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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 24 June 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Stormont House Agreement

1. **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What recent progress has been made on implementation of the Stormont House Agreement; and if she will make a statement. [900425]

4. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What progress has been made on implementation of the Stormont House Agreement. [900428]

11. **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): What progress has been made on implementation of the Stormont House Agreement. [900435]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will first offer my condolences, and those of my colleagues in the Government, in relation to the tragedy that occurred in Berkeley which took the lives of five Irish students. The pain of that loss is felt across the UK and Ireland.

The Government are making progress on their obligations under the Stormont House agreement. We have legislated for corporation tax devolution and we expect to introduce a Bill soon on new structures on the past. I urge the Northern Ireland political parties to deliver on their side of the agreement, including welfare reform and passing a sustainable budget.

Andrew Gwynne: I would like to associate myself with the Secretary of State's comments.

Many young people in Northern Ireland have been given the opportunity to build a shared and integrated future through educational programmes for which there are substantial resources under the Stormont House agreement. Now that a waiting game is being played as the parties in Stormont must agree on other matters, will the Secretary of State update the House on the status of those initiatives?

Mrs Villiers: An important part of the financial package offered by the UK Government under the Stormont House agreement includes £500 million to support shared and integrated education as a crucial means of building reconciliation in Northern Ireland. The financial package is of course contingent on the Stormont House agreement being implemented. The UK Government think this is one of the main reasons

why we need to press ahead with the welfare provisions and the sustainable budget. It would be a huge setback for Northern Ireland to lose the rest of the Stormont House agreement, including the valuable funding for shared and integrated education.

Andrew Stephenson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the implementation of the Stormont House agreement is the only way to get things back on track in Northern Ireland, and that the Government should continue to do all they can to achieve that?

Mrs Villiers: I do agree. We are working hard and the Executive are making a degree of progress with a number of their obligations under the agreement, but it is vital that welfare reform, which was agreed in Stormont Castle and Stormont House, is implemented. It is a good deal for Northern Ireland. The reformed system provides real help for vulnerable people and rewards work. It is a better system than the one it replaces. Under Stormont Castle, the five political parties agreed top-ups from the block grant that would give Northern Ireland the most generous welfare system in the United Kingdom.

Suella Fernandes: As has been mentioned, the Stormont House agreement contained a financial package of up to £2 billion of additional spending power for the Northern Ireland Executive. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that represented a substantial commitment by the Government to Northern Ireland which, should the agreement not be implemented, could be in jeopardy?

Mrs Villiers: It would indeed be in jeopardy, which is one of the main reasons why it is very important for the Northern Ireland Executive to pass a budget that works. That will be impossible without the implementation of the welfare provisions. It is incumbent on every Administration worldwide to live within their means. The consequences of denying the deficit and spending money without regard to the consequences are extremely negative for front-line public services, which is why getting the Stormont House agreement back on track is essential if we are to continue to ensure public service provision is of high quality in Northern Ireland and vulnerable groups are protected.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Everyone in Northern Ireland and further afield agrees that the reason the Stormont House agreement is not being implemented is the failure of Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour party to live up to what they agreed back in December, and to implement what they agreed and signed up to. Will the Secretary of State accept that this is now costing Northern Ireland £2 million a week in terms of loss to the block grant? That is hitting vulnerable people, and imposing austerity and greater cuts, which those parties claim to be against. Does she accept that she must live up to her responsibilities and take action to ensure the agreement is implemented?

Mrs Villiers: I agree that every day welfare reform is delayed and every day Sinn Féin and SDLP refuse to live up to their obligations under the Stormont House agreement costs the Northern Ireland Executive money. If the situation is not resolved soon, we will start to see a significant negative impact on Northern Ireland's

front-line services, because it will not have a sustainable or workable budget without Sinn Féin and SDLP living up to the commitments they undertook as part of the Stormont House agreement. I will continue to work to see that welfare reform is agreed and implemented, and the Government will consider all the options.

