for decades they fought to have their only means of access, a simple track, upgraded to a road. One by one, those crofting townships were emptied of

their people as they sought a better life elsewhere, frustrated by the lack of support from the Government. By the 1960s, they were gone. What happened then? The Ministry of Defence went into the peninsula and a road was built, but it was built too late to save the communities that had existed in Applecross for hundreds of years.

In one way or another, people were cleared from Applecross—cleared from the land. I do not wish to see our people today cleared from the fishing grounds: history must not be repeated. I urge the Minister to engage in early consultation and, crucially, to recognise that we must respect the interests of the local fishing community, as well as the interests of the MOD and BUTEC.

6.22 pm

**Brendan O’Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Let me begin by joining all the other Members who have congratulated you on your appointment, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for allowing me to take some of his allotted time. In doing so, he recognised that this issue is important not just for his constituency but for Scotland more widely. It goes to the heart of the question of the relationship between the Ministry of Defence and local communities, particularly Scotland’s rural communities.

As my hon. Friend said, there is no doubt that work on the extension of the BUTEC range has already started, although, as recently as last month, the *West Highland Free Press* said that the official MOD position was that no such work had begun. The evidence is plain: anyone passing Sands Beach and looking down will see that major and extensive trench digging is already taking place—and why, if no major construction is taking place, are the Applecross guest houses full of construction workers? Some are booked up four months in advance. That is the crux of the matter: it is about engagement and respect between the Ministry of Defence and local communities.

Will the Minister please tell us what level of consultation has been entered into by the MOD with the local population about the range extension, and about the serious effects that it will have on fishermen and associated businesses? Like my hon. Friend, I understand that a public consultation was due to start in April, but it did not. Then it was due to start in June, but that has not happened either. Now there is a vague promise that it will take place some time before the end of the summer. What is the truth? When will that public consultation take place? Indeed, will it ever take place? It now appears that the first part of the extension will be completed before there has been any consultation with the local community. Will the Minister confirm this evening that there will be a consultation process, and will he tell the House when it will take place?

In accepting that the construction work is well under way despite a lack of any public consultation, will the Minister tell us what procedures the MOD believes it has to follow in order to proceed with the major part of the construction work? I ask that question because I am unaware of any planning application having been made, or of an environmental impact assessment having been carried out. As I understand it, when the Ministry

sought to extend the buildings at Faslane, it used the conventional planning process. Is it the Ministry's intention to use that process to extend the work at BUTEC?

Will the Minister tell us whether an application has been made under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997? Does the work even require such planning permission? If not, what mechanisms are being put in place to facilitate scrutiny and consideration by the public, by the local authority and by the Scottish Government? My fear is that the development will be buried deep within the confines of a general permitted development of an unspecified nature, or that the Secretary of State will use the powers granted to him under the antiquated and anachronistic Military Lands Act 1892 and its associated byelaws to avoid any public scrutiny or consultation. Unfortunately, the MOD stands accused once again of a lack of public engagement, of secrecy and of obfuscation. I urge the Minister not to hide behind the Military Lands Act, and to ensure instead that public consultation and transparency are the hallmark of his actions.

We are forced to conclude that the Ministry of Defence is once again spending hundreds of millions of pounds of the public's money yet is unwilling to be held up to public scrutiny. We strongly suspect that the reason this whole project is shrouded in such secrecy is that the MOD is spending this money by stealth to extend the BUTEC range in preparation for the arrival of Trident. How can the Minister explain that, when this place has yet to debate, let alone agree, Trident's renewal?

When will the Ministry consult the people whose lives are going to be affected by the extension of the range? What safeguards are being put in place to prevent any disturbance to the local environment, to the public and to marine life as a result of the extension? And when will the MOD come clean with the people of Applecross and wider Scotland about what is actually happening at BUTEC and admit that this is further below-the-line spending based on Trident's renewal before this House has debated or agreed to such an undertaking?

6.28 pm

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne):** Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to add my congratulations to you on your election. This is the first time I have had the opportunity to serve under your chairmanship. When we first arrived in Parliament in 2005, we served together on the Work and Pensions Select Committee, and I have fond memories of the agreement that we reached on many matters despite coming from opposite sides of the Chamber. This is a great pleasure.

I should also like to congratulate the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) not only on securing this important debate for his constituents but on his presence in the Chamber tonight having won his seat in Parliament. I have listened carefully to what he and the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) have said, and I shall seek to address the points that they have raised. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute for alerting me to the fact that he was going to contribute to the debate.

Before I address those points, it might be helpful if I explain our plans for the British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre—widely known as BUTEC—and

other associated facilities. BUTEC is currently located on two sites in the Inner Raasay Sound: a control centre on the Applecross peninsula and the site support base at Kyle of Lochalsh. Together with a third site, the underwater acoustic signature range operated from the Island of Rona, these are collectively known as the Raasay ranges. All three facilities are operated on behalf of the MOD by QinetiQ under the terms of a long-term partnering agreement. The LTPA is a 25-year contract, effective from 2003, worth about £5.6 billion over the life of the contract for the delivery of test, evaluation and specialised training support services. That partnering arrangement delivers an efficient and affordable service that provides access to QinetiQ's test and evaluation capabilities and expertise, while sustaining investment in new technology and facilities.

I would like to make it absolutely clear that there remains an enduring defence requirement for the capabilities provided by the Raasay ranges. Important work that could not easily be undertaken elsewhere is carried out there to support UK defence, including the measurement of acoustic, electromagnetic and radar signatures of naval platforms, and the testing of some maritime conventional weapons systems. As with all Departments, the MOD must continually strive to deliver capability efficiently. I am proud to have been part of the team helping to deliver more than £5 billion of cost savings since 2010. All areas of defence are regularly examined to ensure that we can deliver our required capabilities at best value to the taxpayer.

As part of our work on potential cost reductions, QinetiQ developed a proposal, at the request of the Department, to optimise and sustain the Raasay ranges. This proposal would see the closure of the Rona facility and the relocation of in-water acoustic measuring equipment to the BUTEC water space, as well as technical enhancements at the Applecross and Kyle of Lochalsh sites. This will result in a significant modernisation of the range architecture. The enhancements would mean long-term investment of approximately £22 million in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, although much of the investment will be made under water. This is expected to deliver some £1 million of annual operating cost savings until 2028, when the current agreement with QinetiQ expires.

As part of this reorganisation, up to 13 posts currently based at the remote Rona facility will be lost. Those posts are manned by personnel who operate in a similar way to workers on offshore oil rigs. In other words, they are not locally housed individuals—they often come from the central belt in Scotland—and therefore have no immediate impact on the local economy because they do not have the opportunity to spend their wages locally. That is because there are no facilities there, other than their own facility and a local household living on the Rona Island. It is hoped that as many of these reductions as possible will be achieved through voluntary means.

It is important to set this in context. Aside from those job reductions, the proposed enhancements will be very good news for the remaining employees of QinetiQ, about 80 of whom work at Applecross and the Kyle of Lochalsh. I understand that QinetiQ is the second largest employer, after the local authority, in that area, so it is a significant employer in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

**Brendan O'Hara:** May I get clarification on something? The Minister said that this would lead to £1 million of savings for the MOD, but the knock-on effect to the local economy will be that the fishing boats will be cleared out of the new extended range. There will therefore be a devastating effect on the local economy while the MOD is saving £1 million per annum.

**Mr Dunne:** I shall come on to deal with the hon. Gentleman's comments about the impact on the fishing industry, because that is the thrust of the argument being made by Scottish National party Members. In short, that vision is not shared by the MOD, and I will come on to explain why. We believe that this investment will sustain the activity in Applecross and the Kyle of Lochalsh, and in the Inner Sound, which will have an enduring future in terms of maintaining economic prosperity in the area.

Relocating the in-water acoustic measurement equipment away from Rona will mean extending the current Ministry of Defence byelaws for the BUTEC protected water space by some 28 sq km. The current byelaw covers 82 sq km, which is currently divided into two areas. The first is an outer area of approximately 56 sq km, which prohibits the fishing by any method involving the use of a net or dredge. There is also an inner area of around 26 sq km within which all fishing, whether by line, net, trawl or creel, as well as the anchoring of vessels, dredging and dumping of rubbish are prohibited.

Under the proposed changes for the BUTEC water space, there would be a single water space provided for all range activities covering an area of approximately 110 sq km. This relatively modest increase in water area would be offset by removing the fishing restrictions currently in place in the area of water around the Island of Rona.

Let me assure the hon. Gentlemen that the Ministry of Defence takes very seriously its obligations to ensure the continued and sustainable use of waters that are used for defence purposes by other users. We already work closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and with Marine Scotland to establish a sound informal consultation process in respect of the national marine plan development.

As part of the work to implement QinetiQ's proposal for BUTEC, it will be necessary to revise the current byelaws. Part of that revision process involves the need for public consultation. It is intended that this formal public consultation will commence later this summer as part of a separate strand of work to review all current byelaws at some 200 defence sites. The consultation is in relation to byelaws, the timing of which is not determined solely by this site. It is affected by proposals across a range of defence sites, not exclusively in Scotland—most of them are in fact outside Scotland.

**Ian Blackford:** I am interested to hear what the Minister is saying. The reason there is so much concern is that some of the information that came from QinetiQ, which ended up in the public domain, referred to a much larger exclusion zone than he is expressing in his statement today. The map, which I am sure the Minister has seen, indicates a potential doubling of the area. I wish to hear some clarification on what was talked about. The information that was in the public domain is therefore

not correct. My constituents and I would welcome an early consultation on that and to hear what it means for the fishing community.

**Mr Dunne:** My understanding is that QinetiQ enjoys a close and co-operative relationship with local fishermen and their representatives. Although it may not have engaged in a direct consultation in relation to the impact on fishing, it is absolutely our intention to do so, and I will come on to that in a moment. I cannot comment on what material may have appeared in the public domain by sources outside the Ministry of Defence, but I hope that I have given some reassurance already that the extension of the area that we are talking about is relatively modest, and not at the kind of dramatic level that the hon. Gentleman seems to think is likely to be the case.

The Ministry of Defence has a presumption in favour of public access wherever this is compatible with operational and military training uses, public safety, security, conservation and the interests of tenants. It is, therefore, important that the views of local communities are taken into account when we propose any changes to occupation or use of shared space.

To assist with the BUTEC public consultation, we will place notices in the local press that the draft byelaws will be made available on the Ministry of Defence website and copies will also be available in local libraries and other municipal buildings, providing the opportunity for anyone wishing to express their views to be able to do so.

I point out gently to the hon. Gentlemen that Members of the Scottish Parliament were notified by me in writing in February that this exercise would be undertaken in the summer. There was no suggestion in my correspondence with the local authority, the then existing Members of Parliament, or Members of the Scottish Parliament that there would be a consultation beginning any time before the summer. I am not aware that there was any suggestion that there would be a consultation starting in April coming out of the MOD, so I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman has got that suggestion from.

I would further like to make it clear to the Opposition Members present that all the views expressed by those taking part will be considered fully as part of the decision-making process, which will also require appropriate ministerial approval, ultimately, by me, and that will include consultation with fishermen. The suggestion that this has all been agreed in advance is not the case. Proposals have been made by QinetiQ. They will be consulted upon. We will consider the responses to that consultation and then we will make a decision.

**Ian Blackford:** If that is the case, why is it that construction activity seems to have started?

**Mr Dunne:** I will come on to that in a moment.

I recognise that the people who are most likely to be affected by the BUTEC plans will be those whose livelihoods depend on fishing the waters of the Inner Sound, which is the concern that has been particularly expressed in this debate. Naturally, they have legitimate concerns about how our plans will be implemented and how this might affect them in the long term, so we completely recognise that it would be wrong simply to

ignore their views. For that reason, and in parallel to the byelaw consultation, I want to ensure that full and proper discussions are held with representatives of the local fishing communities, which we will start shortly, in advance of the byelaw consultation. The aim of these talks will be to investigate what options might be available that would allow some fishing to take place at certain times within the revised water space—much as happens at present in part of the area other than that which is completely prohibited, which the fishing communities are well accustomed to. Of course, this work will have to be balanced with the Ministry of Defence's need to protect its investments and to ensure the continued operation of this vital defence capability.

As I mentioned, I wrote to the predecessor of the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, the well respected and late lamented Charles Kennedy, and met him shortly before the general election, to explain what was envisaged, the process of consultation, and that no final decisions had been taken, contrary to local press reports. I also wrote to Members of the Scottish Parliament and local authority leaders, and I look forward to developing a similarly constructive relationship with the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber.

There is work to be completed before any final decisions are made, which on current plans is expected around the end of the year. Full implementation of the changes is due to be completed during 2017.

In relation to the construction that has started already, most of this investment will be in looking at sensors under the water. There is a modest amount of investment in the existing facilities to upgrade some of the physical capacity onshore. Where that does not require planning consent, that work can continue in any event and is already starting. That is part of the £22 million investment. Some elements require consultation; respect for local planning regulations, if any, is necessary, and consultation with statutory consultees such as Marine Scotland. Of course that work cannot be done until that process has been completed, but initial preparatory work can be undertaken. It is nothing to alarm hon. Members, as though that was prejudging that consultation. Much of this work needs to be done routinely as part of a 25-year contract. You would not expect there to be no improvements during the course of a contract as long as that.

I shall try to allay some of the fears of the hon. Gentleman, who represented an apocalyptic vision of the impact of these proposals on fishermen. I have seen nothing to suggest that that vision is remotely applicable to what we are proposing here. We are actively keen to engage with fishermen who, in particular, undertake creel fishing for prawn and other crustaceans in the sound. There is an established relationship with QinetiQ and a channel for communication to allow that to happen when there is no testing going on. There is no reason to suggest that that would change. There might be specific areas of the sound where we will be looking to extend the prohibition, but they are relatively modest, and certainly nothing like the scale that the hon. Gentleman suggested, which might lead to the devastation of the industry to which he referred.

**Ian Blackford:** I look forward to the consultation exercise, and I will be satisfied if what the hon. Gentleman has laid out turns out to be the case. Hopefully he

understands why there are legitimate concerns. The information that came into the public domain from QinetiQ paints a very different picture from the one that he has put forward today; it suggests a much larger expansion in the area. Therefore, one can understand why people in my community are concerned when they see construction activity starting. If that is in any way related to the expansion plans, would it not be more respectful to the local community if that did not happen until after the consultation exercise?

**Mr Dunne:** All I will say to the hon. Gentleman is that I think it behoves him to act responsibly as a Member of Parliament and not to foment his constituents into getting overexcited about something until he is well informed about the situation. We all have to deal with contentious issues in our constituencies, and having been a Member of Parliament for 10 years, I think that it is always better to adopt an informed position before reaching for the panic button. Therefore, I hope that this debate has helped reassure the hon. Gentleman on how we propose to conduct ourselves and the extent of the consultation we are looking to undertake, because we will take into account the legitimate views of his constituents who might be inadvertently affected.

I would like to answer some of the hon. Gentleman's questions. He asked who will be responsible for the consultation. The byelaw consultation will be undertaken by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation's byelaw review team. The consultation with the fishermen will be undertaken primarily by QinetiQ, as it has the direct relationship with them. He asked whether the depth of the water would have an impact on what we are proposing, and the answer is no; the extension of the range would be in water of a similar depth, rather than shallower water. He asked whether we have any expectations of an adverse impact on the fishing community, which I think I have already addressed. The answer is that we do not think so, but we are keen to explore any concerns there might be.

On the question asked by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara), I do not think that there is a question of undue secrecy by the MOD. As I have said, we have been very clear with his colleagues in the Scottish Parliament about what we are seeking to undertake, and we will do a consultation. However, we will maintain secrecy over the precise nature of some of the equipment and the capability it delivers, because that has a clear defence purpose. I do not think that he would expect us to be as transparent about that.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute also raised in a traditional way his concerns about whether this might be some underhand way of encouraging Trident renewal. I do not think that is a relevant concern here. This is about providing capability that is used for a wide variety of submarine testing, including the strategic deterrent, but it is by no means exclusively in relation to it.

**Brendan O'Hara:** Can I be absolutely clear that the extension of the range has absolutely nothing to do with the proposed renewal of Trident? I find it difficult to comprehend that such an investment would be made in an underwater submarine test facility when the Government are clearly on record as supporting Trident renewal. Is this not just under-the-line spending,

*[Brendan O'Hara]*

by which we have seen billions spent preparing for Trident renewal before this House has had a chance to debate it?

**Mr Dunne:** As I tried to make clear at the outset, this is about improving the efficiency of the facilities that exist at the moment in the Inner Sound. We are, in essence, taking two separate locations under the water and combining them into one. The functionality of what happens under the water is being improved because of technological advances. This has to do with seeking to upgrade the existing facilities to make them fit for purpose for the future; it has no specific relationship to the strategic deterrent.

I think I have sought to address all the points that hon. Members have raised. I hope that the House will understand why the changes I have outlined for the BUTECH water space are required. Put simply, they are key to sustaining the continuing operation of this vital facility, which happens to be one of the largest employers in that part of the constituency of the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. I hope that he will come to recognise that this is something that he should support.

*Question put and agreed to.*

6.50 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Tuesday 23 June 2015

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

## English as an additional language (Pupil Support)

9.30 am

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government policy on support for pupils with English as an additional language.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I welcome the Minister for Schools, whom I have known for many years, to his place in the new Government.

This is a timely debate, not for outlining a detailed policy proposal or indeed criticising what has gone before, but for inviting the Department for Education and its Ministers to explore options for how they can assist a small number of localities and local education authorities to deal with the consequences of very large-scale immigration and pupil mobility, and specifically the impact of these factors, particularly on primary school education, the provision of primary school places, teacher recruitment and retention, and—most critically—educational attainment.

As someone once said, “It’s déjà vu all over again”, because, Mr Hollobone, you were also in the Chair when I secured a similar debate with the same Minister on 15 February 2011, which was on the pupil premium. In that Adjournment debate, I raised similar but not identical matters to those I will raise today.

On that occasion—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Order. Mr Jackson may now carry on. Of course, he could simply refer us to the remarks he made in the debate that he just mentioned and sit down. However, I hope that he will not do so, and that he will add some additional material.

**Mr Jackson:** Thank you, Mr Hollobone. After that alarm, I trust that there will be no incendiary activity in the next 90 minutes.

On that occasion in 2011, I argued—evidently, it transpired, not that persuasively—that although the pupil premium was indeed an excellent idea and a useful tool to assist the most deserving pupils by the deployment of scarce resources, it was nevertheless a blunt instrument. That was because it only related to deprivation as measured by the sole indicator of access to free school meals. It was perfectly possible to nuance and finesse that criterion to drive up education standards in discrete circumstances.

That proved to be the case: in the last Parliament, the coalition Government extended the provision of the flat-rate pupil premium to looked-after children—it was called “pupil premium plus”—and later to the children of service personnel, quite rightly. The deprivation indicator and eligibility criteria were also broadened, as were the differential payment rates between deprived pupils in primary schools and secondary schools. Between

2011 and 2015, per capita funding rose from £430 to £935 for deprived pupils in secondary schools, to £1,100 for deprived pupils in primary schools and to £1,900 for looked-after children. It was £300 for service children.

I am proud to be associated with the Government that did that, and they did it for the right reason, because there is plenty of evidence that the pupil premium has had considerable impact cumulatively across a wide range of LEAs in supporting disadvantaged children and improving their educational attainment. The Department for Education report published in July 2013 under the auspices of TNS BMRB, Tecis, the Centre for Equity in Education, and the Universities of Manchester and Newcastle demonstrated such positive outcomes, as did Ofsted’s pupil premium update, which was published last July.

Naturally, I am delighted not only that the pupil premium worked but that the new Conservative Government remain committed to maintaining it. For the current financial year, it will be £2.545 billion in total. Indeed, one in six children in the Peterborough LEA were in receipt of free school meals in 2013-14.

I accept the central premise that Ministers have prayed in aid of the pupil premium, namely that the link between free school meal eligibility and underachievement is strong. That is undoubtedly the case, but must we accept that the pupil premium cannot be a more flexible vehicle in resource allocation? Let us be clear about what the pupil premium has not addressed historically, and still does not address. There is now no de facto targeted funding for those LEAs that, by dint of their economic profile or geographical circumstances, have to accommodate and deliver the best educational outcomes on an equal statutory footing with all other LEAs to students whose principal language is not English.

The pupil premium has been reconfigured, rebooted, nuanced, reset and expanded, but regrettably it still fails to take account of the real impact of large numbers of English as an additional language pupils. With the demise of the ethnic minority achievement grant, dedicated funding has effectively been removed for EAL pupils. Such funding was rolled up into the dedicated schools grant in 2011-12 and effectively subsumed into mainstream schools funding.

Current LEA funding formulae allow for support for LEA pupils only for a maximum of three years, and the bulk of LEAs elect to fund pupils for less time than that, either 12 or 24 months. That is despite the fact that research indicates that it will take between five and seven years for EAL pupils to match the performance of peers whose first language is English.

There are national initiatives, such as the British Council’s EU-funded Nexus programme. That is good as far as it goes, but it is a national programme that cannot provide bespoke local solutions that reflect the knowledge, skills and experience of teachers, governors, parents and LEAs to deliver the most appropriate local education service.

Each LEA and each school has its own priorities. For instance, if a school was seeking to get the best outcomes for a Somali or west African child in Southwark, that would be a completely different challenge from the challenge of dealing with a Slovak or Lithuanian child in Peterborough, Boston, Wisbech or other parts of eastern England.

[*Mr Jackson*]

It is disappointing that the strong advocacy and campaigning by Westminster City Council for a cash passport system for new entrant EAL pupils has yet to result in any Government action or even, as I understand it, a commitment to investigate the efficacy of such a system in a pilot scheme. I am at a loss to understand why EAL has not featured more prominently in the analysis of the impact on results of the pupil premium by both the DfE and Ofsted since 2011.

This is not a generalist complaint about schools funding, as I am well aware that the Government are committed to rebalancing historical anomalies and unfair funding allocations by providing an extra £390 million for the least well funded education authorities in the current year, 2015-16. Also, in the interests of transparency and lest I be accused by the Minister of being churlish or ungrateful, I concede that he himself committed to Peterborough LEA an exceptional circumstances grant of £1.5 million in 2010-11 to deal with the EAL-related pressures, for which we were extremely grateful. However, that does not negate my case for a strategic and systematic appraisal of such challenges over the medium and long term, and for a focus on those LEAs that are most seriously affected by these unprecedented population pressures. The fact remains that there is effectively no provision for EAL support in pupil premium funding. EAL is only one of a number of pupil-led factors used by local authorities to top up their basic allocation per pupil within the schools block grant funding. In practical terms, such considerations are effectively crowded out by other factors, such as deprivation and prior attainment.

For a small group of LEAs, the pupil premium therefore goes only part of the way in dealing with the huge societal and demographic changes and, indeed, massive challenges they face, centred on EAL issues. Peterborough is encumbered by a vast array of such challenges. It has been described as being like a “London Borough without the funding largesse”. Although the number of EAL pupils in England has risen by 21% since 2011, to 1.19 million, in Peterborough it has risen by 46%, from 7,100 pupils to 10,395 pupils—the equivalent of eight new two-form entry primary schools. The largest rise in Peterborough is in primary schools in years 1, 2 and 3, where over 40% of pupils are EAL. The number has risen by 34% across the city. Nearly 70% of pupils are EAL in the primary schools in my constituency.

Two Peterborough schools, Gladstone Primary and Beeches Primary, both in the Central ward, have more than 90% of EAL pupils. In one Peterborough school, 192 pupils speak a language that is called “other than English.” The biggest increase is among Lithuanian speakers, with 410 extra pupils: a 63% increase since 2012. Change is rapid. At one secondary school in Peterborough, two years ago, 40% of year 7 pupils were EAL; the figure is now 70%.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Given that it was based on the numbers of pupils involved, is he making a case for the reinstatement of the ethnic minority achievement grant as a way of solving the problem that he outlines?

**Mr Jackson:** I will elaborate on my reasoning, but it is a matter of public record that I cited the effective abolition of the grant, insofar as it was rolled up into the mainstream generalist dedicated schools grant in 2011. The hon. Gentleman knows that there was some specialist opposition to that decision. There was a feeling that a deprivation-linked indicator alone was not sufficient to take account of the large changes in school rolls. One of those changes is churn, which I will talk about shortly.

There has been huge organic population growth in Peterborough, driven by new house building and inward migration, rising by 17% from 156,000 to 184,000 in the 10 years to the 2011 census. It also has a younger age profile than the east of England and the UK as a whole. Since 2007, the city council has spent £110 million on a capital programme to create 8,282 new school places. Even so, Peterborough was identified by the DfE and the Local Government Association in 2013 as the fifth most over-capacity LEA in England, with its being predicted as having a 24% deficit in primary school places by 2017.

The city also has the second highest rate of in-year school admissions in England. Such churn is enormously disruptive and resource intensive, and has a major impact on educational attainment. The 2013 Royal Society of Arts report, “Between the Cracks”, estimated the effect of each change of school on a pupil as equivalent to the loss of one term’s worth of progress. Of the 1,263 headcount increase between October 2013 and October 2014, 958 of those pupils have English as an additional language: 76% of the increase.

It is not just eastern European children who present big challenges for schools. Peterborough’s longstanding Pakistani community, and the growing preponderance of Panjabi and Urdu speakers—even fourth generation—for cultural reasons, results in many young Pakistani-heritage pupils struggling with English reading and writing. In 2003, the DfE commissioned a piece of research from Leeds University, entitled “Writing in English as an Additional Language at Key Stage 2”, which examined this phenomenon.

Non-standard entry, challenging work conditions, a higher preponderance of deprivation and poor parenting and inadequate league table results at key stage 2, all make effective and suitable recruitment and retention of good and talented teachers an even bigger challenge than that faced by more traditional LEAs.

Not long ago, a well-respected primary school head told me that in the previous week a Czech Roma family of six children with no English, who were poorly socialised and parented, had been enrolled in her school. Although that is not typical, it is not untypical for Peterborough. Not every head, school or LEA has the skills, confidence or expertise to cope with that, but Peterborough has had to cope—and over many years, too.

Of course, the news is not all bad. It is appropriate to give credit to the work being undertaken in Peterborough to tackle what seems to be a series of insurmountable barriers and pay tribute to the heroic efforts of classroom teachers, teaching assistants and headteachers, and to those in the LEA, and others, who despite everything have succeeded in developing an innovative EAL strategy.

In an era when many LEAs have disbanded their in-house EAL specialist teams, Peterborough has grown its own talent and utilised the expertise from the team that developed the EAL element of the successful London Challenge programme. Thirty-eight schools have received on-site training and/or consultancy, with a focus on school-based training. West Town Primary Academy, Fulbridge Academy, Gladstone Primary, Longthorpe Primary, the Beeches Primary, Thorpe Primary, Highlees Primary Academy, and Ken Stimpson Community School in Werrington, have all led the way as hub pathfinders and exemplar institutions. An EAL reference group has been monitoring their performance and developing new ideas through school-to-school contact and online training, and data-sharing, with high quality written materials and networking, all progressed against a detailed implementation plan.

Inevitably, this bespoke strategy comes at some cost to mainstream school budgets received through the direct schools grant. The cost to the LEA in the previous financial year was almost £750,000, a not trivial sum for a medium-sized unitary authority. It is a mark of the strategy's success that the LEA has been able to defray a proportion of its revenue costs, to an extent, through selling on its skills and expertise to other education professionals. It is appropriate to recognise those who have worked so hard to develop this important specialist work in the LEA and beyond. I thank Jonathan Lewis, among others, Gary Perkins and Graham Smith, who is in the Public Gallery, and the new leader of the city council, Councillor John Holdich.

In 2014, EAL attainment at key stage 2 rose by a modest 7 percentage points, but that rise halved Peterborough's EAL attainment gap. Despite this, 12 out of the city's 54 primary schools missed the benchmark for the key stage 2 standard assessment tests in reading, writing and maths, and it was disappointing that the city languished at 148th out of 152 local authority areas for the performance of youngsters at key stage 2.

In many respects, the issues I raised in February 2011 are much the same, if not more acute and pressing. So I beg your indulgence, Mr Hollobone, because they bear repeating, and you invited me to do so. I said at the time:

"I will not go into minute detail about how resource-intensive those children are in terms of lesson planning, teacher training, and interfacing with pupils' parents, many of whom do not speak English. Culturally, those parents do not need to speak English—many are in low-wage, low-skill occupations where the need to speak English is not apparent. For example, even if Polish children, who are extremely good at science and mathematics and are generally very gifted, are up to speed in English and mathematics, when they go home there is no cultural pre-disposition to speak English. It is very difficult for them. Other children, whose parents are less skilled, from, say, Lithuania or the Czech Republic, are in a situation where their parents' contract for packaging fruit or picking vegetables in the fields of south Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire or Northamptonshire finishes after six months. They then leave their rented accommodation and withdraw the children from school, or they may go to another part of the UK. It is debilitating and resource-intensive to train teachers and to have the capacity to deliver real improvements and added value for those particular families."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 2011; Vol. 523, c. 244WH.]

The Minister and his colleagues are committed to consulting on bringing in a national schools funding formula, and EAL will inevitably play a part in such calculations. Given that the Government remain strongly committed to maintaining relatively generous ring-fenced

allocations for pupil premium, is it too much to ask that they consider developing a discrete and dedicated EAL challenge fund? That fund could be aimed at a small minority of LEAs with a demonstrable record of success in creating, inter alia, EAL hubs, centres of excellence, skills and knowledge bases, human resources, leadership, and strategies that can be audited and that are outcomes-linked. The fund should be related to a small number of key performance indicators linked directly to education outcomes.

The Minister would benefit from seeing the work being undertaken in my constituency. After our debate in 2011 he came to meet the excellent team at Fulbridge Academy headed by principal Iain Erskine. The academy has gone from strength to strength, given that more than 100 languages are spoken there and it is one of the largest schools in England. It was rated as outstanding by Ofsted in the last inspection. If the Minister accepts my cordial invitation to visit my constituency, he will see for himself the exceptional difficulties faced by teachers and the city council.

I ask the Minister to honour the undertakings made to me in 2011, in good faith, to look at the issue seriously, weigh up the evidence and talk to the professionals who helped to deliver the London Challenge, as well as to do a proper, rigorous and robust cost-benefit analysis and to consider the longer-term savings that could be achieved by a modest, well-targeted and ring-fenced budget. I fear that teachers in Peterborough cannot bear the burdens placed upon them without extra help for much longer. There is a strong case to be made, but I hope merely to have provoked a much needed debate this morning.

The Minister made a superb speech last night—the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) might not concur—on Second Reading of the Education and Adoption Bill, speaking with great passion about the moral imperative of education, the concept of one nation and driving up standards. His words were resonant:

"The Bill is about social justice. It is another important step to ensuring that all our state schools are delivering the quality of education currently found in only the best and that our adoption system is swift and efficient, so children can escape the unhappiness of a life of neglect or the uncertainty of life in care as swiftly as possible."

Later he said:

"We want those standards for everyone, regardless of social or economic background. That is what we mean by social justice. It involves taking on the vested interests, which is why in this Bill we are asking for the powers to say no to those who frustrate or delay improvement—enemies of aspiration and rigour. If hon. Members across the House believe in social justice...I urge them to support this Bill."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 722-723.]

Those fine words are true to the commitment to help all the children in my constituency. Whatever their background, race, creed or colour, they just happen to be in Peterborough. Irrespective of all such factors, every child in my constituency and in those of other Members deserves the best possible education. With some thought, a proper plan and a little political willpower, that is what they can get.

9.55 am

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I will talk a bit about my experience of pupils with EAL needs in my previous job as a teacher.

[Carol Monaghan]

Scotland has a long and rich history of multilingualism. Throughout the ages, we have had various languages running through our culture—Scots, Gaelic, Irish and English.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I could not let that pass without pointing out to the hon. Lady that one of the finest poems in the Welsh language, “Y Gododdin”, was written in the south of Scotland in the early medieval period.

**Carol Monaghan:** I thank the hon. Gentleman; I will add Welsh to that list.

Over the past 20 years, we have seen an influx of people with different languages and cultures. EAL pupils have had a huge, positive impact on our schools in Glasgow. I taught in an inner-city comprehensive in Glasgow where asylum seekers and refugees were housed in the late '90s. We had a huge number of EAL pupils, and attainment levels increased almost instantly—not only were those pupils delighted to be in school, but they had a positive effect on the native Glaswegian pupils. Throughout the school, we saw a huge benefit from EAL pupils.

The hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) talked about the impact on primary schools of large-scale immigration, in terms of teacher recruitment and attainment. I fundamentally disagree with him about attainment and I will talk more about why attainment levels benefit when there are pupils with different languages, but I agree that there is an issue with teacher recruitment. We need to be training and recruiting more teachers to support pupils with additional needs.

The Scottish Government are following the European Union with the “one plus two” languages learning policy. The “one” refers to pupils’ native tongue and the “two” to the additional languages, which could be English, French or Spanish. More and more we are seeing a rise in Gaelic-medium education; for some of those pupils, English is not their first language, so they are also getting English support. In Scotland, a lot of parents now want to send their children to Gaelic schools, and attainment levels are increasing hugely. Such pupils do not learn English until the age of seven, and by eight they have overtaken their peers in English-speaking schools.

There are huge benefits to learning two languages, and the Polish children that the hon. Member for Peterborough mentioned will have those benefits. My children attend Gaelic-medium education. Unfortunately, I have no more than pidgin Gaelic, so I cannot support them with their Gaelic education, and they speak only their native language at home, as the Polish children do. However, they are fluent in Gaelic and in English. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that Polish pupils who go home and speak only Polish will be getting two languages, so they are being further challenged and will develop far more skills.

**Mr Jackson:** The hon. Lady is making an interesting point, but she is missing the kernel of my argument. As far as I know, there is no district, region or parliamentary constituency in Scotland where more than about 5% of people speak Scottish Gaelic, and a small city in Scotland

will certainly never have experienced a 17% population rise in 10 years, with the vast bulk of the new residents speaking Gaelic. We cannot, therefore, necessarily compare the two situations, and the hon. Lady is perhaps rather obscuring my central premise.

**Carol Monaghan:** In areas such as the Western Isles, Gaelic is still the native tongue for many people—the figure is far more than 5%, so my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) would probably disagree with the hon. Gentleman.

On the number of pupils coming in with English as an additional language, I am not sure that any area in Scotland has a figure of 70%, but we do have figures of up to 20%. However, I am trying to explain the benefits. Certainly, in the school I was in, which had a huge number of EAL pupils—up to 50%—attainment rose greatly.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the additional funding under the pupil premium, which is for disadvantaged pupils. He spoke about using some of that money for EAL pupils, but there is an argument for looking at dedicated funding. These pupils have a positive impact, and we need to see how we can support them. Unfortunately, in Glasgow, the Labour administration recently cut 15 EAL teachers, despite the best efforts of the opposition in the city council. That was a major blow.

We need to look at the benefits that these pupils bring. It is important to remember that we have had a £20 billion net benefit from having EU immigrants in our country and our communities, but we need to look at how we fully include them in schools and training.

The all-party group on modern languages stated: “speaking only English is as much of a disadvantage as speaking no English.”

In terms of intellectual development and pupil attainment, having multilingual pupils is a benefit and makes great educational sense.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, unless we support teachers, schools and LEAs so that they can provide a proper environment in which these pupils can learn, we will have issues.

**The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb):** I realise that this does not affect Scotland, but the English baccalaureate is a combination of GCSEs, including a modern language. Would the hon. Lady support the Government’s endeavours to get all pupils to take it to the age of 16, to ensure that more young people take a foreign language to GCSE?

**Carol Monaghan:** Taking languages at GCSE is a matter for pupils at that point in their school careers. The baccalaureate system is really robust, with pupils looking at different areas and having specialisms in different subjects, and that is really positive. However, the issue is more about language learning in the early years. There will be huge benefits if we can deal with that, whatever the additional languages are—English might be the additional language for some pupils, while, for others, it might be French, Spanish or Gaelic. The way we go about language learning is not conducive to a real, deep understanding of a language. The learning must take place far earlier, and it must be far more

serious. We start picking these languages up at 11 or 12, which is why the Scottish Government are introducing them much earlier, at primary level.

To finish, I would like to talk once again about the positive impact in our schools of having pupils with an additional language, be it Polish, Urdu or Gaelic. That is positive for attainment, and we welcome those pupils in our schools, but it is important that we put in place structures that will allow them to learn properly and to access the education we provide for them.

10.6 am

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is extremely pleasant to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) again on securing the debate. He set it on fire when he spoke—at least, the fire alarm went off when he started speaking. It might be a good idea if you made representations to the House authorities and pointed out that, if they want to carry out a routine fire alarm test, they should perhaps do so when we are not debating in this Chamber. The interruption did not, however, prevent the hon. Gentleman from making a compelling case about the issues raised in his part of the country by the numbers of schoolchildren with English as an additional language.

I would like to say from the outset—this is the tone that hon. Members have adopted—that we should celebrate the diversity and cultural richness that result from immigration to the UK, as well as the undoubted benefits to education from having such a diverse population. Yes, there are obviously challenges, which we are debating, but we should not let this moment pass without celebrating the cultural diversity and richness that immigration has brought to this country for many hundreds of years.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the pupil premium. He described the practical challenges that the abolition of the ethnic minority achievement grant is beginning to cause in the system—the pressures that are coming about as a result of getting rid of that ring-fenced, pupil numbers-based approach to provision for pupils with English as an additional language. The grant might not have been perfect or perfectly targeted, but that does not take away from the fact that it was the right approach in principle to offer additional support based on pupil numbers and the challenges faced by schools in different parts of the country.

**Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): It has been interesting, given my background—I had some interest in doing educational research—that everyone has talked eloquently about the need for teachers and teachers' development, with teachers being able to support pupils. Does the hon. Gentleman agree, however, that this goes beyond even the teaching profession? In Scotland, for example, we are blessed with a range of well-qualified speech and language therapists, many of whom have specialisms in dealing with pupils, particularly at the primary stages, who have multilingual assets. If we are going to support those pupils, we need to look beyond simply the teaching profession, at the specialists who surround it, who can give further support.

**Kevin Brennan**: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Of course, speech and language therapists also play a very important role in other parts of the United

Kingdom. I have always believed strongly in providing services around the child, beyond the school. That was part of the children's plan, which I was involved in drawing up under the previous Government. I recommend it to the hon. Gentleman for when he has some spare time to do some additional research, which is his background. As a researcher, he will be aware—bearing in mind some of the other comments in our debate—of Professor Steve Strand and Professor Victoria Murphy of the University of Oxford. They have done extensive research on the impact of English as an additional language in classrooms that shows that some of the lurid stories in the popular press about its having a negative impact on other children's education are completely wrong. When we look at the evidence, we see that the contrary is the case.

The hon. Member for Peterborough made the case strongly for looking again at the need for a ring-fenced budget for EAL. I know that the Minister has a pathological dislike of anything that is ring-fenced or that directs schools to act in a particular manner, and an almost religious faith that they will always do the right thing in any circumstances, but there is a case, which the hon. Gentleman made out, to look at the matter again. I hope that the Minister will set aside his usual dislike of these things and look at it with an open mind. The hon. Gentleman quoted the Minister's words at the end of last night's debate. Fine words are all very well, but ultimately we have to will the means in order for a policy to have an impact. There must be a transmission mechanism for a policy to translate into action on the ground. Unless we will the means and unless the Government take a lead, the problem will continue to grow, because the budget system in place does not give an incentive or the necessary direction to ensure that resources are spent in this area.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) spoke today, and I again congratulate her on her maiden speech last night. I am sorry that the early hour at which the winding-up speeches started meant that I was not able to do so with her present. That was not her fault. It was an entirely unexpected development.

**Carol Monaghan**: Actually, I was there. It was my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) who was not. I enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's winding-up speech.

**Kevin Brennan**: I apologise to the hon. Lady. Clearly, my memory is going if I cannot even remember what happened last evening. I do remember her very fine maiden speech and I again congratulate her on it. She pointed out today the benefits to attainment of having more than one language. I completely agree, not least as my own daughter attended a Welsh-medium school and benefited greatly, as I did; my Welsh improved greatly as a result of her attendance at that school. The hon. Lady pointed out that the Gaelic language is predominant in parts of Scotland, including the constituency of her hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), who often reminds us of that in the main Chamber. As she pointed out, English as an additional language need be no hindrance; in fact, it can be the opposite and be of great benefit to educational attainment.

[Kevin Brennan]

As of June 2015, 1.2 million children in England—17.2% of all pupils—had a first language other than English. Until April 2011, as we have heard, the ethnic minority achievement grant, which was set up originally in 1999, provided funding based on the numbers of children from underachieving ethnic minority groups and of pupils with English as an additional language. In 2011, that grant amounted to about £200 million of support across the country. Now, that has been absorbed into the school grant; and as ever when these things are absorbed, somehow or other some money falls from the table. Ultimately, the amount of money in the direct schools grant may or may not reflect that funding, but certainly schools can now receive additional money for pupils with English as an additional language from their local authority and school forums. School forums decide at local level whether any school receives an EAL factor to its funding because of the number of those pupils. The minimum funding from the Government in the 2015-16 school year was £466 for primary and £1,130 for secondary. That is what they have identified would need to be spent.

The problem is that there is no compulsion for local authorities to include an EAL factor in their funding, nor for the value of that to be at the minimum level or above. The Government's funding rules stipulate that a factor can be paid only for the first three years of compulsory schooling with respect to the pupil with English as an additional language. That is an odd stipulation, given the Government's professed desire to allow schools to decide at local level what the best thing to do is. I hope that the Minister can explain why that rule is still in place.

Academy schools, of course, receive their funding via the Education Funding Agency, which uses the same funding formula as the local authority, so funding levels for children mirror those for neighbouring maintained schools. However, there is considerable variation among local authorities when it comes to EAL funding. Under this system, if we can call it a system, there is no accountability mechanism whatever for schools' use of that funding, which essentially means that schools are not obliged to use the funding to meet the needs of pupils with English as an additional language.

There is a very interesting report by the Education Endowment Foundation, and this is a point of agreement between me and the Minister for Schools, although with regard to last night's debate, perhaps he should be renamed the Academies Minister, as maintained schools never get a mention or any praise whatever from the Government in speeches in the House. Perhaps he will correct that in the future. There is one point of agreement between us, which is that the Education Endowment Foundation is a very good initiative. The Government have provided support to it, and we support that provision because in a sense the foundation is the beginnings of what I talked about last night—a NICE for education, a national institute of clear evidence, as I called it.

The Education Endowment Foundation looks at the research evidence on what works in education policy. That is extremely welcome, as so much of education policy seems to be based on think-tank quackery. The foundation's report on English as an additional language is very interesting. One of its key findings was that the attainment of pupils with English as an additional

language varies widely. At the end of reception, only 44% of EAL pupils are recorded as having achieved a good level of development, compared with 54% of non-EAL pupils. The gap narrows considerably, as we would expect, by the age of 16, when 58.3% of EAL pupils achieve five A\* to C GCSEs, compared with 60.9% of non-EAL pupils; by some measures, EAL pupils do better, particularly in mathematics. However, that masks, as the report interestingly points out, the huge range of outcomes within that for different groups of EAL pupils. That makes sense, because there will be a very big difference between an EAL pupil who is the son or daughter of a French banker living in London and some of the pupils whom the hon. Member for Peterborough described, who do not have the same sorts of advantages when they go to school for the first time in this country.

In addition, the report points out that certain factors determine whether pupils are significantly more likely to underachieve. One is entry to England from abroad during a key stage at school. Such EAL pupils tend to be about a year behind their non-EAL peers. Changing school during a key stage is a significant factor. The report says:

“Students joining their primary school in Y5/6 have lower achievement than those joining in Y3/4.”

Being from particular ethnic minority groups also has an impact on pupil outcomes, with a particular impact on speakers of Somali, Lingala and Lithuanian at the age of 16. The report also finds:

“Almost half of schools with a majority of EAL pupils are located outside London.”

That emphasises the hon. Gentleman's point that we should not simply think of this as an issue affecting London. The report also points out:

“High proportions of EAL pupils in a school do not have a negative impact on the attainment and progress of other pupils.”

It is useful to have research evidence, and the other evidence I quoted earlier, confirming that that myth is incorrect.

**Carol Monaghan:** The hon. Gentleman says that the presence of a high proportion of EAL pupils does not have a negative impact on other pupils, but my experience is that it has an extremely positive impact on other pupils. In fact, the presence of such pupils in their class gives other students something to aim for because they can see a different way of working, which is a huge advantage.

**Kevin Brennan:** That is my experience, but I am quoting the academic research to get us into the habit of using evidence to make education policy, which is something that has disappeared in recent years. The Education Endowment Foundation report backs up the research I quoted earlier from the University of Oxford. It says:

“the percentage of EAL students in the school had minimal association with student attainment or progress when controls for student background were included.”

EAL students obviously bring richness and cultural diversity, and they do so without affecting attainment.

As a result of its research, the Education Endowment Foundation makes certain recommendations. The Minister will be intimately aware of the details of the research, being briefed so well by his excellent civil servants

and, as he is likely to have a bit of time, I hope that he will respond to those recommendations. The first recommendation is that schools should be accountable for showing attainment impact. It says:

“Schools should be held accountable for how their EAL funding contributes to improving pupil attainment”.

Schools are held accountable for the pupil premium in the same way, as the hon. Member for Peterborough said earlier. If schools are to be held accountable for how they spend the pupil premium, surely there should be a way to hold them accountable for how they use public money provided for the specific purpose of helping pupils with English as an additional language. Even if schools are not told exactly how many pennies they have to spend in their particular location, surely there should be some way in which they can be held accountable for whether they are doing what that public money is intended for. The recommendation continues:

“Although the report finds that where EAL pupils have attended English schools for the whole of a key stage they make greater progress than non-EAL pupils, and indeed that by age 16 they have caught up...this reflects a long history of considerable additional funding being directed to address language learning needs.”

Considerable under-attainment by specific groups might be masked by that general finding, so the Government need to listen to that recommendation.

The report’s second recommendation clearly follows from the first. It is that:

“EAL funding should be targeted at those most at risk of under-attainment.”

Again, the problem is that the current definition of EAL does not reflect a student’s proficiency in the English language or their exposure to it at home. Schools need to hone how they identify the language and learning needs of children within the EAL category to ensure that funds are targeted at those who most need them, and the Government should do the same because they are able to identify those parts of the country where that is a particular problem. The Minister should reflect on that and consider what action should be taken.

Obviously, the three-year cap on the availability of additional support might be more than some pupils need because of the factors associated with how proficient they are likely to become in the English language, including their home life and background, whereas other pupils are likely to need considerably more than three years. The research evidence clearly shows that it will take longer than the three years of allocated funding for some pupils, which is why I do not understand the Government’s rigidity about the three-year rule when, philosophically, they seem to be in favour of being more flexible about funding. There is a strong case for additional funding to be made available to schools with such EAL pupils to ensure that they are able to achieve their full potential. Professor Strand’s report states:

“Fluency in English is...the biggest factor influencing the degree of support an individual student will require, and schools need to be able to assess this need accurately using their own procedures and expertise.”

The third major finding of the Education Endowment Foundation report is that:

“More research is needed into the best strategies to improve outcomes for EAL pupils... there is a lack of robust research evidence on effective approaches and interventions to raise the attainment of EAL pupils. There were no...randomised controlled trials or studies where the effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated by an independent review team.”

More research certainly needs to be done, and I hope that the Minister will tell us his view on that. Is the Department helping to facilitate, undertake or fund research to ensure that such public resources as are being allocated to this are getting to the right pupils and are having the correct impact?

**Mr Jackson:** I have no wish to be disobliging towards the hon. Gentleman, but he says that there is not enough research into the impact of EAL on educational attainment, yet earlier he blithely agreed with the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) that EAL pupils, of themselves, are a good thing vis-à-vis the educational attainment of non-EAL children. He cannot have it both ways. Either there is robust, empirical evidence to support the former or he is right on the latter. It cannot be both.

**Kevin Brennan:** The hon. Gentleman is never disobliging. I will examine the record very carefully. I think what I have said throughout this debate has been internally consistent, but I will check my earlier comments in case I have contradicted myself. If I have done so, I will give myself a good talking to later on, but I think I have been consistent in saying that such research as there is indicates that EAL pupils do not have a negative impact on others in the classroom. The third conclusion, which he attributed to me but is actually the conclusion of the Education Endowment Foundation—a body funded by the Government to provide us with such research—is that more research is needed into the best strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with EAL.

What assessment have the Government made of the disparities in EAL pupil achievement, and what are they doing to help such at-risk children? What are the Government doing to address the facts that EAL pupils entering school in years 5 and 6 do not achieve as well as EAL pupils entering school in years 3 and 4, and that children entering school from abroad during a key stage are, on average, 12 months behind their non-EAL peers? What are the Government doing to encourage and support better research into these issues, which affect more than 1 million children? Will the Government consider more generally the impact of bilingual education? The hon. Member for Glasgow North West mentioned the experience from across the United Kingdom. There is obviously experience in Scotland and Wales, and there are the beginnings of such education in Northern Ireland, too. Given the Minister’s support for free schools and so on, is he still rigidly opposed to bilingualism in schools? That has been the Government’s position until now, but I understand that that opposition may be decreasing, provided that it is one of their favoured free schools advocating bilingual education. What is the Government’s current position on bilingual education, and has it changed?

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Before I call the Minister, I gently remind him that under the new rules, Mr Jackson gets a second go, so will he be kind enough to conclude his remarks no later than 10.57?

10.30 am

**The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb):** I am grateful for that guidance, Mr Hollobone. It is a pleasure to serve again under you, although even your powerful

[Mr Nick Gibb]

chairmanship was unable to stop a disembodied voice from engaging in our debate; I will be interested to see how *Hansard* reports an unelected person taking part. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) on securing this important debate and on his excellent speech. As always, he campaigns effectively and argues coherently and persuasively for the interests of his constituency and constituents.

The Government are committed to social justice, as my hon. Friend, who supports and campaigns for it himself, acknowledges. That means that we want all pupils to achieve their full potential, including those with English as an additional language. However, I understand the challenges faced by local authorities such as Peterborough in delivering that objective.

The definition of English as an additional language is broad. It reflects pupils' exposure to a language other than English at home, but it gives no indication of their proficiency in English. Some may use English as their everyday language and be fluent in it, while others may be new to Britain and speak very little English. The percentage of pupils in England recorded as having English as an additional language more than doubled between 1997 and 2013, from 7.6% to 16.2%, with enormous variation across the country. In the south-west, only 6% of pupils have EAL, compared with 56% in inner London.

There is also a great deal of variation between individual schools. At more than half of schools, fewer than 5% of pupils have EAL, but 8% of schools have a majority of such pupils. The evidence shows, as other hon. Members have said, that although pupils with EAL face disadvantages early in their school careers, they are not at a significant long-term disadvantage on average. Again, however, attainment levels vary. As the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) pointed out, swift on the heels of her excellent maiden speech last night, learning two or three languages aids educational attainment—not just in languages, but in other subjects too. We must ensure that we support all children to achieve their full potential and overcome barriers to success, whatever those barriers are. We must also recognise that some communities with high numbers of pupils with EAL face particular challenges. I welcome my hon. Friend's focus on the issue.

At the beginning of schooling, the average performance of pupils who speak English as a second language is significantly lower than the average for all pupils, but it significantly improves by the end of key stage 4. The latest data show that about 67% of EAL pupils achieved five or more good GCSE grades A\* to C, compared with about 66% of all pupils. There are examples of local authorities with very high proportions of EAL pupils that perform well against national averages for attainment. In Newham, for example, where 76% of pupils at KS2 have EAL, 83% of pupils achieved the expected levels in reading, writing and maths at that stage. That exceeds the national average of 79% for all KS2 pupils. In fact, in 2013-14, of the 18 local authorities where more than half of pupils at key stage 2 had EAL, all but two had attainment levels above the national average for all pupils.

I remember visiting Fulbridge academy in 2011; I have remembered it ever since. I was struck by the fact that it was the first school that I had visited that year

where all the primary school pupils whom I tested on their multiplication tables knew them. The rate has increased steadily over the years since then, but I was struck by that particular primary school visit, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough for taking me there.

Unfortunately, EAL pupils do not perform that well across the whole country. Although 79% of EAL pupils in Westminster achieve five or more good GCSE grades A\* to C, only 50% of EAL pupils in Bradford achieve the same. The disparity in the quality of education available to pupils in different parts of the country has driven us to reform the school system. We have taken steps to ensure that every child, regardless of their particular needs or background, has a greater opportunity of attaining well at school than before 2010. There are now more than 1 million more pupils in good or outstanding schools. We have intervened in more than 1,000 weak and failing schools and are delivering improvements in performance by matching them with academy sponsors. Those academies have transformed the life chances of thousands of pupils.

King Solomon academy is one example. It is an all-through school sponsored by Ark Schools. More than half the pupils are eligible for free school meals, and 65% do not have English as a first language. In its report last year, Ofsted found the school to be outstanding, stating:

“Achievement is outstanding at all key stages. All groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs, make excellent progress. The academy is working to provide even greater challenge to the most-able pupils.”

**Kevin Brennan:** I join the Minister in congratulating the academy on that achievement. Can he bring himself, for once, to praise a maintained school that has improved its performance?

**Mr Gibb:** Yes. There are many examples of maintained schools that have also improved their standards.

**Kevin Brennan:** Could the Minister name them?

**Mr Gibb:** I will come to that in my own good time. We are unapologetic about taking Labour policy by turning underperforming schools into sponsored academies. What I cannot understand is the ambiguity of Labour's current position on the academies programme. It has proven highly effective in raising standards, and all we hear from the Labour party is carping and criticism of the policy, which began life under Lord Adonis during the last Labour Government.

**Kevin Brennan:** The Minister cannot bring himself to praise a single maintained school.

**Mr Gibb:** There are many maintained schools. I hesitate because 60% of secondary schools are now academies, so schools that I remember as maintained schools may well have converted. Good and outstanding schools throughout the country are rushing to convert to academy status. Many of them performed extremely well as maintained schools run by local authorities, and they are performing well now as academies.

**Carol Monaghan:** In Scotland, we do not have academies, although some schools might have the word “academy” in their title; we have comprehensive schools and private schools. Does the Minister agree that a school's success

is not down to its name but is the result of leadership within the school and the systems put in place to ensure that staff and pupils are supported fully?

**Mr Gibb:** I agree that a school's success is not to do with its name, but there is something about the freedom that academy status brings that enables innovation and professional autonomy to raise standards. Again, I cite King Solomon academy. It is run by some remarkable young people, most of whom are Teach First teachers; the head teacher, Max Haimendorf, became a head teacher in his late 20s. In that school's first GCSE results in 2014, 93% of pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs, including in English and maths. That would be a remarkable result in any school in any location, but it is particularly so given the high levels of deprivation in the area served by the school. Furthermore, 75% of pupils at the school achieved the English baccalaureate, with high levels of achievement across the ability range.

**Carol Monaghan:** The Minister mentioned some staff members: a head teacher and some inspiring teachers. Is the Minister suggesting that if the school had not been an academy, it would not have had the same success, given the staff that it has in position?

**Mr Gibb:** I am. I do not think King Solomon academy would have delivered that kind of educational attainment in that part of London had there not been an academies programme. It has freedom and autonomy, and the professional approach that it takes to how it teaches its children is very different from that of any local authority school that I have visited. It would not have been able to do that if it had been run directly by the local authority in that area.

There is, of course, more to do. Although the overall quality of education in England has dramatically improved, 1.5 million pupils are still taught in schools that are less than good. The Education and Adoption Bill, which we debated last night on Second Reading, will strengthen our ability to deal with failure, and much more swiftly. Its provisions are designed to speed up the process by which the least well-performing schools are transformed in order to bring about rapid and sustained improvements, making sure every child gets the best start in life.

We have made it clear that we want to improve the literacy proficiency of all pupils; improving the teaching of reading is a key priority for the Government. Our aim is to help every child become a confident, fluent and enthusiastic reader. The latest available data show that 84% of pupils for whom English is an additional language achieved level 4 or above in reading at key stage 2 in 2014. That is just below the national average for all pupils, which is 89%. It shows that we still have further to go if we want every child to be reading well by the age of 11.

Key to our approach is the use of systematic phonics instruction; the hon. Member for Cardiff West will have expected me to use those words. The evidence shows that systematic phonics is the most effective approach to teaching early reading. The latest phonics screening check results show that across the country there is a difference of less than half a percentage point between pupils whose first language is not English and those whose first language is English. Phonics has been used

to great effect in local authorities such as Newham, where, in year 1, three times as many pupils have EAL as those who do not. Some 81% of all Newham's pupils met the expected phonics standard, well above the national average of 74%.

At secondary school, we are ensuring that all pupils study the core academic subjects of English, maths, science, history or geography, and a language: the English baccalaureate. We know already that pupils with English as an additional language are above the national average for entry and achievement in respect of the English baccalaureate. Last year, 41% of pupils with English as an additional language entered the EBacc and 26% achieved it, compared with 39% of all pupils entering it and around 24% achieving it. We want more pupils, including those for whom English is an additional language, to achieve the EBacc. Such subjects give young people a strong foundation for progress into further study and for work, and they help to keep their options open.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough focused on funding. We have supported local authorities to provide additional support for EAL pupils in their local funding formulae. Local authorities can provide additional funding to pupils who speak a language other than or in addition to English, and who entered the school system in the past three years; the hon. Member for Cardiff West touched on that issue. The vast majority of local authorities include EAL as a factor in their funding formulae, and 132 local authorities allocated funding to schools teaching 450,000 pupils with English as an additional language in 2015-16. That totalled some £267 million, with schools receiving on average about £591 for each pupil who speaks English as an additional language.

We recognise that EAL pupils are more likely to be mobile and arrive in school during the academic year. Local authorities can hold money centrally to support the growth in the number of pupils below the age of 16 in schools. That growth fund allows local authorities to top up funding in-year for schools experiencing an increase in pupil numbers due to growth in the local population. Local authorities also have the power to use a mobility factor in their funding formulae. The method allows funds to be allocated to schools with a high proportion of pupils entering in-year in the previous three years. Some 66 local authorities used the factor in 2015-16, allocating a total of £24 million through it.

In Peterborough, 18% of pupils have English as an additional language. It has the 23rd largest proportion of pupils with English as an additional language among all the different authorities. The area has seen a rise of more than 5,000 such pupils in its schools from 2014-15. I note that Peterborough City Council allocated some £3.7 million for pupils with English as an additional language in 2015-16 and that it has a growth fund of about £2.25 million.

I am enormously grateful for the support that my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough has given to this issue today. He has raised important concerns. The steps that we have taken underline our ambition to give more pupils the preparation to succeed in school, whether that is getting a place at a good university, starting an apprenticeship or finding a first job. Such steps will provide the foundations of an education system with

[*Mr Gibb*]

social justice at its heart, in which every young person reaches their potential. I congratulate my hon. Friend once again for airing this important debate.

10.45 am

**Mr Jackson:** We have had a wide-ranging debate; I have been privileged to sit in on this Labour and Scottish National party seminar on structures in modern British education. Unfortunately, the subject is a bit of an obsession, particularly for the official Opposition, even though it is eloquently and charmingly articulated by the hon. Member for Cardiff West.

The substantive point has been touched on by my hon. Friend the Minister, but I want to leave him with this thought. As I made clear in my remarks, there has been an evolution in how the pupil premium has been used to drive up attainment. Could there be a competitive system—a bidding process for LEAs that have developed bespoke solutions, such as in Peterborough, that are successful and have achieved good results under their own financial steam? They could bid for ring-fenced money, although the Minister does not like ring-fenced funding, and there could be a competitive element so that the Government rewarded best practice and tackled the long-standing endemic issues to achieve what the Minister laudably aims to do: improve social justice in educational outcomes. I leave him with those thoughts.

Finally, the Minister is welcome to come to Peterborough. I look forward to a visit from him and/or the Secretary of State some time in the next few years.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered Government policy on support for pupils with English as an additional language.

10.47 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## House of Lords Reform

11 am

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered reforming the House of Lords and the number of peers.

Thank you for chairing this debate, Mr Hollobone. It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship.

This debate is not designed to diminish the Lords' responsibility, status or powers. I am trying to find a way forward that will allow us to retain the Lords' expertise and keep them there for life, as was originally envisioned when they were appointed. It must not be seen as ageist or in any way derogatory to what goes on in the other place. I value the Lords; the Lords are valued. Their expertise is second to none, irrespective of their type, and their constitutional role should not be underestimated.

There are currently 786 peers, with 40 peers on leave of absence or otherwise disqualified from sitting. The Conservative party has 228 peers; the Labour party has 212; there are 178 Cross Benchers; the Liberal Democrats have 102; the Democratic Unionist party has four; the UK Independence party has three; Plaid Cymru has two; the Ulster Unionist party has two; the Green party has one; there are 28 non-affiliated peers; and there are 26 Lords Spiritual. It is a bit long-winded to state how many Lords there are, but it is important that I do so because our upper Chamber is one of the most highly-subscribed democratic institutions in the developed world.

The numbers in attendance by age were supplied to me by the House of Commons Library. The analysis reveals that the mean age is currently 70.4 years—in effect, 70 years. The median is roughly the same, implying a symmetrical distribution, with roughly as many peers above that age as under it. The oldest party is the UK Independence party, at a mean age of 76.3 years, although there are only three of them. The mean age of the Cross-Bench peers is 76.2 years; for the Labour party it is 71.3; for the Conservatives it is 70, and for the Liberal Democrats it is 70.3.

It is difficult to analyse peers' activity, yet a brief analysis using *Hansard* data reveals that the mean age of the 20 most active Members of the House of Commons, excluding Mr Speaker, is 64.9, which is more than five years younger than the average of the House of Lords. That may suggest that younger Members are more active, although I would be cautious about drawing that conclusion, given that it is based on only a partial analysis of the data.

In the previous Parliament, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) wanted to have a partly elected upper Chamber. He proposed that the upper Chamber continue to be known as the House of Lords for legislative purposes; that the reformed House of Lords should have 300 Members, of which 240 are elected Members and 60 are appointed independent Members; and that up to 12 Church of England bishops may sit in the house as ex-officio Lords Spiritual. His proposal would have halved the number of Lords and created a semi-elected second Chamber, which would have huge ramifications for our unwritten constitution and our intellectual talent. I believe that that would be the wrong way forward, and would cause a drought of our intellectual talent in the other place.

Dan Byles, the former Member for North Warwickshire introduced a private Member's Bill for the retirement of Lords. Some peers have utilised that provision. I contacted Dan, and he disclosed that the retirement age was always aimed at 75, although that was never mentioned.

My proposal is to reduce the numbers in the House of Lords. It could be seen as radical, although I hope it is not. I want it to be seen as a constructive way forward. I believe that there is a better way to slim down the Lords by 250 Members, so it becomes more proportionate to the Commons over a 20-year period. I propose that the Lords eventually settles at 450 to 500 peers, who should remain in the House of Lords as life peers, but retire from the Lords as we know it at the age of 75. They may wish to retire from the Lords under Dan Byles's law, but that would be up to them.

I propose that Lords over 75 become the Lords Council. They would still be able to attend functions and use the facilities of the House of Lords. In fact, they would be able to go about their daily business as they do now. They would still be remunerated, and it would cost no more than it does now. The problem is not the number of Lords, but the number we appoint, so we have to find a way forward that enables us to value our existing Lords and appoint new ones in a manner that reflects where we want the House of Lords to be in 20 years' time.

Members of the new Lords Council would be able to sit on Committees, based on their expertise and choice. They would be able to influence their colleagues and the Government as before. However, they would not be able to attend the Chamber and vote. That would have a significant effect on getting down the numbers, improving the working environment and creating a Chamber atmosphere similar to the Commons.

The benefits of my proposal are that it would enable us to value our peers without losing them as we reduce their number over two decades. It would allow a tapered reduction to take place in a sensible and measured manner. It would allow the more active peers to debate and work on a regime suited to their stamina. Therefore, the Lords who, to put it bluntly, are getting older and cannot attend the Chamber regularly will have options. They would not be able to go into the Chamber in the first place, although they would be able to advise. It would create a career path from the Commons into the Lords, and make both Chambers more efficient. The new appointees would be strictly limited and appointed in the same way as before. However, there would be constraints that I will not mention in this debate that will have to be looked at to ensure we have the correct political system at work. We must prevent the perception that the Lords is being stacked by political means. The main benefit would be that we retain the expertise of all ages and reduce the numbers sensibly.

As the median age is currently 70—there are as many under that age as over it—the maths naturally state that if the proposal were to become law, roughly a third of peers would go into the new Lords Council in the first five to 10 years. The restriction of the numbers of new appointees would ultimately reconfigure the look of the new Lords structure. I firmly believe that my proposal is a viable and credible means of reducing the number of Lords and, more importantly, preventing the loss of our valued intellectual talent that an elected second Chamber would cause. It is very simple and straightforward.

**Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am happy with most of what my hon. Friend said, but I am concerned about the age being fixed. Some peers are very effective beyond the age of 75. I suggest a slightly different arrangement, whereby a percentage—I will not say what that is at the moment—retires or is requested to retire, and people compete for the remaining places. How about that?

**David Morris:** That is a valid and constructive way forward, as an annexe to what I am trying to do. I would like hon. Members reading this debate in the future to understand that this is a simplified view of what could happen. Further debates would have to take place, and legislation would have to be enacted to make it actually work. However, what my hon. Friend has just articulated very well is that we could have a percentage of Lords who assist a transition, and so still retain the intellectual expertise in the other place—that is the whole ethos behind this debate.

I have nothing more to add, but this is an important subject. For literally decades we have been trying to sort out the problem of the number of Members of the House of Lords. Although I voted for the proposals of the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam in their initial stages, I did not like them. We should look into the issue in a more measured and stately way—one that suits the House of Lords as it currently stands.

11.10 am

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I must apologise, Mr Hollobone—I have not spoken in a Westminster Hall debate before and so am not quite sure what I am doing.

I am the SNP spokesperson on the House of Lords. Our policy is no longer to have a second Chamber, but I understand that this debate is about finding a way forward by reforming the House of Lords rather than getting rid of it. The way forward that has been suggested is really interesting and would reduce the number of Lords. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) mentioned that some Lords are active and effective over the age of 75; that was an interesting point and should be taken into account.

One concern I have with the proposal of the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) is that in the interim period of 20 years he suggested there is a risk that the House of Lords as a whole will continue to get older. If we are aiming to reduce the number of Lords, presumably we will not be appointing many more in that interim period, which will push the average age up, even with a cut-off point of 75.

**David Morris:** I agree with the hon. Lady. I have looked into this, and if we do the maths, as I said earlier, the average age in the Lords is around 70, and the average active Lord is 65 years of age. She is correct that there is a mathematical schism, in that not appointing new Lords would push up the average age. However, over a period of 20 years it would come down to how many Lords were appointed in the initial stages. We could have a calculated assessment that kept in mind the ages of the Lords and how many might be around in 20 years, which would allow us to work out a taper.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Absolutely. If the youngest Lords at the moment are in their 30s and we do not appoint any more, in 20 years the youngest will be in their 50s, which is a concern.

There could be a degree of election for the pool of life peers, as well as for the hereditary peers. The SNP policy is to abolish the House of Lords entirely, but if that is not going to happen, we want something that is closer to representative democracy. That would mean some form of election, and a House that represented the breadth of the population. A mean age of 70 is nowhere near doing that—I am not in any way being ageist, but simply suggesting that there is a lack of representativeness. If there were a system whereby a group of the current life peers was chosen democratically to continue in the House, we would be more likely to have a swathe of peers who were more representative of the population.

**David Morris:** I understand where the hon. Lady is coming from and share some of her sentiments. However, we looked at that in the previous Parliament and could not get the proposals through the House. I think the House of Lords should be kept as it is now; the issue is how we get the numbers down. I do not have a panacea and am hoping that this debate will be the start of a process. I share her sentiments, which could be looked at in future.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Absolutely.

I do not have much more to say. I appreciate the chance to contribute to the debate and hope that we can find a constructive way forward that includes reform of the House of Lords and, in particular, reduces the number of its Members.

11.15 am

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose):** It is a pleasure to have you looking after our debate so carefully and in such an accomplished manner, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) on securing this important debate. The debate on this topic has gone a little quiet in the past couple of years, and it should not have. It is important that we wake it up again. My hon. Friend has made a good start on that, and has perhaps lit some blue touch paper—I will come on to that in a minute.

I should start with a small declaration of interest, as my wife has recently been appointed to the House of Lords as a life peer. We have had the conversation over the breakfast table in which I tell her that I have already voted to abolish her and replace her with an elected representative at least three or four times during this Parliament; she has each time informed me, in return—with slightly too much pleasure—that she is no longer able to vote for me in general elections. I will not detain hon. Members any longer with the politics of the Penrose breakfast table, but thought I should make sure everyone knows that part of my family background, if I can put it that way.

To return to the argument of my hon. Friend, as he said, there have been attempts, big and small, to reform the House of Lords. It is a hardy perennial of debate both in this place and in debating societies up and down

the country. It prompts deep and great thoughts among constitutional experts, from historians and academics through to think-tanks and policy wonks of all kinds. It has been so important because it clearly needs to be dealt with—any democrat looking at the House of Lords thinks it looks odd.

To be fair, their Lordships understand that and in the past few years a number of different measures have been introduced both from the Lords and jointly by Members of the Commons and the Lords. My hon. Friend mentioned the Bill introduced by Dan Byles and Lord Steel dealing with the retirement of peers; there was also a Bill introduced by Sir George Young and Baroness Hayman on expulsion and suspension from the House of Lords. There have been successful attempts at Lords reform, albeit on a relatively small scale, as well as less successful attempts at grander Lords reform, such as the House of Lords Reform Bill that failed to make progress during the previous Parliament.

It is therefore a little odd that this area of policy seems to have run out of steam in the past couple of years. I thought my hon. Friend's proposals were interesting and thought-provoking. His proposal for peers who are over 75 to be part of a Lords council would retain much of the Lords' expertise and ability to provide advice. It would also reduce the number of voting peers while retaining their advice to be drawn on if needed.

I also found it fascinating that, even during my hon. Friend's brief remarks setting out his interesting proposal, we heard a couple of additional suggestions from my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) and the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman). Each sparked off the initial idea and contributed variations and additional thoughts—right here, my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale has succeeded in beginning a revision and expansion of this rather neglected area of debate.

My hon. Friend has done something important by lighting that blue touch paper, and I would like him to carry on, if he is willing. If we can get other parts of the body politic that is interested in constitutional reform to start considering the issue with a bit more energy and focus—perhaps spurred on by his ideas—we may well get a series of other proposals. They could be tremendously helpful in broadening and enriching the debate.

The Government's election manifesto states:

“We will ensure that the House of Lords fulfils its valuable role as a chamber of legislative scrutiny”.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend start his remarks by saying that he thought the House of Lords fulfils that role, and that it is an important role that should continue. We want to help the Lords continue to do that, and hold the Government to account.

Also, while it is difficult to envisage a return in the immediate future to the bigger, bolder issue of massive, whole-scale Lords reform, we want to continue to consider ideas about limiting the number of peers, and further ideas around retirement. My hon. Friend's proposals are therefore bang on the money. They are exactly about where it might be possible, as a practical measure, to take these sorts of things forward, and that is why we should encourage other people to propose alternatives, so that we are not faced with having only one idea from one brave soul who has decided to try to light this issue up again; others should participate as well.

I encourage my hon. Friend not just to talk to think-tanks or constitutional experts outside Parliament; it is crucial that he gets the Lords involved as well. It was noticeable that the two successful attempts recently have been made in close conjunction between Members of the Commons and Members of the Lords, effectively as private Members' Bills. That element of buy-in from the upper House has been absolutely essential. Who is better placed to make proposals that might get buy-in and consent from their lordships than other Members of the House of Lords?

**Mr Turner:** May I suggest one problem? Throughout the period we are considering, that process would require a denial—a self-denial—from the Prime Minister, and I am talking about not only this Prime Minister but future Prime Ministers, because the number of peers created during the last 15 years has been staggeringly high. It cannot go on at that rate. I would like to know how we can persuade Prime Ministers of all possible political colours—I realise that only one is likely to be in Government—to prevent them from using their power to create too many peers.

**John Penrose:** My hon. Friend makes my point for me, which is that I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale is pretending that his proposal is a complete answer. I think that he is putting it forward as an interesting and thought-provoking contribution to a broader debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight is quite right to point out that this question about how we reduce the size of the House of Lords will depend not only on people leaving, standing down, retiring or—as this proposal suggests—entering as councillors, but on the number of people coming in and at what age they come in. This proposal does not necessarily address that issue directly—I think my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale was quite straightforward about that—and that is why I

suggest that we ought to have other people contributing to this debate, because it will require other proposals for us to come up with a full suite of potential answers.

**David Morris:** I know that the Minister may not be able to answer this question, but could he possibly point me in the right direction in the House of Lords to like-minded Lords who would like to take this matter further? I know that previously Dan Byles worked closely and respectfully with the Lords.

**John Penrose:** I am sure that the Whips in the Lords and the Leader of the Lords will be happy to point my hon. Friend at particular people who might be interested, and I also suggest to him that he might want to talk to some of the Lords who sponsored the two successful private Members' Bills that have gone through recently. They might be interested themselves, or they might know other colleagues who would be interested in picking this matter up. That would be my starting point.

I hope that other people outside Westminster Hall have listened to this debate, that their interest is piqued and that they will start to consider this important and—as I have said—currently unexpectedly neglected area of constitutional reform, because we have only just started to focus on it. Therefore, this debate is an incredibly valuable starter for 10—a way of beginning a wider debate and kicking things off—but we need to be clear that it is a starting point and not the final answer. To be fair to my hon. Friend, I do not think that he is positioning it as anything else but that.

With any luck, those outside this place will listen to what we have said today and start work. If they start work and then have weighty thoughts on a variety of approaches to pursuing this important area of constitutional reform, I will be delighted to hear what they have to say.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.25 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Crown Prosecution Service

[MRS ANNE MAIN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the work of the Crown Prosecution Service.

I am honoured to open this debate under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I think that this is the first time I have opened a debate with you in the Chair. It is very nice to see you there.

The debate is on the important topic of the challenges facing the Crown Prosecution Service in the light of significant cuts in resources. Its purpose is to consider whether the institution is sufficiently supported to carry out its work effectively, or whether the cuts to staff and resources are leading to a permanent decline in its performance.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the CPS to all of us. It ensures that the laws that knit together our complex society are adhered to, and that those who transgress are brought to justice in a timely way and in the best traditions of a free and fair democracy.

When people are asked to name a Great British institution, the CPS may not be on the tip of everybody's tongue, but it plays a crucial practical role by bringing to life two of the core rights of every British citizen: the right to a fair trial; and the right to get justice as a victim of crime. It is not a criticism of the CPS to say that it is not at the forefront of everyone's mind, because in some ways it is a measure of its success that it does not garner much attention when it is doing its job well. It is when things go wrong that the organisation is scrutinised in the brightest of public spotlights, as has happened this year. Across the press, from *The Daily Telegraph* to *The Plymouth Herald*, there have been headlines such as "Cuts plunge CPS into crisis" and "'Shocking and unforgivable' court delays cause more crime". Indeed, today the Justice Secretary has added his voice to the debate.

There is no doubt that there are many talented and dedicated staff who make sure that the CPS does all it can to fulfil its obligations to society and to safeguard the core rights of every British citizen. However, serious concerns have been raised about whether the CPS, which is a demand-led service, is being sufficiently resourced to deal with the spike in historical sexual offences, child abuse cases, and those cases arising from an increasing and complex terror threat. In these circumstances, does it seem right that the CPS has experienced a 28.3% cut to its budget, which is estimated to be around £200 million per annum, since 2010? Does it seem right that the most vulnerable participants in the criminal justice system—the victims and the witnesses—are being detrimentally affected because of these cuts?

There is a legal and a moral obligation on the CPS to serve the needs of every single victim. I am proud that my party has been at the forefront of improving the position of victims in the criminal justice system by establishing a victims' taskforce. The taskforce comprises leading criminal justice specialists and campaigners, who lead work on establishing a "victims'

law" and who advise on further improvements to the way that victims and witnesses are treated by the criminal justice system.

It does not take a rocket scientist to know that delays in case progression put increased pressure and strain on victims and witnesses, so that many of them face prolonged periods of time in limbo, not knowing where cases stand and unable to move on with their lives.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the cuts in the CPS not only lead to problems in progressing cases and in arming prosecutors with the correct information in court, but increase the number of diversions from court, which obviously also has a negative impact on victims and witnesses?

**Teresa Pearce**: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention and I totally agree. Court cases are a very stressful time for people and delays just make matters more stressful.

I will say a few words about the current experiences of witnesses at criminal proceedings, although I anticipate that others may also mention it. There is a widening gulf between the ideal world of a system that should support victims and witnesses, and the real-world experience of a system that so frequently fails them.

An editorial in *The Independent* last year said that "procedures are designed with little consideration of the needs of the victims and witnesses in whose interests they are supposedly working."

Anyone who has ever attended court—I have, as a witness in a criminal case—knows how difficult it is to understand court scheduling. Someone might mentally prepare all day for an appearance that does not happen or that is adjourned till another time, and decisions are rarely explained or laid out.

Sometimes the situation is even more difficult. In my case, I was witness to a very violent crime outside my house. It was arranged that I would be able to give evidence behind a screen, so that I could not be identified. However, when I got to court, I was put in the waiting room with the family of the accused, which meant the whole experience was absolutely terrifying for me.

If courts were private businesses, witnesses would be the "customers" of court proceedings and they would be well within their rights to complain about the service they receive. The Ministry of Justice agrees with that view. It has admitted:

"For victims and witnesses, the criminal justice system can be baffling and frustrating, and their experience all too often falls below the standards they might expect from a modern public service".

Staff cuts have hit hard. Between 2010 and 2013, the number of witness care managers, whose job is to aid victims and witnesses, fell by 43%. The services that witness care managers provide are little known to the public, especially when compared with those provided by the police and the CPS, and given the current rate of cutting, there is genuine concern about whether they will even exist in future.

My constituency is partly within the London Borough of Bexley, and the magistrates court observers panel operates in Bexley. It has suggested that if the public were more aware of witness care managers, that would encourage more victims to come forward and report

crimes, especially in cases of domestic violence, hate crime and sexual assault, because awareness of such managers might give them the confidence they need to pursue a complaint.

The magistrates court observers panel has expressed its concerns, particularly about domestic violence cases and the fact that a high number of complainants “withdraw their statements or fail to attend the trial”.

Its most recent report states that in more than 65% of the trials that it had examined in which the CPS offered no evidence, it was because the complainant or witness had withdrawn or failed to attend court.

I understand that that lesson has been learned, and that a separate team has now been set up to deal with domestic violence cases, which is an intelligent move. I hope that it will allow skilled professionals to prepare cases in a thoughtful way and give the support that is required to move matters forward.

**Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. I certainly agree with her that we need to put the victims of crime at the centre of the criminal justice system and its work.

I have worked at Bexley magistrates court, to which the hon. Lady referred. Does she welcome the work of the witness support service there, which has assisted, over many years now, both prosecution and defence witnesses when they attend court? And does she also—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that interventions are usually brief and of a singular nature.

**Teresa Pearce:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Yes, I welcome the work of the witness support service at Bexley magistrates court; it does a fantastic job. Often, when people consider coming forward as a witness or to report a crime, they are not aware that such support exists and we must do more to publicise it, because the witness support service does a very important job.

Being a witness in a criminal proceeding is hard enough. The pressures of enduring cross-examination, bewigged barristers and the alien environment of a sterile courtroom are all enough to make a witness feel massively intimidated. However, sometimes getting even basic support from a witness care manager can make the difference between having a difficult time and enduring an absolutely impossible ordeal.

In the light of the reduction of nearly 43% in witness care manager numbers, what will the Minister do to safeguard the right of every witness to receive support? If witnesses continue to be unsupported, they are less likely to come forward in the first place. They are also less likely to turn up at court, less likely to give good evidence when they are cross-examined, and less likely to look back on the experience as being anything other than demoralising.

The costs of rescheduling hearings, postponing trials and abandoning prosecutions midway through will surely outweigh any savings made through cuts. This is an area where we could actually “spend to save”, because cutting the number of witness care managers is a false economy of the worst kind.

I will say just a few words about a special category of crime that the CPS prosecutes—historical sexual abuse cases. Perhaps there are few more compelling examples of victims who need support than the victims in such cases. If we fail them, we really must look again at the logic of cutting the CPS budget.

Historical sexual abuse is a crime that, regrettably, is coming to define our times. It represents a moral stain on society’s character. The late Lord Bingham, a former senior Law Lord, was right to hold up what he called “Equality before the law” as a “cornerstone of our society”. Too often, victims of crimes that took place sometimes decades ago have felt they have been treated unequally and ignored by our society and our criminal justice system. We legislators cannot undo the terrible things that victims have had to endure, but we can strive for justice for them. We can try hard to address their concerns and their years of not being listened to—and the way we do this is by properly funding the CPS in these cases.

The Director of Public Prosecutions has requested that the Chancellor provide £50 million-worth of funding to effectively prosecute cases of historical sexual abuse. Will the Minister commit to doing everything possible to provide the funding requested for these cases and make sure that the victims are fully taken care of while undergoing such an ordeal?

It is clear that the CPS is a demand-led service and cannot function appropriately if it is not adequately resourced. The opposing forces of increasing crime and decreasing funding mean that the system is struggling to cope, and the rise in the number of terrorist suspects being investigated is a further burden on the service. Alison Saunders, the Director of Public Prosecutions, has been forced to consider doubling the number of prosecutors to cope with the magnitude of the challenge of complex, terrorist-related cases and suspects. The complex nature of these offences means that much more time and resources have to be put into preparing them.

It is imperative that we reflect on what the CPS does well and what it is failing to do as a result of these cuts. We must ask ourselves what we can possibly expect of the service, in rising to increasing challenges, during a time of austerity and budget cuts of 28%.

It would be wrong to blame the CPS solely. Poor casework preparation and delays are not always its fault, but with staff cuts and growing workloads, administrative errors are more likely and, increasingly, cases are being dropped because of unnecessary mistakes. The CPS is trying its best to modernise: it is pursuing digital working, moving from a paper-based system to a digital one. If that is successful, it stands to save taxpayers money in the future. However, there have been huge criticisms of that service and it must be reviewed to ensure that it really is providing value for money, because expensive mistakes must be avoided.

We, as a society, depend on the CPS to bring to justice those who cannot or will not observe the laws that we make for ourselves. Will the Minister undertake to look again at where the CPS cuts are falling, not least to make sure that savings are not outweighed by money lost because of delays and lack of witness support?

2.42 pm

**Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) for securing this debate, which certainly needed to be had.

My involvement with the Crown Prosecution Service in recent years has mainly focused on the failure to prosecute child sex abusers. We know that in the 1960s, 70s and 80s people like Cyril Smith and Victor Montagu were allowed to continue to abuse children because the CPS was unable or unwilling to bring cases against them, even when it had the evidence. It is a legacy that should shame the CPS and the entire justice system, but these failures are not just a thing of the past. The case of Lord Janner is an interesting case study of the workings of the modern day CPS and its attitude towards alleged child abusers. We know that the CPS failed to press for prosecution of Lord Janner in 1991, 2002 and 2006, and the current Director of Public Prosecutions, Alison Saunders, has admitted that he should have been prosecuted. Now we hear that he cannot face justice because he is too ill.

Before discussing the case in detail, I want to make the point that we cannot underestimate the effect that failed prosecutions have on the survivors of abuse. There are many people—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair)**: Order. I caution the hon. Gentleman against discussing the case of Lord Janner in detail, rather than discussing the process of the Crown Prosecution Service. I am sure that he will stay completely in order, but I am just careful to ensure that he discusses the Crown Prosecution Service and its relationship to the case, rather than the case against Lord Janner itself. That is on advice from the Clerks.

**Simon Danczuk**: I understand that, Mrs Main. Although there is no case against Lord Janner—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair)**: No, it is not sub judice. There is no case against Lord Janner, but it is a long-established practice of the House not to criticise Members of the other House except on a substantive motion. I will let the hon. Gentleman carry on and, if he does not mind, I will jump in if I think he is going off piste, so to speak.

**Simon Danczuk**: Thank you, Mrs Main. I always appreciate your guidance in these matters.

The CPS's failure to prosecute cases can have a real impact and can be extremely damaging. Research shows that child sexual abuse victims die on average 20 years early: they may commit suicide, become alcoholic or drug dependent, or just struggle to cope with life because of what has been done to them by their abusers. We know that abuse victims die in their 30s, 40s or 50s, while their abusers live into their 70s or 80s. Such a failing by the CPS also reduces the public's faith in the justice system. It discourages people from reporting child sexual abuse because they think the CPS will say that the victims are unreliable; that it is not in the public interest; or, as in the case of Lord Janner, that the alleged perpetrator is too ill.

Most importantly, failure by the CPS emboldens the perpetrators of child abuse. When the CPS failed to prosecute Cyril Smith in the 1960s, he went on to abuse for decades; and when the CPS failed to prosecute the

Rochdale grooming gang in the early 2000s, it carried on raping Girl A for years afterwards. Poor white working class boys were considered unreliable witnesses in the 1960s in relation to Cyril Smith. Fast forward and poor white working class girls were considered unreliable witnesses in the 2000s.

Returning to the case of Lord Janner, the shocking thing is that the CPS admits that the witnesses are not unreliable. It admits that Janner should face prosecution, but refuses to bring a case. I know the police are furious about this, and rightly so. Anyone who has heard the accusations would be similarly outraged. I have met Leicestershire police and discussed the allegations in some detail: children being violated, raped and tortured, some in the very building in which we now sit. The official charges are: 14 indecent assaults on a male under 16 between 1969 and 1988; two indecent assaults between '84 and '88; four counts of buggery of a male under 16 between '72 and '87; and two counts of buggery between 1977 and 1988. My office has spoken to a number of the alleged victims and heard their stories. I cannot overstate the effect that this abuse has had on their lives.

To sum up, I want to make the following points about the case. If Lord Janner really is too ill to face prosecution, why cannot the courts establish this with a fitness-to-plead process? This would clear up doubts that still linger. For example, why was he still visiting Parliament on official visits after he was declared unfit to face justice? Why is he able to contribute to the law-making process in the House of Lords, but unable to face the law himself? If it is found that he is genuinely too ill to stand trial, why not conduct a trial of the facts? This would allow the victims to tell their stories and gain some sense of justice. The DPP has said that a trial of the facts would not be in the public interest. Personally, I fail to see how the knowledge that a peer of the realm is a serial child abuser is not in the public interest.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair)**: Order. I caution the hon. Gentleman about alleging anything against Lord Janner and making assertions about his guilt or innocence.

**Simon Danczuk**: Thank you, Mrs Main. I appreciate that.

The Director of Public Prosecutions has said that Lord Janner will not offend again. But the failure to prosecute Lord Janner offends every principle of justice. He may not abuse again, but the legacy of the abuse continues. His victims need the truth and they need to be heard.

2.50 pm

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing the debate.

Since Neath magistrates court closed last year, my constituents have had to travel to Swansea, which is more than 20 miles away, denying them access to local justice in their own community and putting an added strain on the Crown Prosecution Service. Constituents and local solicitors have told me that the closure of the local court has had a negative impact locally. Those on low incomes might have to choose between buying

everyday necessities and travelling to court, causing them hardship at an already stressful time. The closure has caused great inconvenience to those in Neath who have to attend court as the victims of what might be spurious allegations or charges, or attend to find their case adjourned.

The cuts in legal aid and the two-tier criminal justice contract have left constituents without legal aid representation. When residents of Neath are arrested, they are taken to Bridewell custody suite in Bridgend, which is more than 20 miles away, and they have no way of getting home when they are released. Constituents and local solicitors have told me that policing has declined in Neath since the court's closure. The reorganisation of courts has therefore not worked for Neath. Today's further announcement by the Justice Secretary of more reorganisation is alarming, and I urge the Government to consider the proposals very carefully.

2.51 pm

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this important debate.

It is more than 10 years since I first picked up files from the Crown Prosecution Service, when I was a young pupil barrister, to prosecute what was known as the magistrates list. Much has changed at the CPS since then—I used to handwrite the results of every single case on the outside of each white file. Technology has brought us an online system, and the criminal procedure rules have also streamlined the system.

However, streamlining and management changes cannot take human judgment out of the system. In reality, decisions in the Crown Prosecution Service have to be taken by individual lawyers. Of course, I welcome the role of CPS Direct at a very early stage and at the charging stage, although I gently suggest to the Solicitor General that there could be a little more clarity throughout the system about when police have to take advice from CPS Direct, particularly in cases where there is a clear lack of evidence, which would render such a step unnecessary.

The availability of lawyers, and no excessive delays at that early stage, are crucial to CPS Direct's working well as part of the system. The charging decision itself is, of course, a matter of judgment. The Solicitor General, having practised criminal law for so many years in Cardiff, will be only too aware of the two-stage test. The evidential test of a realistic prospect of conviction, and the public interest test, are judgments that human beings have to exercise. Having fewer people exercising that judgment will mean that those left have to work longer hours, which will inevitably lead to errors becoming more commonplace. That will show in the Crown Prosecution Service performance statistics.

In addition, it is critical that Crown Prosecution Service lawyers have the time and space to prepare trials properly. For example, watching CCTV, watching a DVD or listening to audio evidence take time, and that time has to be built into the system. If it is not, there will simply be delays further down the line. The position of complainants and witnesses is critical, as is transparency in the Crown Prosecution Service's work.

I welcome what the Director of Public Prosecutions has said about the recent consultation on greater support for witnesses in court, which I hope will lead to a strong CPS policy on pre-trial assistance. There is no conflict, in my view, between robust cross-examination by a solicitor or barrister at court and ensuring that witnesses and complainants are fully supported and familiar with the environment that they are entering. I praise the work of Victim Support and the victims' right to review scheme, in particular in situations where there has been a decision not to charge, to discontinue or withdraw in the case of the magistrates, to offer no evidence or to leave charges on file.

We do not serve victims, complainants or witnesses well if the Crown Prosecution Service is inefficient, under-resourced and understaffed. That will have a knock-on effect throughout the criminal justice system. Delays at court, poorly prepared trials, sub-optimal charging decisions and problems in cases at a late stage all fail witnesses and victims, as well as undermining public confidence in the criminal justice system as a whole. I urge the Government not to wield the axe indiscriminately on the Crown Prosecution Service budget without carefully considering the knock-on effects and the overall corrosive effect on the system.

2.56 pm

**Mike Weir** (Angus) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to make a short contribution to this debate. Before being elected to the House, I was a solicitor in private practice for some 20 years, and I spent many happy hours in courtrooms defending clients. In Scotland, we have always had an independent prosecution system, unlike in England. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) made some powerful points about child abuse, but my understanding is that the CPS came into being only in 1984, so some of the earlier decisions were police, rather than CPS decisions. It may be a bit unfair to blame the CPS for all the problems. However, the collapse of some recent high-profile trials has undoubtedly done nothing for the CPS, leading to some of the criticisms against it.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) said about people appearing in court. As a solicitor, I often cross-examined witnesses, but I, too, was once a witness in a case and found it a terrifying experience. After that, I took a much more sympathetic attitude to witnesses. It is difficult for a witness to go to court, even in a relatively simple case. Even I, who was used to the court system, found it difficult. I spent years saying to people, "Well, are you sure that's what happened six months ago?" but when I was asked it, I realised how difficult it is to remember such things. That is an argument for getting cases to court more quickly.

Today is an interesting day for the hon. Lady to have the debate. In the Tea Room at lunchtime, I happened to read *The Independent* and an article headlined "Crusading Gove slams justice for the wealthy", which was about the Justice Secretary. He is speaking today about the court system, promising

"rapid and radical reform to criminal justice through the greater use of technology, to accelerate prosecutions and make it less traumatic for witnesses to appear in court."

He also called the existing system "creaking" and outdated, which is interesting, because that chimes with what the

[Mike Weir]

hon. Lady was saying. How things happen in an era of cuts to the CPS will be an interesting balance. I am interested to hear what the Minister has to say.

Whatever the system, one of the biggest problems in dealing with cases is that people do not turn up in court. I often had the experience of turning up in court, ready to do a case, only to find that the accused or a witness had not turned up, and the whole thing collapsed. That is also difficult for the witnesses who turn up, having screwed up their courage to come along and do this, only to find that they are sent away and told to come back at some indeterminate time in the future. In Scotland, we have tried various things such as intermediate diets, or pleading diets, to avoid that happening, but it still happens in some cases—there is always a problem with human nature in such things.

I am not sure how Victim Support works in England, but certainly in the Scottish courts Victim Support Scotland does excellent work in dealing with the victims of crime who come to court, and often also with the witnesses giving evidence. Its role should not go unnoticed.

There are differences between the English and Scottish systems. We have always had an independent system, through procurators fiscal and advocates depute. They have always been independent of the police and Government, and make decisions on whether to prosecute cases and on their conduct, although for obvious reasons in both systems the police are the primary investigatory body.

One crucial difference between the two systems is the role of barristers, or advocates as we say in Scotland. Under the Scottish system, all procurators fiscal and advocates depute are full-time prosecutors, whereas my understanding of how the CPS works is that it is almost like a client and it engages barristers for particular cases; those barristers might be prosecuting one week and defending the next. That seems slightly odd to us, because, as I say, our prosecutors are full-time prosecutors—that is what they do. I am sure that barristers can compartmentalise their day-to-day cases, and many will do so, very well, but it seems a curious way to go about things.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that that is the special thing about the criminal Bar—its independence? A barrister may well be prosecuting one day and defending the next. That allows for impartiality.

**Mike Weir:** I am not questioning the impartiality, but it seems curious. In our system, people can go from being an advocate depute to being a defending solicitor, but they would leave the Crown Office to do that—they would not do it at the same time. In our system they build up expertise in prosecution. It is a matter of personal opinion. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a long-time practitioner and I am sure that he has a different view; I am simply putting forward my view.

The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead also mentioned cuts to the service. Cuts are a concern in many areas. In Scotland, again, the system is slightly different: the Lord Advocate, who heads the Crown Office, negotiates his own funding deal directly with the Deputy First Minister, who also happens to be the

Finance Minister, separate from the wider Budget. Although it is true that the Scottish system's budget over the past few years has been largely flat in cash terms, which is a reduction in real terms, this year there has been a real-terms increase for the Crown Office. That increase was made in recognition of some of the problems in the court system.

The hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) made good points about access to justice locally. We have struggled with that issue in many areas of Scotland. Rationalisation and new technology and services are relevant here. When I was practising there were two sheriff courts—the equivalent of English magistrates courts—in my constituency. One has now been closed down and its services transferred to the other. However, there has been a lot more investment in the second court, in particular, in video technology; witnesses can give video evidence and the court has a facility for children to give evidence over video link. I am sure that much of that also happens in English courts, but it needs investment. That was the interesting thing about what the Justice Secretary said today, because greater use of technology means investment, and I question how much he will be able to do when cuts are being made.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) gave a good exposition of his own experience in the prosecution service. I do not have that experience, but I understand what he was saying.

The CPS is a good service. The principle of an independent prosecution service is important. It is unfortunate that in some ways the CPS has got a bad reputation in recent years because of some high-profile cases that have not gone well at trial or have collapsed early. However, as was rightly said at the outset, any justice system must be about making sure that everyone has a fair trial and that witnesses are dealt with properly at trial. That needs investment, and we make cuts to such systems at our peril.

3.4 pm

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this important debate. I immediately declare an interest, as I was the Director of Public Prosecutions and head of the Crown Prosecution Service from 2008 to 2013. The current DPP was head of CPS London as a member of my staff and is known to me.

The CPS is a demand-led organisation that has taken significant cuts in recent years. As a result, it has significantly fewer staff and less resilience, and faces probably a greater challenge now than it has for many years. I pay tribute to the staff who work in that environment and deliver the best they can in the circumstances.

One of the unknowns for a demand-led organisation such as the CPS is the caseload. In the years that I was DPP, the number of cases coming into the service from the police undoubtedly reduced, which significantly softened the impact of some of the cuts. The difficulty as I see it, and the risk that the CPS was running when I was DPP, is that the reason for the reduction was never properly understood—no one could explain why the numbers were going down and, equally, no one could

properly predict when they would twist and go up. I note the recent reports of increased numbers of sexual abuse cases coming into the CPS; those cases are highly resource intensive.

The cuts to the CPS are not dissimilar to the cuts to other parts of the criminal and civil justice systems. As the Solicitor General will know, a series of very critical reports on the cuts to the civil side, from this House and elsewhere, have indicated that the strategy for the past five years has been to cut first and look at the evidence and the impact later, rather than the other way round. That is a very serious criticism of any strategy. One of my concerns has been whether over the past five years there has truly been a criminal justice strategy that goes beyond simply taking the money out and focuses on the services to be delivered.

Against that background, and recognising what Sir Brian Leveson said in his recent report on the efficiency of the courts, namely, that there is an irreducible core minimum of funding below which we cannot deliver services, will the Solicitor General tell us what arrangements are currently in place to ensure that the Government have a line of sight on the risks being run by reducing resources for the CPS? Have there been evidence-based assessments of the impact of the reduced resources? If so, will some or all of those impact assessments be published? If, as the Lord Chancellor indicated this morning, the rights of victims will be taken more seriously in future, are there currently plans to increase resources for the CPS so that it can deal more effectively with victims?

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): I welcome my hon. and learned Friend to the House—his expertise is widely welcomed here—and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) for securing this debate. My hon. and learned Friend mentioned the CPS staff; does he agree that it is totally unacceptable that they have to work weekends, unpaid, with an increasing workload?

**Keir Starmer:** There is of course concern about the workload of CPS staff. One effect of the reduction in resources is that staff have to work much harder in different circumstances and at different times. That is part of the risk when the resource of any organisation is reduced. It does not mean that one must always return to the status quo and that there cannot be change. However, it does highlight my point that there needs to be a constant risk assessment when resources are reduced in the way they have been.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I should declare an interest as somebody who has been a practising barrister—in fact, I was probably instructed by the hon. and learned Gentleman. Does he agree that culture is sometimes as important as cost when helping victims and witnesses? There has been an extraordinary change—this was the case even during his tenure as DPP—in the way victims and witnesses are treated. That ranges from victim impact statements, to the screens provided for under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, to getting counsel to meet witnesses before they give evidence, which is critical to giving them a good court experience.

**Keir Starmer:** I accept that, and I have always said that, if we are to provide properly for victims, we need not only resource but a culture change.

I share the concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) raised about Cyril Smith and other old cases. For the record, Cyril Smith was not, of course, considered by the CPS, because it was not in existence at the time. However, the case was considered by the DPP, and I have gone on record to express my concern about the decisions that were made.

This is about making a cultural change. When I was DPP, I was concerned that there was a cultural inhibition against prosecuting some of the sexual grooming cases, and that was most acute in the Rochdale cases, but a new approach was heralded to prosecuting those cases. I accept, therefore, that, when it comes to victims, the issue is not just resource but a culture change. The culture is changing, but it needs to be pressed harder, and it needs to be pressed in other parts of the criminal justice system, although there has been good work. However, if we are to take victims more seriously, that will require more resource, and it will require us to be clear about the risks that will be taken if further money is taken out of the criminal justice system.

Let me finish by observing that the decision before the DPP on the Janner case was not an easy one; it was a stark and difficult choice between two unattractive approaches. The DPP has followed the victim right to review policy and has put the decision out for review. We should respect the independence that she has brought to the decision making and the fact that she has had the courage to put the decision out for review. To that extent, we should inhibit our comments on the case.

3.12 pm

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I suspect that I will be rudely interrupted at any moment, because we are expecting a Division on the Floor of the House. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this important debate.

The CPS is going through profound changes, and it is right that we carefully consider the consequences of budget cuts and stretched resources in this demand-led service. The CPS plays a vital role in the criminal justice system. It has been well led in recent years, not least by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and, recently, by the current DPP, Alison Saunders. I have met her on a number of occasions to discuss the challenges that the service faces, and she is doing an excellent job in an extremely difficult situation.

Since 2010, we have seen cuts to the CPS budget of more than 28%, which has led to office closures and reductions in staff—the figures I have show that it has lost 571 prosecutors and 500 administrative staff. Those numbers are absolutely massive, given the previous size of the CPS. The cuts in resources are unprecedented, and they have left a gaping hole in the organisation.

Savage cuts are being made against a backdrop of historical sexual abuse cases, increases in reported child abuse and complex cases involving terrorist offences. The CPS must be afforded the flexibility to respond to complex cases when the need arises. In the last couple of years, we have seen an unprecedented and unexpected rise in the number of historical sexual abuse cases and the strain that the CPS has been put under as a consequence.

[Karl Turner]

In recent weeks and months, the DPP has been on bended knee, pleading with the Chancellor, through the Attorney General, for £50 million of emergency funding so that the CPS can properly prosecute the large number of historical sexual abuse cases. I am afraid that the Chancellor is yet to award that money, and he will no doubt expect the CPS to shoulder more cuts in the forthcoming Budget. In my respectful view, that is a huge mistake. If the Chancellor and the Government decide to continue down this path, the problems in the CPS are bound to get worse.

We all agree that the criminal justice system, including the CPS, needs some reform to be fit for purpose in the 21st century. It needs to meet the complexities and challenges of modern demands. However, simply slashing the budget and hoping for the best is wrong and dangerous.

Just today, we saw the Justice Secretary come to the sudden realisation that the justice system is in disarray. He is right that victims and witnesses are adversely affected by inefficiencies and bureaucracy in the criminal justice system. The Opposition welcome his warm words, but we need to see the colour of the Chancellor's money. Victims and witnesses are often an afterthought, and we need to see them front and centre of any reforms to the CPS and the criminal justice system.

The Lord Chancellor is right to point out that there are two nations in the justice system, although he should not be surprised—it was his Government, I am afraid, who introduced savage cuts without thinking them through. Let me say, before I am intervened on by Conservative Members, that it is true that any party coming into power in 2010 would have made cuts, but my colleagues and I would have thought very carefully about where the axe should fall. The two previous Lord Chancellors did not think their cuts through very well at all.

The move towards the CPS Direct model is taking CPS prosecutors away from local offices and police stations, which has probably led to a slowdown in charging decisions. The timeliness of such decisions has become a real issue, and there have been reports of police officers waiting to get through to CPS Direct for hours on end. Every area visited in the recent joint inspection of charging decisions had serious concerns about the mechanisms used. Worryingly, the report found serious failings in the timeliness of charging decisions, with two thirds of the calls made to CPS Direct not answered within its target of three minutes. Once officers actually make it through to a prosecutor, they are taken through a long process, which often takes more than an hour.

Cuts to the CPS have not been cost-effective, as Her Majesty's former chief inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service, Michael Fuller, concluded in the report he published on 15 March. The vast reductions in the workforce have meant that the CPS is unable to deliver value-for-money advocacy and the service has made poor progress in most areas.

**Alex Chalk:** Is it right to say that by 2013 the Crown Prosecution Service, not least because of the intervention by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), was in a better state than it was in 2008, when he took over, and certainly than it was in 2010? It is simply crude to suggest that it has all got worse since 2010. That is simply not the case.

**Karl Turner:** I am bound to disagree. I am sure that vast improvements were made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras when he was at the helm of the CPS. I remember cross-examining him when I was serving on the Select Committee on Justice, and he made very well the points that the service—[*Interruption.*] The Solicitor General says from a sedentary position that he was there, too. I remember him being there. It is right to say that improvements were made, but the reality is this. When the Crown Prosecution Service is receiving a 28% cut without the entire criminal justice system having been reviewed, problems will materialise, and when it comes to victims of serious crime, such as historical sexual offences, we need to—

3.21 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

3.35 pm

*On resuming—*

**Karl Turner:** Before the Division, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who unfortunately has not yet made it back, said that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras improved the CPS in his time as Director of Public Prosecutions. I entirely agree, but the vast reductions in its workforce mean that the CPS has been unable to deliver value-for-money advocacy. Those are not my words; users of the service—victims and witnesses—are telling us that there is a definite problem. That point was made by Her Majesty's chief inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service. There have been reports of CPS advocates turning up for trial without being properly prepared—in some cases not having read the case at all—and not having sufficient evidence, and even of witnesses not being warned to attend court. Those advocates are not necessarily CPS in-house solicitors and barristers; it is the independent Bar, too.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary recently reported that there is a postcode lottery, which is troubling. In some areas of the country, prosecutors are proceeding with only a third of cases, whereas in other areas, such as my area of Humberside, the figure is closer to nine out of 10 cases—88%. Victims are being failed by a system that is obviously not coping. People should not be denied justice because they report an alleged offence in one area rather than another. Confidence in the criminal justice system is essential, but I am afraid that the system is not working. Victims must be able to come forward and report crimes with confidence that the justice system will work for them. In London, the review of Dame Elish Angiolini, QC into investigations and prosecutions of rape found the criminal justice system to have serious deficiencies in dealing with the number of rape allegations. Since 2005, there has been a 68% rise in recorded sexual offences but only a 17% increase in charges. Last week's report by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children shows a dramatic 39% rise in the number of reported cases of child abuse. Very worryingly, there is a distinct increase in terrorist-related prosecutions, with the DPP projecting that the number could top a frightening 600 this year alone. The Solicitor General will appreciate from his pre-eminent career at the criminal Bar, and from sitting as a recorder of the Crown court, that such cases are

often unresolved before trial, which means that more time and resources are needed to prepare the cases, with the effect that other cases fall by the wayside.

Alongside cuts to advocates and administrators, and office closures, there has been a massive cull in the number of witness care officers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead said. Almost half of those employed to ensure that victims and witnesses are dealt with appropriately have gone—their jobs have been axed. With increased pressure on resources, there are concerns about the timeliness of case progression. There has been an increase in the number of cases dropped by the CPS, leaving many victims and witnesses in despair and feeling let down.

The Government need to decide what their vision for the criminal justice system is and what they want a 21st-century CPS to do. Their slash-and-burn approach to the CPS is putting justice at risk. Although the CPS is a demand-led organisation that must respond according to the circumstances in which it finds itself, the Government have removed vital resources and expertise. What goal are they trying to achieve? If it is cuts for the sake of cuts, without a proper review of the entire system, including legal aid—criminal solicitors, of course, also provide a vital service within the criminal justice system—I fear that the CPS is heading for further and more major difficulties.

We have heard in this debate that the CPS is struggling to cope with increased demand, and that prosecutors, whether in-house or at the independent Bar, are expected to achieve the unachievable. The combination of massive budget cuts and large increases in complex cases has created the perfect storm in which cases are not being dealt with effectively. I invite the Attorney General, through the Solicitor General, to set out what steps his office will take to remedy this worrying problem. Can the Solicitor General say whether the Chancellor will provide the £50 million requested by the Director of Public Prosecutions? What assessment have the Law Officers done of the impact on the CPS? What inquiries, investigations or even discussions have the Solicitor General and the Attorney General had with the DPP about whether the service is coping? I think that it is not coping at all well; as I said earlier, that is the evidence of service users.

As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras said, there must be a strategy beyond just taking the money out. It seems to me that there is no strategy, just cuts, and regrettably, the axe is falling on victims and witnesses.

3.42 pm

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) on securing this debate. I am never clear when there is a Division whether we are given injury time in the form of an extra 15 minutes. If so, be warned that I might have to use it all, because I want to ensure that I refer to the excellent contributions made by Members from all parties.

It is perhaps right of us—it is certainly right of me, as one of Her Majesty's Law Officers—to remind the House why the Crown Prosecution Service was set up 30 years ago: to deliver justice for the public through the independent prosecution of crime across England and

Wales. I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Angus (Mike Weir) about the question of independence, which is at the heart of how the criminal justice service in England and Wales operates. There are parallels between the work of employed prosecutors in Scotland and those employed by the CPS in England: while prosecutors remain in the employ of the service, conflicts should not and cannot arise, but where we have an independent referral service, such as the Bar of England and Wales, the independence and objectivity that it can bring to often difficult and sensitive cases is without parallel in the western world.

We should celebrate that, as well as the work of Crown prosecutors the length and breadth of England and Wales, and all the support staff who work so hard in offices and courts throughout the country. I speak with 20 years' experience as a prosecutor who has worked closely with the CPS, particularly in Wales, dealing with a wide range of serious crime. I not only cherish that experience, I find it incredibly useful in my work as a Law Officer.

I am delighted to welcome not just to this debate but to this House new Members with similar experience of the criminal justice system. We have two in the room today—my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), to whose excellent speech I will return—but it would be wrong of me not to refer as well to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), who went down a more civil path in his career at the Bar but reminded us of his early days, an experience that I think several of us have shared.

The hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees), of course, is also a qualified member of the Bar, which should be put on record. I am grateful to her for her contribution, albeit on an issue that is perhaps more within the purview of the Ministry of Justice. The delivery of justice is achieved by working with other agencies, and her contribution brought that into perspective. Although the CPS is a large cog in the system, it is but one part of that system; it must work with the police and court system to ensure that criminal cases are brought not only to court but to a conclusion.

The test that is applied is one that loads of us who are close to the service can probably recite in our sleep, but it is none the less important to remind ourselves of it. It is the two limb test. First, is there a realistic prospect of a conviction? Secondly, is it in the public interest to bring the prosecution? I hope that answers somewhat the criticism made by the hon. Member for Angus about the bringing of cases by the CPS that have not ended in a successful conviction and that have, in his words, brought into question the reputation of the service. With respect to him, if the CPS were to adopt a test involving risk of acquittal, no cases would ever be brought, because there will always be a risk of acquittal in taking a case to court. That should not deter Crown prosecutors from doing their job.

**Mike Weir:** I agree entirely. I was merely making the point that there have been some high-profile cases in which convictions were not secured, and perhaps some in which the evidence was shaky at best. That has reflected on the CPS in the public mind. It is not a criticism of the CPS; I understand that not all cases are successful, and not all cases should be.

**The Solicitor General:** I am sorry to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but therein lies the problem. If we as politicians and commentators start making such value judgments, we undermine confidence in the independence of the prosecutorial system. We must trust an impartial and objective application of the threshold test. Any questioning of that causes me and many others great concern about the integrity of our prosecutorial system.

**Keir Starmer:** Does the Solicitor General agree that, when a case is charged and the judge decides that there is a case to answer, that case is properly brought, even if there is an acquittal? It is important to our criminal justice system that we adhere to that. The mere fact that a case, high-profile or otherwise, does not end in a conviction is not a test of whether the charging decision was right or wrong. A better test is whether the judge left it to the jury. If that is so, it normally means that the case should have been brought.

**The Solicitor General:** I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman. He presages the point that I was going to make about sufficiency, and about the checks and balances throughout the court process. Arguments can be made about the sufficiency of the evidence at the beginning of a case, at the end of the prosecution case, and, indeed, in some rare circumstances whereby judges withdraw cases from juries—it does not often happen—at the end of defence cases, but the power remains.

In making such criticisms, we are also in danger of calling into question the jury process and indeed the whole system, which is so integral to the rule of law in this country. I was asked—rhetorically, perhaps, but I will give an answer—what strategy this Government have. It is a criminal justice system that upholds the rule of law, enhances public confidence in the system and ensures that there is a consistent approach to bringing cases and sentencing, so that the public feel confident and are protected by due process within the system. That is nothing new—it has been with us for generations—but this Government believe in it as passionately as previous Governments, of whatever colour.

I want to deal with each contribution in turn, but particularly with the opening speech by the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead and her experience of giving evidence in a trial. It does not sound to me as though best practice was followed in her case. I am glad she has brought it to the attention of the House, because those with responsibility for the administration of justice, not only in the magistrates court in Bexley but elsewhere, will do well to remember that the housing of witnesses for the prosecution with either defendants or their families is wholly inappropriate and leads to all sorts of complications that I need not recite here.

[NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead asked specific questions about witness care officers. I accept that the numbers have been reduced in line with other staff reductions, but, importantly, those reductions have been accompanied by reforms to better target our limited resources to help witnesses who are intimidated or vulnerable, and those who are in greatest need. Even more is being done with regard to the change of culture to which my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham referred. For example, the Government are now improving access to information for victims through the new online

and telephone-based victim information service that was launched in March. The increasing commissioning of victims' services through local police and crime commissioners will create a more responsive service—a more localised service—that I do not believe will create a postcode lottery, but will emphasise best practice from which other areas can learn. Although I accept there have been reductions in expenditure, the change in culture that everybody in the system—counsel, solicitors, and lawyers in their role in explaining matters and reassuring and supporting witnesses and victims—has experienced continues to grow.

**Alex Chalk:** On precisely that point, if counsel apply the victims' charter and explain the situation to witnesses and victims as they come to court, it can have an extraordinary impact on how they end up viewing the criminal justice system, and it does not cost a penny.

**The Solicitor General:** Very much so. A lot of us who pioneered such work in the '90s now find that a lot of what we said and believed then is becoming standard practice, and that is absolutely right. We have heard reference to the victims' right to review, and, as was made clear in an intervention on the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), there is an ongoing process in relation to a particular case that means that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it. However, I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I will come back to his point about historical child sexual exploitation in a moment.

Importantly, the new victims' right to review scheme that was established last year gives victims a further opportunity to ask the Crown Prosecution Service, with the help of independent advice, to consider again the merits of particular decisions. So far, between June 2013 and the end of September last year, 263 decisions have been overturned by the new system. It is a small proportion of the number of Crown Prosecution decisions that are made, but it is an extra safety valve that goes a long way, as I said in relation to our strategy, to enhance public confidence in the criminal justice system.

I have referred en passant to the hon. Member for Rochdale, who talked with his usual power about child sexual exploitation. It is a national emergency. I entirely agree with him, and so do the Government. The way in which complainants were dealt with historically in towns such as Rotherham and the town that he represents was wrong. There was far too much emphasis on the reliability of the individual witness, who was often very young and vulnerable, rather than an overall view of the merits of the case. That is rightly acknowledged to have been an incorrect approach. The thrust of the work being carried out by the Crown Prosecution Service now very much reflects the fact that lessons have been learnt, and there are a number of marked successes when it comes to convictions in such cases. A number of so-called celebrities have rightly been brought to justice, and young victims in larger conspiracy-based cases involving many young and vulnerable complainants have now had their voices heard, as the hon. Gentleman says, and can now see that some justice has been brought in order to help them get on with lives that have been torn asunder by the abuse that they suffered.

The hon. Member for Torfaen rightly talked about pressure and efficiency and how decisions are to be made where there is a reduction in the number of

lawyers. The way to measure that is by looking at some of the efficiency measurements that the CPS has conducted. The percentage of guilty pleas at first hearing is a good measurement, because that clearly demonstrates that there has been an excellent level of pre-trial and pre-plea preparation in terms of case management, which means that the evidence has been presented clearly and that those advising defendants can confidently tender advice in a proper way. The percentage of guilty pleas at first hearing has increased from 63.4% in 2010-11 to 70.6% in the last financial year. That is a significant increase.

Another vital piece of information relates to the percentage of magistrates court proceedings that are dropped at a third or even fourth or fifth hearing. That percentage has fallen from 44.2% to 34.1%. In the Crown court, cracked and ineffective trials owing to prosecution failure have fallen from 18.2% to 13.5%. That shows that those who are responsible for decision making and case preparation in the CPS are rising to the challenge and yielding significant results. I pay tribute to chief Crown prosecutors in regions such as the west midlands and the south-west for understanding the importance of the management of the huge volume of cases that come across the desks of prosecutors week in, week out, and for making sure that further improvements are made so that, from the CPS's point of view, they are doing everything they can to ensure that the Courts Service is efficient.

It would be churlish of me not to put on the record my grateful thanks for the service of the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras as Director of Public Prosecutions. He came in at a time when the service already knew that it would face important financial challenges under his stewardship, and he managed them admirably. It is in no small part due to the leadership that he showed that the sorts of figures I have been able to bring to the debate today, and the improved efficiencies in the CPS have been achieved. We are grateful to him.

The hon. and learned Gentleman asked about strategy, and I have given him the answer that I think needs to be set out. He also talked about lines of sight and the risks being run with regard to the impact of reduced resources at a time when it is clear that case loads are increasing. I agree with him: case loads are increasing. We have more terrorism cases and an increase in child sexual exploitation cases. He is right to ask questions. I can reassure him that, as in his day, there continue to be regular meetings between the Director of Public Prosecutions and chief Crown prosecutors to ensure that the current director is fully aware of the impact of changes in case load and resources on individual CPS areas. Further to that, both the Attorney General and I regularly meet the CPS's director and its chief executive, Peter Lewis, to discuss a range of measures that crucially include resources and its case load mix.

**Karl Turner:** In discussions the Solicitor General has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions, has she mentioned to him and the Attorney General that the CPS urgently needs £50 million now to prosecute historical sex cases properly? What representations has he made to the Chancellor about that?

**The Solicitor General:** I wanted to come on to finance and I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the CPS continues actively to discuss its requirements and resourcing

pressures with the Treasury. The idea that somehow there is a nonchalant, sit-back approach to that is wholly wrong.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured that not only are the pressures understood, but discussions continue at the highest levels of Government with regard to making sure—[*Interruption.*] I reassure him that when it comes to the prosecution of serious crime, whether terrorism or child sexual exploitation, the question of resources does not come into it. What does come into it is the threshold test that I referred to at the beginning of my speech.

The CPS continues to look at the impact of resource changes and it is working with colleagues in the Treasury as part of the ongoing spending review. It would not be appropriate for me to prejudge the outcome of that review. The debate is timely and I accept that Members are impatient, but that is where we are on the ongoing pressures and risks that the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras talked about.

**Alex Chalk:** On resources, is it not right that where there is a specific need, the Government will step in? There is no clearer example of that than when the Serious Fraud Office had to consider whether it had sufficient resources to go after so-called LIBOR fraudsters and money was found for detailed and complex investigations. When there is a need, resources are delivered.

**The Solicitor General:** I think my hon. Friend was talking about blockbuster funding and the SFO. It would be invidious of me to make direct comparisons, but that point is very well made indeed.

On finance, I hope to demolish the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East's attractive but somewhat false—I will say colourful—characterisation of the Government's approach to the CPS budget, which I think he described as a "hope for the best" approach. I am sorry to disappoint him, but that is neither accurate nor fair. As I said, under the stewardship of the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras, preparations were made before the 2010 spending review for the CPS to start to reduce its costs by, for example, releasing resources from the back-office at HQ to the frontline; renegotiating important IT contracts to achieve significant savings; introducing a new IT equipment and workstation ratio strategy; and looking at the closure of uneconomic smaller offices.

That all began before the spending review, and those policies have been taken further since then. We have seen the consolidation of operations into regional hubs, the end of occupying unnecessary buildings and the number of CPS geographical areas reduced from 42 to 13 together with a reduction in management numbers. In fact, back-office functions have taken the greatest cut, with a 50% reduction in HQ staff; 20% savings from the renegotiation of the IT and communications contracts, and the estate reduced from 95 offices in 2010 to 40 this year. With respect to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East, that is not "hope for the best" or "back of a cigarette packet" stuff, but a carefully calibrated and planned structural change largely authored and led by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras. That process continues.

When it comes to the prosecution of offences, there is no question of negotiations with the Treasury somehow having an impact on individual decisions; the independence

[The Solicitor General]

of the Crown Prosecution Service is a self-evident truth. To reinforce that, perhaps I should look at some overall results. The CPS's conviction rate in the magistrates courts is now 83.5%, which has increased from 80.6% back in 2004-05. Similarly, in the Crown court, the conviction rate is now 79.4%, up from just over 75% 10 years ago.

Guilty plea rates continue to rise in both Crown and magistrates courts and I am struck in particular by the increase by both volume and proportion of convictions in cases involving violence against women and girls. The past year saw the highest ever volume and proportion of cases charged: 88,359 cases, which is a rise of nearly 12,000 compared with the previous financial year. We also saw more than 107,000 defendants prosecuted to completion in the past year in cases involving violence against women and girls—the highest ever number. The number of those convicted increased from 67,380 in the previous financial year to 78,773 in the past year.

Those figures are far more eloquent testimony to the success of the Crown Prosecution Service's continuing work than anything else that I can summon up. I commend its work to the House and thank once again the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead for giving me the opportunity to address that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the work of the Crown Prosecution Service.

## Local Government Finance (Tameside and Oldham)

4.7 pm

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered local government funding in Tameside and Oldham.

I want to use this opportunity to highlight the impact of the drastic and unfair cuts to local authority spending on local people and public services in my constituency. I also want to set out a better way.

Since 2010, the Government have cut cash funding to Tameside Council by just over 41%, forcing it to cut its budget by £104 million—more than half. The council has lost 1,700 jobs, almost half its workforce. A further £24 million in cuts is now set for 2015-16 and another £14 million for 2016-17. Together, that total of £142 million in cuts amounts to a real-terms equivalent of 53% of the total budget and more than twice Tameside's council tax income.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on her tremendous contribution since being elected. As a former Tameside councillor, I could say much about our local government funding settlement, but the fundamental point I wish to register is that we want local authorities to continue to be the deliverers of core public services—I do, and I think there is consensus for that. However, the local government settlement system for areas such as ours is simply not sustainable.

I believe there should be an incentive system—a way of rewarding councils for house building, economic growth and so forth—but there must also be a floor to ensure that vital, core public services are met. In Tameside, we are very close to falling through that floor.

**Angela Rayner:** I thank my hon. Friend for illustrating what I am trying to portray. Some fantastic councils up and down the country are facing genuine difficulties.

Oldham Council, which is also within my constituency, has done even worse than Tameside Council. It has been forced to cut £200 million from its public services since 2010—the second-largest cut in Greater Manchester. Taken together, my two boroughs have already lost from their public services more than £300 million—that is, incidentally, the annual cost of running the royal household.

Across Greater Manchester, local councils are making almost £450 million of cuts, which comes after 15,000 jobs were lost from our town halls after the last round of budget reductions.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I, too, welcome my hon. Friend as the Member of Parliament for Ashton-under-Lyne. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), I served as a Tameside councillor before entering this place.

The situation is worse than the picture my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) is painting, because such reductions in council spending have an impact on wider public services. For example, the cut in adult social care budgets has had an enormous impact on the ability of the NHS in Greater Manchester to deliver quality health services.

**Angela Rayner:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the impact will be felt across all the public services, which are struggling with their own cuts.

Local government is facing the biggest challenge in its history. Spending as a proportion of GDP is forecast to fall from 4% in 2010 to less than 2.5% in 2019, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. One of the consequences of the cuts she is experiencing, apart from the fact that they are disproportionately affecting areas such as Greater Manchester while more affluent areas are receiving increases, is the long-term effect on life expectancy, about which there is a solid evidence base.

**Angela Rayner:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. After five years of austerity, it is becoming increasingly difficult for well-run councils such as Tameside and Oldham to protect the most vulnerable from the impact of Government policies.

Demand for core services, particularly in social care—formerly, I worked in home care—continues to rise steeply, while funds are being drastically cut. Who will pay the price for the mismatch between the demand for services and the resources available to fund them? Will it be the 5,000 adult care service users in Tameside who have a physical difficulty, a frailty or a sensory impairment? Will it be the 4,000 people who use reablement services to help them live at home, or the people the council supports by providing nursing or residential care? Will it be the 1,300 mental health adult social care users, the 556 adults receiving learning disability services or the 410 vulnerable looked-after children in Tameside? What about the 1 million telephone callers to the council every year? Should staff just ignore the ringing phone, stop cleaning the 715 km of highways and footpaths every month, stop emptying the 45,000 wheelie bins and forget the 140 tonnes of street sweeping and the 290 tonnes of litter per month?

The Local Government Association believes that by 2020 the money available to fund some basic but essential council services, which we all rely on, will have shrunk by 90% in real cash terms. More than 60% of council spending will be on adult and child social care. Local authorities up and down the country are facing difficult choices.

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): My local authority, Salford City Council, is in a similar situation: up to £4.7 million is going to be cut from adult services alone. Its Labour mayor has tried to limit the effect of such swingeing cuts by implementing the living wage and employment standards charter, supporting local people into work with free nursery care and raising £5 million from the proceeds of crime.

**Nadine Dorries (in the Chair):** Order. Ms Long Bailey, please do not make a speech if you are making an intervention.

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** Thank you for that guidance, Ms Dorries.

Does my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) agree that we need a fairer funding settlement for the whole of Greater Manchester, based on the real needs of localities?

**Angela Rayner:** My hon. Friend is right. I know her constituency well enough to realise that there is much more that unites us than divides us, not least on the issue of needing funds to provide basic services for our constituents.

Of course, not every local authority is facing the same agonising choices. Analysis by the all-party Local Government Association has shown that Labour local authorities have suffered average losses of £108 per person in spending power, while Tory councils have lost just £38 per head. Is that the Government's one-nation Britain? Of the 50 worst-hit councils, 43 are Labour-run; of the 50 least-hit councils, 42 are Tory-run.

Even using the Government's own carefully constructed figures on spending power, the unfairness is stark. Tameside has seen a 3.6% cut in spending power for 2015-16 alone—a cut of £74.77 for households in my constituency. Meanwhile, Oxfordshire's spending power has risen by 1.3%, and Cheshire East's has risen by 1.5%. Let us be clear: households in my constituency have lost almost £75 each, while households in Witney have gained almost £22 and those in the Chancellor's Tatton constituency have become £25 richer. The number of food banks in Tameside has increased sixfold under a Prime Minister and a Chancellor who are busily feathering their own nests.

The Chancellor has announced a so-called stability Budget on 8 July, which will contain another £12 billion of cuts that will no doubt hit out-of-work benefits, disability allowances and personal social services. Inevitably, local government services will be hit once again.

The Independent Commission on Local Government Finances said today that councils are already at a cliff edge, which means that everyday services may not exist for much longer. People who depend on council services are already teetering on the edge of that cliff, and the Chancellor's so-called stability Budget will push them over.

Tameside Council is forecasting that £4.5 million of cuts will be made to social care by the Chancellor's stability Budget. Cuts to benefits would add another £4.5 million of extra pressure on council services. One cannot be taken without the other. Those cuts come on top of the £1 million cuts to public health services already announced in Tameside. The total in-year cut for Tameside will be up to another £10 million, and the situation in Oldham is exactly the same.

We are not alone. Sheffield Hallam University estimates that the Chancellor's £12 billion of welfare cuts will take £5.2 billion a year out of the pockets of families in the north. Coincidentally, almost the same amount is lost in tax evasion every year. I look forward to the Tories pursuing multimillionaire tax avoiders with the same fervour as they are punishing poor working people, but I am not holding my breath.

I have no doubt that Tameside and Oldham Councils will continue the difficult work of managing the cuts and tackling the enormous challenges they face, but I fear that, for all their best intentions, many local people will inevitably suffer. There has to be a better way. I know that many Government Members genuinely believe in local democracy and local government, and will join me in congratulating Tameside, Oldham and many other local authorities for their work in stimulating private-sector

[Angela Rayner]

investment, creating decent jobs, providing strong civic leadership, innovating services and being prepared to do things differently.

All that is at risk if local government services continue to be the whipping boy for austerity. That is why we need a new settlement for local government in our country. Devolution and more local decision making will undoubtedly play their part and I welcome the progress made, particularly in the development of the northern powerhouse. However, devolution is only part of the answer; in itself, it will not solve the funding crisis and cannot be used by central Government as an excuse to transfer responsibilities.

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** My hon. Friend shares my keen interest in the devo Manc proposal. In light of the facts she set out, there is concern—among northern MPs, in particular—that Ministers see it as a chance to palm off the blame rather than hand down the power. Does she agree that, whatever the final shape of local government in Manchester, resources much match responsibilities?

**Angela Rayner:** Once again, my hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. She anticipates my next point. If the northern powerhouse is to succeed, it cannot be used as a Trojan horse for more cuts. There must be a fairer settlement for local government: a settlement where reductions in spending do not fall on the most vulnerable in society and the places where they rely on a strong public sector; that puts public need first; that takes a place-based approach to finance, ending the madness whereby cuts to preventive local government services only fuel increasing demand for more expensive NHS treatment; and that helps to cut the appalling gap in outcomes between the most affluent and most deprived areas, ensuring that everyone has an equal chance to get on in life, regardless of where they started.

4.21 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. This is the first opportunity that I have had to welcome the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) to the House. I congratulate her on securing the debate and commend her on her speech about the situation in Tameside and Oldham. She and her colleagues are not necessarily enthusiastic about what is happening in her area as a result of the northern powerhouse talks, but I certainly take her comments today seriously.

The way local government is funded is extremely important and creates a great deal of debate. Thanks to the Government's long-term economic plan, the deficit is falling, the economy is growing and employment is at a record high. The Government are putting public finances back on track. The past five years have seen huge changes in the way in which councils operate. Local government accounts for almost a quarter of total public expenditure. It was therefore inevitable that local government would have to play its part in reducing the deficit, but it has done so efficiently and effectively, delivering sensible savings while protecting front-line services. In fact, public satisfaction with local government services has increased or been maintained across the country over the past five years. That illustrates how

successful councils have been. However, the job is not yet done, and the next five years will present further challenges. The Government still need to take difficult decisions about local government funding, to ensure that the public finances are on a sustainable path, and councils will need to continue to play their part.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Jones:** I will in a moment, but I will make further progress first.

For Britain to be truly successful, every part of the country must thrive. With the 2015-16 settlement, the Government attempted to be fair to all of our great cities, counties, rural shires and coastal communities. The overall reduction in local authorities' spending power in 2015-16 is 1.7%. When taking account of the funding provided to support local transformation, the overall reduction is lower still—1.5%. To answer one of questions from the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, those authorities with the greatest demand for services continue to receive substantially more in funding. Only London and the north-east have higher spending power per household than the north-west.

**Mr Michael Meacher** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Mr Jones:** I will give way in a moment.

Just to put that in context, in Oldham the spending power per household is £2,400 and in Tameside it is £2,070, against a national average of £2,086. Furthermore, we have ensured that no council will face a loss of more than 6.4% in their spending power in 2015-16, the lowest level since we started out on the road to recovery.

During the past five years there have been unavoidable changes to local authority funding from central Government. We have ensured that these changes have been applied fairly and sustainably.

**Mr Meacher:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I will give way in a moment.

Through our reforms to the local government finance system, we have established a basis for a more self-reliant local government, and a sector that is less dependent on Whitehall and is instead increasingly confident in using the tools and incentives that we have provided to grow local economies.

**Andrew Gwynne:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Marcus Jones:** Yes, I will.

**Andrew Gwynne:** The Minister talks about a fair funding settlement, but does he not appreciate that, because of their make-up, local authorities have different needs from and demands on services? Tameside and Oldham, for example, are grant-dependent because the council tax base is low and their ability to raise additional finance is therefore limited.

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. That is why the north-west—particularly the Oldham area—has greater spending power than many other

parts of the country. However, he undersells his area's potential to raise revenue locally, through additional council tax and business rate retention. Councils have a greater stake in stimulating local growth. Authorities throughout the country are benefiting from greater powers in this sense, including—

**Mr Meacher:** For the third time, will the Minister give way?

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I am going to make progress.

Councils benefiting from those powers include Newcastle, Sunderland and Northampton, which had the greatest growth in business rates retention in 2013-14, as a result of enterprise zones and new development deals. Authorities' own estimates for 2015-16 show that 94% are expecting growth in their business rate income, above the level of assumed growth of £544 million in total. In response to the point made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, I remind him that Oldham and Tameside forecast growth of £1.8 million and £2.4 million respectively, putting both councils in the top 100 authorities in England in terms of additional income.

**Mr Meacher:** On that point, I ask the Minister for a fourth time to give way.

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I will give way in a moment. I am just going to finish this point.

As those authorities are members of the Greater Manchester and Chester business rates pool, which benefits from a zero levy, they will avoid paying any levy on the additional income that they bring in.

**Mr Meacher:** Can we get to the real point of this debate, which is that Oldham in particular, which I and my hon. Friend represent, is having to take a £200 million cut by 2017, as my hon. Friend said? In this current year, it is having its spending power cut by 4.3%, whereas Oxfordshire, which happens to contain the Prime Minister's constituency, has an increase of 1.3%, and Cheshire East Council, which happens to contain the Chancellor's constituency, is having a 1.5% increase. Does that not clearly indicate a flagrantly politically partisan distribution of resources between Tory areas, where the need is less, compared with Labour areas where it is far greater?

**Mr Marcus Jones:** I should say to Opposition Members that I will not take any further interventions after the right hon. Gentleman's lengthy contribution. He needs to put this matter in the context of the authorities that he mentioned having far less spending power than those we are discussing in this debate.

The other way that the areas in question will no doubt benefit is through the new homes bonus. Councils benefit directly from the number of new homes built in their area and from bringing empty property back into use. We have provisionally allocated £1.2 billion of new homes bonus funding to local authorities in England for 2015-16. Of that, Oldham will receive £2.1 million and Tameside £3.5 million. Since the scheme began, local authorities have been rewarded with a total of £3.4 billion.

As well as growing their economies, the best authorities are transforming how they do business and demonstrating innovation, including in how they work with local partners.

We are supporting them as they do so, helping them to achieve savings and, perhaps most important, improving outcomes for the people who use local services.

In November, the Government announced the 73 projects that were successful in bidding for the transformation challenge award. The projects will receive £90 million to improve services and ultimately will save the public sector more than £900 million. I would like to give several examples, particularly one in Manchester, but I do not have time to do so during this debate.

One critical area where the Government must work with councils to transform services is adult social care. I hear what the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne says about her experience and I am sure that the House will welcome that experience. The Government are clear that the NHS and social care services must work together and move away from operating in financial silos. They must secure the best possible value from the local funding available for health and care in order to improve people's lives. The Government are committed to making that happen, but just putting more money into the system is not the answer, despite Opposition Members' comments. We need radical reform of how health and social care are delivered. The better care fund provides a new approach to protect social care services, breaking new ground in driving integration between health and social care.

Despite the challenges that I have mentioned, most local authorities have coped well. Most authorities froze council tax in 2015-16, helping people with the cost of living. The Government once again provided additional funding equivalent to a 1% council tax increase to help them to do so. This was the fifth successive year of freeze funding provided by Government, bringing the total package to £5 billion. That has helped to reduce council tax by 11% in real terms since 2010, with the average band D household saving up to £1,059. That is in stark contrast to the 13 years of Labour government, when council tax bills doubled.

**Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab):** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Jones:** I cannot, due to the length of the interventions that I took previously.

The financial constraints facing councils make it even more important that we deliver on our critical agenda of devolving power to local places and local people. That is one of the most exciting agendas in local government at the moment. Local government should no longer think of itself as a manager of central programmes, but should embrace its new power and responsibility.

The Government's commitment has been demonstrated by the inclusion—the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne will have seen this—of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, which has started its progress in the House of Lords. Alongside the Bill, we will be talking to councils about their ideas for devolution, so that we can agree deals that make devolution a reality. The Government want the process to be bottom up and recognise that the right approach will be different in every area. We want to devolve power to cities, rural areas and neighbourhoods. The Bill will bring about the most far-reaching decentralisation of power in living memory and in particular will create a northern powerhouse with Manchester and other northern cities. It will create

[Mr Marcus Jones]

a directly elected mayor responsible for co-ordinating significant powers and budgets across transport, back-to-work support and health and adult social care.

Last November, Greater Manchester and the Government agreed a devolution plan that saw powers over transport, planning and housing transferred from central Government control to the Greater Manchester combined authority. In February, building on that, 10 local authorities, including a number that Opposition Members represent, came together with 12 clinical commissioning groups and NHS providers in Greater Manchester, along with NHS England, and agreed that from April 2016 they would take joint control of the estimated £6 billion health and care budget in the region. That will enable Greater Manchester to be freer to respond to what local people want, using experience and expertise from across government and the NHS to help improve outcomes and change the way in which public money is spent.

There is little doubt that the next five years will bring further financial challenges but, with the spending review approaching, hon. Members will appreciate that I cannot say much more about our financial plans today. The Government wish to work constructively with local government on these issues, and we are ready to listen to the views of councils.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## BBC Investment (East and West Midlands)

4.36 pm

**Nadine Dorries (in the Chair):** I will not impose a time limit on speeches. I am sure that hon. Members can work out the times for themselves.

**Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered BBC investment in the East and West Midlands.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. The east and west midlands have a proud history of broadcasting. Looking back through time, the first regional TV station was established in Sutton Coldfield in 1949. We were also the first to have a regional radio station, which was established in Birmingham in 1922, and the first ever colour TV studio was established in Birmingham in 1969.

**Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab):** It is not only in broadcasting that Birmingham and the west midlands lead the way. The west midlands is, of course, the centre of Britain's creative talents. William Shakespeare, Jerome K. Jerome and J. R. R. Tolkien were all from the west midlands. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a disgrace that, although the west midlands contributes 25% of the licence fee, the BBC spends just 2% of its budget fostering creative talent in the region?

**Mark Spencer:** Absolutely. That is the crux of the debate.

**Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab):** I will speak briefly on behalf of the east midlands. The hon. Gentleman missed out that the BBC Asian Network was created in Leicester and, under current proposals, will be moved from Leicester down to London, which is totally unacceptable.

**Mark Spencer:** I am grateful for that intervention. From the mood in the room, it is clear that we are proud of both the east midlands and the west midlands, and it is a shame that the BBC management in London do not recognise the importance of the broadcasting ability in the midlands. As the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) indicated, more than a quarter of all licence fee money is collected from the midlands, but investment in the region is as low as 2.05%, which is outrageous. The figure is a sixth of the amount spent in the north, 21% of the amount spent in the south and less than the broadcaster spends in London every 12 days.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con):** I have served as a Member of Parliament for the east midlands as well as for the west midlands, so I hope that I take a balanced approach to my hon. Friend's excellent speech. Does he agree that it is astonishing that the BBC should neglect investment in Britain's second city of Birmingham? The city is a centre for the creative arts, in addition to the point raised by the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin). The BBC is cutting off its nose to spite its face; it is missing out on the huge array of talent in the east midlands and particularly the west midlands.

**Mark Spencer:** I am grateful for that intervention. Many of us will remember the great facility at Pebble Mill, which closed in 2004. Currently, the midlands has no network TV studios at all. The north has dozens. Once again, that demonstrates that the BBC does not invest in the midlands and does not take us seriously.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Birmingham is the city not just of Chamberlain but of Pebble Mill. Does he agree that it is absolutely wrong that £9 out of every £10 raised from the Birmingham licence fee payer is not spent in the midlands? Will he also join me in congratulating the *Birmingham Post* and *Birmingham Mail* on their outstanding advocacy of a fair share for Birmingham and the midlands?

**Mark Spencer:** I absolutely join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating the *Birmingham Post*. Its campaign has been a long-running one. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), who since his election to this House has been very active in pursuing the issue.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): To come back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North, there is a lot of history in the west midlands, particularly in Coventry, where “The Italian Job” was made. Film producers can do it in the midlands, so why cannot the BBC, when it is disposing of its resources? The west midlands could be called the economic powerhouse of this country, but we would not know that from the BBC.

**Mark Spencer:** I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman. When we consider what the east and west midlands have to offer as backdrops for TV programme makers—the beautiful city of Lincoln, Sherwood Forest in my constituency—the great creative talents of Birmingham and Coventry, the spectacular restaurants of Leicestershire and the rolling hills of Derbyshire—[*Interruption.*] I am not familiar with what Stoke has to offer, but I am sure the hon. Gentleman will educate me.

**Robert Flello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Ms Dorries, I will not try your patience by giving a long list of the marvellous things in North Staffordshire and in Stoke-on-Trent in particular, but will make the very serious point that Birmingham and other large conurbations are hard done by, but the far-flung places in the west and east midlands, such as Stoke-on-Trent, are even more neglected.

**Mark Spencer:** I acknowledge that. I hope that this debate will help the BBC management to understand its poor decision-making processes.

It is worth making comparisons on a per-head basis. If spending per licence fee payer was the same in the north as in the south, £473 million would be spent in the midlands.

**Ian Austin:** The hon. Gentleman is making a really important point about expenditure on broadcasting, one that was brought home to me by my constituent Jean Vincent and her children, who all work in the creative industries and are having to travel further and further from Dudley to find work. She told me that it is estimated that, for every pound the BBC spends, £2 is

generated in the wider economy. That makes BBC investment even more important and means that our creative industries in the midlands are losing out on hundreds of millions of pounds. Does he agree?

**Mark Spencer:** I wholly agree. If we pursue the hon. Gentleman’s argument that every pound that the BBC spends creates £2 in the local economy, the economy of the east and west midlands would benefit by £786 million—a substantial amount of investment.

Let us compare the midlands with other areas. In the midlands, the BBC spends £12.40 per head. In Wales, the figure is £122.24 per head; in Northern Ireland, it is £103.14 and in Scotland, £88.73. In the north of England, it is £80.24, and in London, it is a staggering £757.24. By any stretch of the imagination, that makes the midlands the poor relation when it comes to BBC investment.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Does he agree that one fundamental problem is that the BBC’s funding mechanism—the licence fee, which is backed by criminal sanctions for non-payment—means that midlands licence fee payers have little influence over the BBC’s spending strategy? However, if the BBC’s funding were moved to a voluntary subscription mechanism, that would give subscribers in the midlands a lot more power, and the BBC would not be able to ignore them in its spending strategy.

**Mark Spencer:** My hon. Friend has a long-standing record of being supportive of the BBC—of being a critical friend. The licence fee and a subscription service are a separate debate for another occasion.

One could argue that the midlands has always been the poor relation, but that is not true. Since 2009, spending in the midlands has fallen by 35.25%, to well below what is spent in London. In the same period, spending in London fell by 16.5%, but investment in the north rose by 217%, and every other region has seen increased investment, apart from the midlands.

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab): I am sure the hon. Gentleman and other east midlands MPs will join me in bidding farewell to John Hess, the BBC’s political editor in the east midlands; we wish him well. I mention that to raise a serious point. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the BBC should continue to invest in good political journalism that explains to our constituents what is going on in this place? We would not want any of that to be cut in future months.

**Mark Spencer:** I absolutely agree. Not only do we have John Hess, the esteemed broadcaster, on east midlands TV, but we have good journalists right across the midlands, and they hold politicians like us to account very efficiently. The amount spent in the midlands is very low, but the quality of programmes is often very high. To me, that is an argument for the BBC to invest more in that efficient model, which is delivering more bang for every buck.

**Robert Flello:** I draw the attention of Members and of anyone listening to the debate, or reading it afterwards, to “Marvellous”, the story of Nello, which is a perfect example of a fantastic production by the BBC. If only we could have more.

**Mark Spencer:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to that.

Every year, the BBC spends £89 million on its Broadcasting house headquarters in London—more than on the entire midlands region. As has been identified, none of the output for Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3, Radio 5, BBC 2, BBC 3 or BBC 4 was made in the midlands last year, and no peak-time BBC programmes whatever were made there.

The midlands has no network TV studios, after the closure of Pebble Mill in 2004. As I said, there are dozens of studios in the north. BBC regional spending is up by 35%; Every region has seen an increase in spending over the last five years, except the midlands. It is an outrage that the midlands is pouring in more than a quarter of the licence fee money to get only a 2% return.

**Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend for his brilliant speech. Has he found in his constituency, as I have in mine, that people support the BBC as an institution, but oppose the total unfairness we are seeing in the midlands?

**Mark Spencer:** Absolutely. I wholly agree. When the BBC gets programming right, my constituents certainly respect and love what it does. My argument is not with what the BBC is doing; it is that the BBC should be doing more and investing more in a model that is very good and very robust and deserves more investment and support from London.

I am conscious that many other colleagues want to speak, so I will draw my comments to a close. I recognise that the Minister's power to influence what the BBC does with its budget is small, but he meets its representatives regularly, and I hope that he will use the influence he does have to draw their attention to investment in the midlands and to the fact that we are the poor relation compared with other regions. Other colleagues in the House will also continue to draw the attention of BBC managers to the issue. I hope that at some point the BBC will listen, so that we can make some progress and get real investment in the midlands.

4.50 pm

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) for securing the debate. He is a strong advocate for his constituency and for the midlands as a whole. I declare an interest: I worked for the BBC from 2002 until 2007. I was the BBC News personal finance and consumer affairs reporter, based—I hasten to add—in London.

The motion is about BBC investment in the east and west midlands, and the truth is that there is far too little of it. In 2014, for each £145.50 of licence fee raised in the west midlands, only £12.40 came back to the region; as has been pointed out, that compares with a staggering £757 in London. There is also what economists call a multiplier effect, whereby every pound spent multiplies through the economy and people employed. As a result, licence fee money has a massive and disproportionate impact in London and Manchester rather than in Birmingham, which is the heart of our country and the only part of it to have a trade surplus with the EU; it is a strong powerhouse that is under-represented by the BBC, a national broadcaster.

**Robert Ffello:** A mischievous thought has crept into my mind: if every licence fee payer in the midlands, east and west, were to pay only £12.40, the BBC might start to take notice.

**Julian Knight:** Obviously, I would never countenance mass civil disobedience over the matter, but something will certainly be shared on social media later. A lot of people are interested in the debate. I am following on my iPad the live blog by Trinity Mirror Midlands's *Birmingham Post* online, which is looking into this. Perhaps that is something that will spread around.

**Ian Austin:** The hon. Gentleman is the MP for Solihull, so he knows, as I do, that the central problem facing the west midlands is our inability over decades to attract new jobs in new industries to replace the ones that we lost in traditional industries. Clearly, creative industries will generate hundreds of thousands of well paid jobs in the future. Does he agree that all of us—on both sides of the House and in the wider west midlands economy—should make it a priority to establish some sort of broadcasting hub in Birmingham and the west midlands to attract such jobs? We need to get our universities and the BBC working to attract jobs to the west midlands for the future.

**Julian Knight:** That is an interesting idea and I would hope that the BBC would play such a role; it would if it were doing its job properly. It is ridiculous that the Mailbox seems to be full of the HR department, rather than of people making programming for our enjoyment. If the BBC were to do its job properly and to be genuinely representative of the strength of the east and west midlands, we would be seeing greater programming and a real hub—the broadcast hub that we are talking about.

I am wondering how we got into the situation that we are in, with a bipolar organisation between London and Manchester—a carve-up, perhaps. The last time the charter came in, after the sad demise of Dr David Kelly, the Hutton report and all those things were going on, as well as the falling out between the Government and the BBC. The then director-general, Mark Thompson, decided to have what I call a “Jim Hacker” moment—as in the “Yes, Minister” and “Yes, Prime Minister” programmes. Suddenly the idea was to move lots of people from one part of the country to another and to call it regional diversity. The initiative was sold to the Government in good faith as extending regional programming and as the creation of a new hub in Manchester.

Looking at the output of the BBC these days, I question the purpose of moving thousands of staff to Salford from west London to produce the same programming in a different studio. The BBC has no regional character. When I was growing up in Chester and the west midlands—Biddulph, to be precise—we used to enjoy a lot of regionality in our programming; there were many more programmes and outside broadcasts specific to our region than there are today. Many of the studios established throughout the east and west midlands have now gone, and we are left with a skeleton staff in our region.

**Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab):** In that context, would the hon. Gentleman question the BBC's figure that more than 50% of its output is produced outside London? All it has done is increase

regional commuting, with people travelling from London to various hubs across the nation. It has not really changed anything.

**Julian Knight:** The hon. Lady is spot on. The BBC has created a bipolar organisation that transports people from London to Manchester. There is no real regional diversity to its broadcasting. I am horrified to learn of the BBC Asian Network's being moved from Leicester to London, a prime example of that. I commend the campaign by Trinity Mirror and *The Birmingham Post*, and in particular the journalist Graeme Brown, who is highlighting an important matter that has brought many parties together.

We are in a bit of a dead zone for the national broadcaster in the west and east midlands. The BBC has perhaps seen regional diversity as something to be endured rather than embraced. If the BBC is to reconnect with the public at a time of mass digital communication, when we have many different ways of viewing and listening to content, it should consider drilling right down into the regions and offering something more regionally-based.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Whenever the BBC's income stream is considered to be under threat, the first thing it says it will have to cut is regional radio in the east and west midlands, further reducing its already small presence there. Is my hon. Friend as horrified as I am at that? Should the Minister not tell the BBC at charter review that that would be completely unacceptable?

**Julian Knight:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. Regional broadcasting seems to be seen as an expense to be endured, rather than something that would deliver value for viewers and listeners, be valued and reconnect the BBC with the wider public once again.

Many Members here are of a certain age and can remember the time of mass broadcasting, with the shows of Morecambe and Wise getting 20 million viewers. These days, younger people, under the age of 25, will not understand the connection that many of us have with the BBC. If the BBC is going to survive in the long term, it needs to reconnect with the public. One key way of doing that is greater regional broadcasting and developing regional talent.

I appeal to BBC management to consider the case for the midlands, to redress the balance and genuinely to embrace regional diversity at the next charter renewal—not see it as some sort of sop that will buy it another seven years, which is what happened last time. We need not a bipolar organisation but one that takes its broadcasting out to individuals.

I am not that encouraged at what I have heard so far from the BBC. Its agenda for charter renewal seems to involve a crackdown on those not paying the licence fee for content on digital devices, retention of criminal sanctions against non-payers and a potential inflation of the licence fee. The BBC needs to understand that we are in the antechamber to the end of the licence fee and that we need to see a path out of it in the long term. The BBC can reconnect and offer better value for what it delivers by focusing on its core services. I argue strongly that its core service is regional broadcasting and delivering for the people of the east and west midlands.

4.59 pm

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): I must declare a narrow interest: my moment of glory was on 7 May 1997, when Pat Archer was heard to say from Pebble Mill, which was in my constituency, that when Edgbaston was won, we would know we had a Labour Government. I was disappointed when the BBC moved out of Pebble Mill and I was no longer the MP for “The Archers”.

I am going to do something that may seem slightly counter-intuitive: I will partly defend the BBC, because we have to be careful what we wish for. If we want a public service broadcaster—most of the rest of the world would give their eye-teeth for the BBC and the World Service—we should realise that our desire for it has consequences. That does not mean that I agree with everything the BBC has done, but the Government do not get off scot-free. If we wish the BBC to be a public service broadcaster that can survive in the modern age, the funding structure and stream must be protected as well. What that means for the midlands is quite significant.

First, we must acknowledge that when he saw those empty offices in the Mailbox, Tony Hall was horrified. The BBC has tried to fill them, so far only with human resources staff, and it has moved its academy there. At least the BBC is moving that way. It has appointed a regional director.

For me, the bottom line is that if we do not start commissioning programmes from the midlands, nothing will flow from the midlands. We may become a production area, but for the west midlands to reflect its own culture and output, we have to commission programmes in the midlands and have commissioners there. We come across the issue on a daily basis. Turn on “Woman's Hour”, and it will have vox pops from Manchester's Oxford Road. The BBC is not asking people in the Bullring. The whole culture is just the wrong way.

What that means for us as MPs in the region is that we have to stress a number of things. If the BBC wants to survive in the future, we in Birmingham are the future: 40% of Birmingham's population is under the age of 25, and 30% is under the age of 15. The ethnic diversity of the stable population in that region is enormous. It is not just the Asian Network, which started 40 years ago in the midlands, but the whole cultural production that is happening there. Frankly, if the BBC does not reflect the culture of that significant area—the chunk in the middle of England that is so easy to overlook, and it seems to be overlooked—then the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, will not fulfil its function for the whole of the country.

I say to colleagues that we have to keep up the pressure and say to the BBC, “Step by step, you are trying to move in the right direction, but you aren't there yet.” I also say that we must be clear that if we do away with the licence fee, that will also have consequences. Let us just think for a moment. Those of us who think that the Union—the United Kingdom—is important should remember that the British Broadcasting Corporation is one of the very few British institutions that still embraces the entire British Isles and the nation.

**Julian Knight:** The hon. Lady said that the BBC “embraces” the nation. However, we noted during the referendum campaign that the Scottish National party

[*Julian Knight*]

was very angry with the BBC, and claimed bias in that respect. Given that the modern BBC does not embrace regional broadcasting, as we are discussing today, is it fulfilling that true national broadcaster remit?

**Ms Stuart:** That is a really important point at which we should pause. The SNP would like a national broadcaster; I would like a public sector broadcaster—and there is a very important distinction between the two, which we must not lose. The BBC must fulfil its duty to the regions—for example, in the political output in radio broadcasting, which it is neglecting.

What happens in the midlands is extremely important for northern Wales, because it looks to output from the midlands more than to that of the south of Wales. To be a proper public sector broadcaster, the BBC has to represent the regions and be more than just the national broadcaster: it also needs to commission programmes in the region.

The challenge for us is to be clear about the ask to the BBC; the challenge for the BBC is that unless it starts commissioning programmes in the whole of the midlands, they will not reflect us. That takes us back to the challenge for the Government in the charter review. A public sector broadcaster requires certain funding streams that will allow the BBC to fulfil that function.

5.5 pm

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) on securing this important debate. His constituency and mine are at opposite ends of the midlands, but we have in common a sense of injustice about the poor return for our licence fee payers on the investment that they make.

What we need from the BBC is simple: a fairer share of the spend and a much firmer commitment that BBC production will be brought to our region. For far too many of my constituents and, I suspect, people across the midlands, the BBC means London, Cardiff, Salford, Bristol, Belfast and Glasgow—the big six—and indeed anywhere but our region. Various people have cited the figures; the simple fact remains that midlands licence fee payers contribute about £942 million to the BBC and get back about £80 million in investment, less than 9% of the total licence fee. I do not think that anyone would see that as fair.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the BBC spent £1 billion on the new Broadcasting House and wrote off £100 million on a failed digitisation project last year?

**Steve McCabe:** We can all criticise failures in spending, but the central point that I am making is about inequitable spending. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

A brief that the BBC sent me for this debate reminded me that the Mailbox is the home of the academy, the workplace and outreach. That is great, but what the brief did not contain was the number of new jobs and apprenticeships associated with those initiatives. I would like to know how that compares with the £180 million new studio and the 1,000 new jobs for MediaCity in Salford. I would also like to know why, as

my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) pointed out, the bulk of production is technically still located in London.

I am told that the BBC is anxious to use Birmingham as an innovative test bed because we are the youngest city in Europe and we are truly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, but I want to know where the substance is. Where are the new formats, technologies and jobs for the midlands? It is time we saw some of the hard data. I want to know that all those promises will come true and that there is plan to work with the Ormiston academy, the Rep theatre and Birmingham City University. I have heard plenty of talk; it is time we saw some action. We need to know that there is a real programme for mentoring and apprenticeships in the midlands, and we need to know that digital innovation is more than just a form of words.

**Julian Knight:** On apprenticeships, does the hon. Gentleman have any thoughts about pay differentials within the BBC? According to the latest reports, 91 BBC staff members currently earn more than the Prime Minister, while many people who do the programming, such as broadcast assistants, broadcast journalists and senior broadcast journalists, might take home a quarter of that. They are the ones putting in the work, while those who move people from place to place earn bumper salaries. What does he think about that?

**Steve McCabe:** It is a challenge for the director-general, and it is one of the things that he must tackle. It contributes to the sense of unfairness that many of us have about the organisation. Of course, like my hon. Friend, I welcome the news that human resources and training jobs will come to Birmingham, but it was only a couple of years ago that the BBC announced a nationwide search for new talent among disabled presenters and managed to exclude Birmingham from the process entirely. Where are the new jobs in the midlands for performers, directors and creative people?

I conclude by congratulating the hon. Member for Sherwood again on securing this debate. We need to hear that a more equitable share of the money will be included in any future discussions on charter renewal and the licence fee. We cannot contribute nearly £1 billion to the BBC pot and get back a paltry 9%.

**Mark Spencer:** When the east and west midlands are given an opportunity, we are really good—Notts TV, which works alongside Nottingham Trent University, has been a successful model—and it is such a shame that people in London do not recognise that and invest more in that talent.

**Steve McCabe:** I totally agree. There is a wealth of creative talent across the midlands. As someone said earlier, we keep hearing about the desire to help the regions to grow and rebalance their economies. One of the things we need to do is to recognise the creative potential in our region. I do not know how helpful it will be, but I have come to the conclusion that midlands licence fee payers will not tolerate the situation any longer. The game is up—they have had enough.

5.11 pm

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) on securing this debate. The Minister will

understand that feeling on this issue runs deep across both the east and west midlands. The feeling is cross-party, and it will not go away. It is vital that something happens on regional broadcasting in the Government's negotiations on charter renewal; it must not be something that is simply written in the right words in the right documents. The Government have a role to play in pushing the BBC quite hard on that in the coming period.

Members have talked about the figures, which are stark. They have talked about the contribution that licence fee payers in the east and west midlands make to the BBC and what comes back to the region. Many of us feel that we have been around this track so many times before, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and me. I have lost count of the meetings we have attended. I can just about count the directors-general and acting directors-general to whom we have put these points, and each of them has said that they agree. It might have been easier if one of them had said, "No, you are wrong. We think that the east and west midlands are a bit of a backwater and are not where the action is. We need to do what we are doing." But every time they told us that they agreed with us and that things were going to change.

The situation was not entirely the BBC's fault in the early phases. When Mark Thompson was director-general, a memorandum of understanding was agreed between the BBC and Birmingham City Council. At the time, the lack of ambition to put the memorandum of understanding into practice was equal on both sides. The words were all there but, when we asked afterwards what was being done to follow it up, not much was going on at all.

**Ms Gisela Stuart:** If I recall the moment correctly, it was obvious that neither the leader of the city council nor Mark Thompson had actually read the memorandum of understanding or could tell us what it contained.

**Richard Burden:** As somebody is meant to have said in this place, my hon. Friend may say that; I couldn't possibly comment. [*Laughter.*] I will comment: she is right.

Mark Thompson was followed by a couple of other directors-general, and they both said that things were going to change. My hon. Friend is right about Tony Hall. In October 2013, a cross-party group of midlands MPs presented a petition that had been put together by the Campaign for Regional Broadcasting—I pay tribute to that group for keeping this issue in the public eye and putting up in lights the inequity in funding. In November 2013—this was significant—the BBC committed itself to a new vision for Birmingham and the midlands as a whole, with a pledge to invest £23.5 million; Birmingham is to become a new centre for digital excellence for skills, recruitment and talent, creating hundreds of jobs. That was a change—some action was taken and I like to believe that Tony Hall is serious about that.

However, I am worried that, since the announcement, everything has ground to a halt again. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak mentioned the briefing we received from the BBC. It basically says, "It's okay, we're doing it," and runs through the kinds of things we have been told before—the kinds of programmes

that were announced some time ago. At the end, the briefing simply says, "The BBC is committed to providing audiences with programmes and services to reflect the many communities across—"

**Julian Knight:** I have seen similar documentation. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, with the BBC, it always seems to be a case of jam tomorrow for the midlands? We want our jam today, or at least in time for the next charter renewal.

**Richard Burden:** The hon. Gentleman is right. At the risk of mixing jam metaphors with glue, the ambition that Tony Hall says he has for the BBC in Birmingham—the kind of thing we are all talking about—needs some glue to stick it all together. It needs something behind it to make it happen. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston hit the nail on the head, and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak also made this point: that glue is commissioning—it is crucial. We all talk about the BBC network. Everyone I have spoken to—both in the BBC and beyond, in related creative industries—has said that networking is vital. People have to know one another. When people commission a programme, they think of who they will approach, the production companies they will use and where they will get the new talent. If the focus remains on London, we will not get change in Birmingham and the east and west midlands. The kind of change there has been in the north—the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) had this right—is not real change, as there is still that commuting south.

We therefore need a commitment by the BBC to match its ambitions for the network with real networking. It should be looking out for the new and existing talent in our regions and particularly in the east and west midlands. If that can be done, it can pull behind it the apprenticeships and the training that can make such things fly.

Under the current director-general I, too, have noticed a change from what has gone before. I hope that when he reads the transcript of the debate he will understand that we are trying to be friends. To remain friends, however, action has to follow words. If we are to be the centre for broadcasting and for digital broadcasting in the future—in many ways digital broadcasting is the future—he has to do more than he is currently doing. That means a vision beyond the HR-related and training jobs that are being brought to the midlands at the moment. Crucially, we need a focus on commissioning, production and getting in place the networks that can make the east and west midlands vital parts of the BBC's ambition for the future.

5.19 pm

**Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) on securing this important debate and on drawing attention to the appallingly inequitable funding allocated by the BBC to our region. I will endeavour to be brief, not least because my hon. Friend set out the issue so well with his usual clarity. I must say that, on being elected to the House—I am making my first contribution in this Chamber today—I never expected to find myself as fully in agreement with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) as I am.

[Edward Argar]

The proud tradition of broadcasting in the east midlands highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood and the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) extends to Leicestershire, too. For example, BBC Radio Leicester does a first-class job of serving the people of Leicester and Leicestershire. That organisations such as BBC Radio Leicester continue to be trusted and listened to in such numbers by my constituents is in large part down to the talent and hard work of the journalists and broadcasters, and not down to their receiving fair levels of BBC investment, which, as we have heard, certainly does not reflect the licence fee paid by our region.

**Andrew Bridgen:** I would like to make sure that the Chamber is fully aware of the size of the BBC. If we include BBC Worldwide in the BBC revenue stream, it gets about £5 billion a year. That is comparable with the United Nations and twice the annual budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

**Edward Argar:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point with force and clarity, as always. My constituents have no choice about paying their licence fee. On this occasion, I will not labour my view that non-payment should be decriminalised, but the least they should be able to expect is a fair deal and a fair share from what they pay. I hope that as we look towards charter renewal, issues such as the BBC spending bias against the midlands will feature in that debate. I fully endorse the points that the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) made about local political journalism in the east midlands and its importance to our democracy and to all of us being held to account by local journalists producing local content.

Some 25% contributed and 2% received is disgracefully unfair as an equation, however we look at it. That cannot be allowed to go on. It is time for the BBC to escape its apparent London-centric investment bias and once again fully seize on the talent and energy of the midlands by investing and producing more in our region. I hope that the Minister will ensure that the BBC receives the strength of hon. Members' views clearly, particularly in respect of how much we and our constituents value truly local content. The point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) that the BBC needs to approach charter renewal recognising that it must continue to change and to listen to those who listen to it and who have no choice but to pay the licence fee, and not simply ask us for more money.

5.22 pm

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I thank the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) for securing what has been a passionate and committed debate. I was fascinated as he went through the history and heritage of TV and radio broadcasting in the east and west midlands. I thank all hon. Members who have made speeches and interventions. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden). I thank the hon. Members for Solihull (Julian Knight) and for Charnwood (Edward Argar). I also thank my

hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) for his perceptive and incisive interventions in this important debate.

I pay tribute to the long-time campaigners. The campaign has been truly cross-party and has the support of the new Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. I also pay tribute to the campaigning of the *Birmingham Post* and the *Birmingham Mail*, which has been so important in placing the issue on the national agenda.

We are here to discuss BBC investment in the midlands. The main investment the BBC makes is in BBC Birmingham. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston is right: those of us who live in the borders of north-east Wales have seen a lot of it—sometimes by choice, sometimes through transmitter problems; we do not always get BBC Wales, which is a subject for another day. There is no question but that BBC Birmingham has a proud history, having produced “Pebble Mill at One” and “Boys from the Black Stuff”. Across the midlands, the BBC produces “Midlands Today”, “East Midlands Today”, “Look East” and online content, and there are 14 local radio stations. BBC Birmingham makes great shows, such as “Doctors”, and it is the home of the BBC Asian Network, which was mentioned earlier.

BBC Birmingham also produces the great, popular radio drama, “The Archers”—I confess that I always thought it was based somewhere in the west country, not in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston. “The Archers” is more than 65 years old, but its listeners are of all ages and live around the world. Since FM radio waves travel through space, we can confidently say it reaches as far as Pluto. It has even been suggested that the theme tune of “The Archers” should be the English national anthem. It does not quite compare to “Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau”, but it is pretty good, and the programme is an extraordinary international production.

There are clearly very serious concerns about this issue. For instance, a quarter of licence fee payers live in the west and east midlands, but the area receives 2% of BBC spending. Last year, that meant the BBC received £942 million, and the midlands got £80 million back. The BBC is investing only £12.40 per capita in the midlands. Such figures have real consequences for infrastructure, and therefore for programming.

The BBC has little to no commissioning or production facilities in the midlands, and no primetime BBC 1 programmes are made there. In fact, the BBC does not make anything on BBC 2, BBC 3 or BBC 4 in the midlands, nor on Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3 or Radio 5. A small chunk of investment means a small chunk of infrastructure, which means a small chunk of programming.

At least three main problems have been raised in this debate. The first is the simple matter of fairness, which has been mentioned by many hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston previously referred to it as a mismatch, and she is absolutely right. One estimate is that the midlands pays out 12 times what it gets back.

The second problem relates to the infrastructure of creativity. The BBC is the central part of the United Kingdom's creative and cultural ecosystem, and at a national level it plays a key role in training and fostering talent, encouraging investment and exports, and raising standards across the market. The £3.5 billion we pay for

it is our single biggest investment in the arts. At a regional level, it helps to ground creative clusters, which can be seen most clearly in its move to Salford. The MediaCityUK cluster of creative firms and workers is grounded by the BBC. The investment it makes in the midlands—particularly in training and digital—helps to ground the area’s growing creative scene. More investment would mean a better and more flourishing creative ecosystem.

The third problem relates to what we see on our screens and hear on our radios. The hon. Member for Solihull spoke about diversity and regional content. This issue is about not only wanting more spending, but reflecting our country back to itself. It is important that we have stories from every part of the country. In every nook and cranny of the United Kingdom there is a unique viewpoint and a voice that we need to hear in our national conversation.

The Labour party is clear that we believe in a BBC for everyone, which is why we support the existence of the licence fee. The fundamental principle is that everyone pays in and everyone gets something out. People need to feel they are getting something out and that the BBC is worth it. I accept that not everyone agrees with that, but that is where the Labour party stands.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Will the hon. Lady clarify the Labour party’s position? Is it in favour of or against the continued criminalisation of non-payment of the TV licence?

**Susan Elan Jones:** There are major issues to be looked at, and we believe that that needs to happen in this debate on the BBC charter. It is not a little opt-out alone; the debate is much too important for that.

The BBC has recognised that there is a disparity. When Tony Hall became director-general in 2013, he visited the Mailbox and announced additional investment. In particular, the focus on training and digital was a sign of investment in the future of the BBC, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield said earlier. However, the issue has not gone away; the question is what we do now.

On 19 March, the Prime Minister was asked about BBC investment in Birmingham and the midlands. He said that

“the charter renewal is a good time to have that conversation”

and that

“these are the questions we will be able to ask in the charter renewal process which starts after the election.”

We agree with the Prime Minister on that. We are past the election and should be getting on with charter renewal, which is the right time to have that conversation. Charter renewal is our opportunity, every decade, to ask ourselves, “What do we want the BBC to do?” We re-examine the BBC’s purposes, governance, funding and investment in the round.

The Culture Secretary’s Select Committee report, “Future of the BBC”, laid out a road map for how the process would work. It basically means copying the successful model that Tessa Jowell, Labour’s Culture Secretary, took us through 10 years ago. That was a vibrant, open, consultative, national conversation about the BBC’s future. It is time to do that again. Labour wants an open and transparent national debate to start as soon as possible. We want all the excellent campaigners

to be able to make their case in an open, transparent process, so the Government need to get on with it. The last charter renewal process was three years long. In a week’s time, it will be half that—a year and a half—until the charter runs out. Today, there are only 557 days to go. It is worrying that the Government seem inactive, saying, “We’ll make an announcement in due course.”

**Julian Knight:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Susan Elan Jones:** I do not think that there is time, unfortunately. I would love to, though.

A year and a half is not long for an important debate. In recognition of that, the Culture Secretary’s report even floated the option of extending the existing charter for a year. We think that this time the Government should hand their homework in on time. They should not leave it all to the last minute and then bash something out late at night behind closed doors—exactly what they did in 2010. They certainly should not ask for an extension because the dog ate their draft charter. They need to start the charter renewal process as soon as possible to ensure an open debate. Then we can get on with debating the real issues, such as how to ensure a diversity of viewpoints and voices. Labour will be arguing for a BBC that does something for everyone. Everyone pays into it and everyone should get something out of it. The Conservatives have flirted with a different view, some of which we have heard today—if not wholesale privatisation, then drastically reducing the range and breadth of the BBC’s output. If that is the debate, very well. Let us get on with it.

5.32 pm

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** It is a pleasure to appear under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I often say that when I appear before a new Chairman, but in this case I mean it. I have obviously been an enormous fan of yours since we came into the House together, and I want to celebrate you as one of Britain’s foremost authors. I am referring to the famous Four Streets trilogy: “The Four Streets”, “Hide Her Name” and “The Ballymara Road”, which was published this month. What we see before us is a multi-thousand-selling British author. It perhaps says something about the tone of arts coverage in this country that the Chairman we see before us is not as celebrated as some other authors who sell far fewer books. Thank you, Ms Dorries, for allowing me to indulge myself in this way. When I tried to praise Louise Bagshawe, when she was an MP, Mr Speaker slapped me down, but thankfully we have a more enlightened Chairman for this debate.

I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) for calling this important debate. It has been much more lively than I expected. Before talking about his remarks and those of other hon. Members, I pay special tribute to the brilliant journalist Graeme Brown, of the *Birmingham Post* and the *Birmingham Mail*, who has brought this campaign to great prominence. He has worked with many hon. Members who are in the House this afternoon to get the campaign to critical mass.

I cannot improve on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood in terms of the statistics that he talked about—the hundreds of millions of pounds

[*Mr Edward Vaizey*]

spent on the licence fee by people living in the midlands and the return on investment that they get from the BBC. A more important point, because one can always play around with statistics, is that it is clear, from what he said, that investment has increased in all regions except the midlands. It has fallen in the midlands and in London, but that is not really relevant because London has huge funding already.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight). He was that rare species—a Conservative in the BBC. For that, he is to be treasured. Part of me wishes that he was still in the BBC, flying the flag for the Conservative party. One would have thought that he had been working not for the BBC but in the House for the past 25 years, such was the assured point that he made—that there is a north-south link, as it were, at the BBC, missing out the midlands.

Of course, this was not a one-sided debate. We had valuable contributions from the Opposition and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) in particular. I join with her in defending the BBC; we are its critical friends, but we want to see it thrive because it is both a fantastic asset to viewers and listeners in this country and one of our most important—if not the most important—global calling cards.

The hon. Lady made points about why the BBC should have a greater presence in the midlands as well as represent youth and diversity to a greater extent. Diversity in particular is a passion of mine and we urgently need far more diversity in our media. The BBC could lead the way and, as she pointed out, with such diverse and young communities in the constituencies represented by Members in the Chamber, the BBC should be working at that.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) made forceful points about the need for the BBC to invest in the midlands, as did the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden). It was not his debut, but it was good to see my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar)—he is also my old personal friend—make such an impassioned speech. He has only just arrived in the House, but to say that he has found his feet would be the understatement of the century.

Hon. Members here represent some fantastic cultural institutions in the midlands. I want to tell the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) how much I have enjoyed my visits to Dudley zoo, which has two of the finest tigers that I, or indeed my children, have met. The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) has the Curve. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello) has been instrumental in trying to save the collection at the Wedgwood museum, and hopefully the potteries are now thriving even more. Of course, in Birmingham we have the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the symphony hall, the largest library in Europe and the Birmingham museum and art gallery. All hon. Members made valuable contributions that emphasized the thriving nature of culture in the midlands, but there was also an element of nostalgia for Pebble Mill studios that points us in our future direction.

The right hon. Member for Leicester East, the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, made a specific point about the BBC Asian Network. The minute he brought

that up, I looked into it, and my understanding is that one programme from the BBC Asian Network is moving to London, but the network will remain split between Leicester and London.

**Robert Flello:** I thank the Minister for his kind words about Wedgwood and the other magnificent potteries in Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire. He mentioned Pebble Mill and much has been said about the Mailbox, but Members who have been called down to the Mailbox in recent years to take part in the “Sunday Politics” show will have seen a dramatic reduction in its facilities. Indeed, the programme is now pre-recorded on a Friday to make savings, though there is no saving in terms of battling Birmingham’s traffic on a Friday compared with a Sunday. The dumbing down, if I can use that phrase, that we have seen at the Mailbox is quite shocking.

**Mr Vaizey:** The hon. Gentleman is not mincing his words.

I must mention contributions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), the hon. Members for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) and for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), and my hon. Friends the Members for Redditch (Karen Lumley) and for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen), who has been so helpful to the BBC in the past 12 months. They, and all the other Members I have mentioned, have all made incredibly valuable points and pointed to their constituents’ concerns.

We can play fast and loose in politics, but I would not dream, for example, of taking the comments from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South out of context by saying that the Labour party was advocating a licence fee of £12.50, because that is not what he meant. He was simply trying to compare the contribution of people living in the midlands with what they receive back.

**Robert Flello** *rose*—

**Mr Vaizey:** I will not take the hon. Gentleman’s intervention yet; I will make a bit of progress and then see if I have time for more interventions.

However, I will make a point that I think plays to the concerns that have been set out in Westminster Hall this afternoon. First, the BBC has a strong regional presence in many other parts of the country. If people go to Glasgow, they will see a fantastic BBC presence; in Belfast, of course; in Cardiff, where the BBC now films “Dr Who”; we know about the move to Salford and we can say whether or not that is a good or bad thing, but it has happened, although I hear the point about the BBC making a real move rather than simply a commuting move; in London; and of course in Bristol, which is the centre of the BBC’s wildlife programming.

Has Birmingham missed out? The BBC would say that it is doing what it can. For example, it points to the fact that it is making the Mailbox, which was referred to earlier by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston as the base for the BBC academy, the diversity unit and internal communications. The BBC is also increasing jobs there; I understand that investment will go up from £80 million this year to £89 million next year, and up to £125 million the year after. There is also a training remit, with the establishment of the drama village in

Selly Oak and the digital innovation unit, too. Of course, there is drama itself, such as the highly successful “Peaky Blinders”, and the BBC has just finished filming Lenny Henry’s semi-autobiographical drama, “Danny and the Human Zoo”, which may indeed take place in my much-loved Dudley zoo.

However, the point that I think is being made here today is about much more than those things. Obviously, we should welcome what the BBC is doing to invest in Birmingham and the east and west midlands, but what I think hon. Members are calling for is much greater cultural representation, if I can put it in those terms.

**Ms Stuart:** I have just one example. There is a brilliant radio broadcasting series that follows world war one, day by day, in 15-minute slots. It is great, and recorded in Birmingham, but not a single storyline involves the midlands. That is the point—production on its own is not sufficient. We need commissioning that recognises the input of the midlands.

**Mr Vaizey:** That is exactly the point. To a certain extent, where the BBC makes its programmes matters, because it effectively acts as an anchor for a creative cluster. Nobody would argue that “Dr Who” reflects Welsh culture, but people could certainly argue that it supports the Welsh creative industries, just as the BBC’s investment in S4C does. However, one would perhaps argue that the transmission of some programmes from different cities helps to reflect the wider cultural aspects of the United Kingdom.

**Andrew Bridgen:** When my hon. Friend the Minister speaks to the BBC about its lack of footprint in the midlands, I ask him not to accept the fact that it has had its licence fee frozen for five years, because that has not diminished the income stream—

**Nadine Dorries (in the Chair):** Order. The Minister has one minute left.

**Mr Vaizey:** Good point.

Basically, I am but a junior Minister and I think that hon. Members in Westminster Hall today can reflect on the fact that they have the support of the Prime Minister. He has already been quoted, but I will quote him again; quoting the Prime Minister never does one any harm. He said that

“the charter renewal is a good time to have that conversation and make sure the West Midlands gets a fair bang for its buck.”

**Andrew Bridgen:** And the east midlands.

**Mr Vaizey:** And the east midlands, but the quote is about the west midlands; the Prime Minister meant to say the west and the east midlands. And the Mayor of London, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), has spoken, and of course the Chairman of the Culture, Media and Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), describes himself as a midlands MP representing Hereford. So there is strong support for this idea.

Before the recess, we will set out what we will do in terms of the charter review, so I hear what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston says about getting on with it, and I can guarantee to hon. Members in Westminster Hall today that they have made such a strong case that it will be reflected in what we set out.

5.44 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No.10(14)).*



# Written Statements

Tuesday 23 June 2015

## TREASURY

### ECOFIN

**The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne):** A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council was held in Luxembourg on 19 June 2015. Ministers discussed the following items:

#### *Bank Structural Reform*

Council reached a general approach on this file.

#### *European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI)*

Ministers were updated by the presidency on progress in relation to the EFSI. The Council presidency anticipate reaching a First Reading agreement on the regulation by the end of June.

#### *Administrative Co-operation*

Ministers held an exchange of views on the presidency proposal on mandatory automatic exchange of information on tax rulings.

#### *Interest and Royalties Directive*

Ministers held an exchange of views on the presidency compromise on the proposal for a common system of taxation applicable to interest and royalty payments made between associated companies of different member states.

#### *Current Legislative Proposals*

The presidency gave a state of play update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

#### *Commission Communication on Corporate Taxation*

The Commission presented the main elements of the action plan on corporate taxation, which was released on 17 June.

#### *Implementation of Banking Union*

The Commission updated the Council on the status of implementation of the banking union, focusing on the ratification of the intergovernmental agreement on the single resolution fund and implementation of the bank recovery and resolution directive.

#### *Capital Markets Union*

Council adopted Council conclusions on capital markets union.

#### *Contribution to the European Council Meeting on 25-26 June 2015—European Semester*

Council discussed country specific recommendations and prepared a discussion for the June European Council on the European semester.

#### *Contribution to the European Council Meeting on 25-26 June 2015—Broad Economic Policy Guidelines*

Council adopted a report to the European Council on the recommendations on broad economic policy guidelines.

#### *Contribution to the European Council Meeting on 25-26 June 2015—Report on preparing for next steps on better economic governance in the euro area*

Council received a state of play update on the report on preparing for next steps on better economic governance in the euro area.

#### *Implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact*

Council adopted Council decisions and recommendations in the context of the excessive deficit procedure.

[HCWS47]

### Equitable Life Payments Scheme

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):** As of 31 May 2015, the scheme has now issued payments totalling over £1.06 billion to 902,508 policyholders. The scheme will today be publishing a further progress report, which can be found at [www.gov.uk/equitable-life-payment-scheme](http://www.gov.uk/equitable-life-payment-scheme).

Eighty-seven per cent of eligible policyholders have now been traced and had a payment issued; this represents nearly 92% of the total amount estimated to be due to policyholders.

The scheme encourages any policyholders who believe themselves to be eligible to call the scheme on 0300 0200 150. The scheme can verify the identity of most policyholders on the telephone, which means any payment due can usually be received within two weeks.

[HCWS48]

### EU Payment Accounts Directive

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):** I am today publishing a consultation on the draft payment accounts regulations 2015.

The regulations make provision regarding the transparency and comparability of fees charged in relation to payment accounts; payment account switching and access to payment accounts with basic features for all consumers legally resident within the EU.

The regulations are required in order to implement the requirements of the payment accounts directive (2014/92/EU) (“PAD”) which was adopted on 23 July 2014. In order to meet treaty obligations, EU member states must implement the majority of the measures set out in PAD by 18 September 2016.

The Government have already taken forward a number of initiatives for the purposes of improving the experience of UK current account customers. For example, the seven-day current account switch service (CASS) supports current account switching and basic bank accounts have been available in the UK for over 10 years, most recently augmented by the December 2014 agreement concluded by the nine largest providers of current accounts in the UK. That new agreement clarified and improved the terms upon which basic bank accounts are offered.

To complete the transposition of PAD, the UK must establish these initiatives in legislation and amend existing legislation related to the provision and regulation of payment accounts. However, due to the measures that the UK already has in place, the proposed regulations aim to minimise any negative impact on structures and services that are working well.

PAD allows member states to extend provision in a number of areas. Under the draft regulations, application will not be extended beyond what is necessary.

The exception to this is chapter IV of PAD—payment accounts with basic features—where UK policy on basic bank accounts is more developed than that set out in the directive. As a result, the Government intend to implement PAD in such a way as to preserve the UK's existing basic bank account policy, while creating the necessary legal certainty for consumers required by PAD.

The consultation closes on 3 August. The consultation document is available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/latest?departments%5B%5D=hm-treasury>  
[HCWS51]

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Telecommunications Council

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** The Telecommunications Council took place in Luxembourg on 12 June 2015. I represented the UK and below are the agenda items and the positions, where applicable, I took on each of them. Please be aware that the order of the agenda, as laid out in the pre-Council statement was changed by the Latvian presidency at the last minute. This statement reflects those changes.

The first item was an exchange of views on the Commissions digital single market strategy, which was published on 6 May. The debate was informed by two questions from the presidency. My intervention was as per the pre-Council statement. The Commission Vice President Ansip opened the debate by identifying three priorities for the digital single market—goods and services; infrastructure; and e-commerce and e-society. He also noted the need for progress on geographic price blocking. On copyright, he also suggested that more work was needed to harmonise exceptions currently invoked by member states.

Member state interventions covered a range of issues, including e-skills, infrastructure, e-commerce and the internet of things. Copyright and platform regulation were also two of the more commonly raised issues, with clear emerging divisions between member states. The UK, Finland, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden also linked the Commission's better regulation agenda and the digital single market, noting the benefits of industry-led approaches where possible.

The second item was 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 (ISA2, First reading, EM11580/14). As per my pre-Council statement, I abstained from voting for the general approach. However, the rest of Council agreed to the general approach and this approach will now form the basis of the Council discussions going forward.

I hope that the improvements to the text that could not be agreed in Council will be made during the trilogue negotiations, so that the UK may support the proposal when it comes to final agreement. The UK

continues to encourage the inclusion of more tangible efforts to make ISA2 a more effective programme, including clearer prioritisation and evaluation of programme actions based on user needs and clearer analysis of how actions support efforts in other parts of the Commission.

The presidency then presented a progress report on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the accessibility to public sector bodies' websites (First Reading, EM16006/11). There was no debate on this item.

This was followed by 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. Council agreed to the adoption of these conclusions and there was no debate on this item.

There were three items under AOB on the agenda. The first two items were 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" (EM13562/13 and 13555/13 + ADDs 1-2) and 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). The presidency updated Council on the progress of both, which are each in the middle of trilogue negotiations between the Council, Parliament and Commission. There was no substantive debate on either of these items and I did not intervene.

As noted in my pre-Council statement, the readout from the presidency on the connected continent package was informed by the informal ministerial breakfast whose aim was to reach political agreement on the regulation.

At this breakfast, Council could not reach such an agreement and the negotiation of this package therefore continues. At the breakfast, I intervened as per my pre-Council statement, especially pushing the cessation of EU roaming charges in the near future and the importance of a future-proof approach to net neutrality. I was given strong support on this approach by Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands. However, the majority of Council did not agree with this approach.

Finally, under AOB, the Luxembourg delegation informed the Council of their priorities for their forthcoming presidency before Council adjourns until the next meeting in quarter four 2015.

[HCWS50]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Justice and Home Affairs: Post-Council Statement

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** The Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council took place on 15 and 16 June in Luxembourg. My right hon. Friend, Lord Faulks QC, Minister for Civil Justice and I attended on behalf of the United Kingdom. The following items were discussed.

Justice day started with the Latvian presidency securing a general approach on the data protection regulation, following three and a half years of negotiations. The UK supported the text as a basis for negotiations with the Parliament. However, UK support had a number of caveats. The UK stressed the need for a balanced instrument that strengthens privacy rights in a simple, coherent and informed way and does not threaten innovation or the success of the digital single market. The UK also voiced strong concerns on the effect on SMEs and other business, about the overly bureaucratic “one stop shop” model, and the threats posed to freedom of expression by the so-called “right to be forgotten”, which the UK opposes on principle. The UK sees no justification for an expanded right such as that contained in the data protection regulation.

Luxembourg, as the incoming presidency, stressed that it would keep all of these concerns in mind during trilogue negotiations. Luxembourg is committed to keeping both the regulation and directive (covering personal data processed for investigating and prosecuting crime) together as a package, with the aim of full agreement on both instruments by the end of the year.

This was followed by agreement on a general approach on the simplification of public documents regulation. The Council supported the presidency compromise text, with many states noting that this helped to remove barriers and administrative burdens within the internal market. The UK and Ireland highlighted the importance of equal respect for common law and civil law traditions. The incoming Luxembourg presidency would take forward trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament on the basis of this general approach.

Over lunch, justice-related aspects of the Commission's digital single market strategy were discussed. The Commission wanted clear, simple and legally certain rules, with targeted legislation to harmonise only where there were gaps; they stressed they were not seeking a repeat of the proposed common European sales law. The UK highlighted domestic legislation on online purchases of digital content and the UK's vibrant e-commerce sector, suggesting that this model could be a useful starting point for EU-level work. The UK emphasised that work on these proposals should respect better regulation principles, including appropriate consultations and impact assessments. The UK also raised combating illegal content online, arguing that a voluntary removals approach, working with industry, had greater global reach than legislation and could deliver more effective results on removals.

On the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), Ministers agreed “broadly expressed conceptual support” for the text of articles 1 to 16 of the draft regulation, which cover the balance of power between the central office and delegated prosecutors. The UK reminded member states that we would not participate in this measure.

Under AOB, the presidency noted progress on the data protection directive and work with the European Parliament to reach a compromise on the small claims regulation. The presidency and the Commission updated the Council on the recent EU-US JHA summit in Riga. The Commission highlighted co-operation with the US on combating money laundering and terrorist financing, as well as progressing on the data-related umbrella agreement and safe harbour.

The incoming Luxembourg presidency, starting in July, presented its priorities for the justice field: the two main priorities would be data protection and the European Public Prosecutor's Office. Linked to the European public prosecutor, it planned to drive forward progress on the draft PIF (“Fraud against the EU's financial interests”) directive and Eurojust regulation. In civil law, it would introduce proposals on family law and continue work on the simplification of public documents. A motion underlining the Council's will to move towards EU accession to the European convention on human rights would be put to the October JHA Council. Finally, the Luxembourg presidency said it planned to present a proposal to improve political discussions at Council at its informal JHA Council meeting in July.

The interior session began with a policy debate on migration. While there was broad support for elements of the Commission's European agenda on migration, there was no agreement on the relocation proposal. The Commission pointed to the development of “hotspots” to ensure processing of arriving migrants, beginning in Sicily, and progress on the proposed “multi-purpose centre” in Niger to try to mitigate flows through that country, alongside enhanced efforts to combat the facilitators. The European External Action Service (EEAS) confirmed that the first phase of the common security and defence policy (CSDP) mission in the Mediterranean would be launched shortly. The UK joined other Ministers in emphasising the need to tackle the root causes of migration, to tackle people smugglers and traffickers, and to break the link between rescue at sea and the expectation of remaining in the EU by returning economic migrants while supporting their reintegration in their home countries. The UK also recalled the European Council's clear agreement that EU relocation and resettlement schemes should be voluntary rather than mandatory.

The incoming Luxembourg presidency gave a presentation which confirmed the following priorities in the area of migration: more effective returns including use of readmission agreements; progress on operational proposals such as the centre in Niger and “hotspots”; agreement to the draft regulation currently under negotiation that would clarify the treatment of minors under the Dublin regulation; and political agreement on the visa package and the students and researchers directive. Other priorities included: combating terrorism (in particular dealing with the threat from foreign fighters), implementing the new internal security strategy, concluding trilogues on the Europol regulation, and seeking agreement with the European Parliament on the passenger name records (PNR) directive by the end of the year.

During lunch there was a discussion on returns which saw broad agreement that greater ambition was required in this area as part of the comprehensive approach on migration. More effective EU readmission arrangements were seen as an important element.

The Council conclusions on the internal security strategy were adopted without substantive discussion.

The presidency presented papers which updated Ministers on progress since the 12 February informal European Council statement on the EU response to the Paris terrorist attacks.

The Commission (Avramopoulos) drew attention to its communication “The European agenda on security” and highlighted that in the short term counter terrorism (CT) priorities included: a high-level internet industry

forum event in the autumn; making the Europol internet referrals unit (IRU) operational as quickly as possible; swift adoption of an efficient and legally sound EU PNR directive; and preparing for a revision of the EU framework decision on terrorism.

The EU CT co-ordinator (Giles de Kerchove) called for detailed planning on handling the increasing wave of European returnees from Syria/Iraq. This meant investing now in exit and rehabilitation programmes and supporting Commissioner Jourova's work on prison radicalisation. In his view, the EU also needed to find the resources to enable Europol, Eurojust and CEPOL to enhance co-operation and capacity building in third countries.

The UK welcomed progress on the Europol internal referral unit (IRU) and announced a UK secondee into the unit. The UK also praised the work of the Syria strategic communication advisory team (SSCAT). While welcoming the Commission's action in establishing the industry forum, the UK cautioned that certain aspects of tackling terrorist abuse of the internet (including encryption and interception) were matters of national security and thus for member states rather than the EU. The UK called for robust minimum standards on legislation on firearm deactivation; for enhanced data sharing on illegal firearms and ammunition; and for the Commission to step up its work on proactive sharing of criminal records via the European criminal records information system (ECRIS). Finally, the UK again underlined the urgency of adopting, with the European Parliament, a strong and effective PNR framework, including intra-EU PNR, before the end of the year.

Europol drew attention to the excellent co-operation it has received from member states' intelligence agencies. Europol also reported significant increases in the use of their existing CT tools. Most notably, this included the terrorist finance tracking programme (TFTP) which had led to 3,000 separate intelligence leads since the Paris attacks (some 1,500 of which were related to foreign fighters). Europol was on track to establish the IRU by 1 July and had worked constructively with social media companies in recent months.

The presidency urged renewed vigour to implement the post-Paris conclusions in order to keep pace with the threat. The presidency would report the priorities outlined during the debate (and those identified in the Internal Security Strategy Council conclusions) as the JHA Council's input to the June European Council's review of the post-Paris statement it agreed in February.

Under AOB, the Commission provided a brief overview of the biannual report on the functioning of the Schengen area, noting that Schengen was the solution not the problem providing that all member states fully applied the rules of the Schengen acquis. The Commission also confirmed that a new smart borders proposal would be published following the results of the pilot phase. The presidency provided an update on the EU-US ministerial meeting which took place in Riga on 2/3 June; this agreed a statement defining the common EU-US JHA agenda over the next five years. The presidency also provided an update on ongoing legislative negotiations including on the European Police College (CEPOL) and the European Union's law enforcement agency (EUROPOL) regulations and the students and researchers directive.

## ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

### Scottish Independence Referendum: Campaign Expenditure and Regulation

**Mr Gary Streeter** (*Representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission*): The Electoral Commission has today published a report in the Scottish Parliament on its analysis of the spending and regulation of campaigners at the Scottish independence referendum.

This is the Electoral Commission's second report on the referendum and fulfils its statutory duty to report to the Scottish Parliament, under the provisions of the Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013 (SIRA), on the use of its investigatory powers and civil sanctions. For further background and information on the wider context of the referendum on independence for Scotland, this report should be read in conjunction with the report the Commission published in December 2014 on the conduct of the referendum, which is available on its website and copies of which were placed in the Library of the House on its publication.

This report analyses the funding and spending of those people and organisations that registered to campaign at the independence referendum. It builds on last December's report and makes further recommendations for the future based on the information campaigners were required to submit in their post-referendum returns. These additional recommendations are intended to inform the regulation of future referendums, not only in Scotland, but elsewhere in the UK including an EU referendum.

SIRA contained a number of rules drawn from those that applied at the 2011 referendums on increased powers for the National Assembly for Wales and the UK-wide referendum on the UK parliamentary voting systems. These rules clarified aspects of the regulatory controls, reduced burdens on those that wished to campaign and ensured that voters had access to the information that would enable them to make an informed decision when they voted. Overall, the Commission concludes that the regulatory controls that applied at the independence referendum worked well and improved on the rules from previous referendums.

After the independence referendum, registered campaigners were required to submit a campaign spending return to the Commission. The returns included details of the spending that the campaigners incurred campaigning at the referendum and all donations and loans they accepted over £7,500. Campaigners were also required to provide a total figure of the donations and loans they received over £500 but below £7,500. Anything with a value of £500 or less was not counted as a donation or loan for the purposes of the referendum rules.

The report shows that 42 campaigners registered with the Commission, 21 indicating they supported the yes outcome to the question asked, 21 supporting the no side. Registered campaigners reported spending a total of £6,664,980 campaigning at the independence referendum and reported having received donations and loans totalling £7,318,545.

SIRA also gave the Commission the role of monitoring and taking steps to ensure compliance with the referendum campaign rules. To enable the Commission to undertake that role, it had access to investigatory and sanctioning powers. The report finds that the Commission's powers

under SIRA enabled it to effectively investigate matters. While the Commission found that it was able to obtain the information that it required through voluntary co-operation with campaigners, it also sets out that the powers SIRA provided it were useful to point to as part of its discussions with campaigners.

Copies of the Commission's report have been placed in the Library and it is also available on the Commission's website: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

[HCWS49]



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