Mr Dodds: Given that we are now into the period running up to 12 July and beyond, does the Secretary of State accept that enormous efforts were made last year by community leaders and political parties to ensure peace and calm on the streets of Belfast and elsewhere? Since then, she has abandoned the only initiative that was in the offing to move things forward, and has not come up with an alternative. Will she undertake to look at the parades legislation? She has the responsibility for parading issues—it is not devolved—so will she come forward with proposals to move the situation forward and find a replacement for the current failed regime?

Mrs Villiers: The best way to take forward reform of parades adjudication is, of course, through the Stormont House agreement. I understand that the Office of the Legislative Counsel has been preparing the options for which it was tasked, under the agreement, for reform of parades legislation. I hope that they will be published soon. Alongside others, I will take part in the debate about what a reformed system of parading would look like and how it would work. In the meantime, it is crucial for us all to work together to encourage a peaceful parading season, where determinations are obeyed and any protests and parades are both peaceful and lawful.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): With regard to setting the budget and many other decisions that need to be taken, is not the fundamental problem that the Assembly and the Executive were designed for the very good reason of bringing people together, but that that does not make for an efficient decision-making body? What thought has the Secretary of State given to how we might move forward to a position in which the Assembly and the Executive can take decisions on a day-to-day basis?

Mrs Villiers: These difficult decisions on living within one's means are more challenging in a situation in which there is a broad coalition and multiple vetoes. Where there is the political will, however, it is perfectly possible for the Northern Ireland Executive to pass a sustainable budget and implement the Stormont House agreement. That is why it is very important for the two nationalist parties, Sinn Féin and the SDLP to live up to the undertakings they made. The Stormont House agreement was a good deal for Northern Ireland. It was rightly praised by Sinn Féin when it was agreed, and now it needs to get on and implement it.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): Let me reassure the Secretary of State that the SDLP has lived up to, and will continue to live up to, every detail of its obligations. I would be very glad to discuss with her any of the details that she has not understood. Although the Stormont House agreement achieved much, it did not fully complete the circle of the many issues involved. Will she define the Government's position

with regard to the Stormont House agreement? Are they active participants for peace and progress, or are they neutral observers?

Mrs Villiers: We are active participants for peace and progress. That is why we are fully engaged on our side of the Stormont House agreement and in encouraging the parties to live up to theirs. Obviously, a crucial part of the agreement is progress on dealing with the legacy of the past. That is another reason why I appeal to the hon. Gentleman and his party colleagues to unblock the questions about welfare so that we can press ahead with those institutions that his party championed during the Stormont House talks.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State confirm that in the event of the Stormont House and Stormont Castle agreements being implemented, the Northern Ireland Executive will operate a far more compassionate and generous benefit system than is available in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mrs Villiers: I believe that the welfare reforms introduced by this Government are the best ones for the whole of the United Kingdom. I believe it is crucial to replace a system that has failed and trapped people in poverty with one that rewards work and caps benefits. I believe that the top-ups agreed by the Northern Ireland parties at the Stormont Castle agreement produce a useful and helpful addition to match specific local circumstances.

Mr Lewis: Although we disagree with the Government on the bedroom tax and on their refusal to come clean on future benefit cuts, the Secretary of State is right to insist that these agreements are honoured without extra money from the Treasury. In the past, Northern Ireland's leaders have earned great respect for making tough choices for peace. Does she agree that all parties must now accept that an affordable and sustainable welfare system is vital to securing financial and political stability in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those comments. It is crucial for the Northern Ireland Executive to find a way to live within their means. They are not being asked to do anything that Governments across the developed world have not had to grapple with over the last five years. Their block grant has gone up a little in cash terms and come down only by about 1% per year in real terms. It is deliverable; it is possible to do this. The Stormont House agreement delivers a good deal for Northern Ireland, including on welfare.

Low Pay

2. **Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to tackle low pay in Northern Ireland. [900426]

3. **John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps the Government is taking to tackle low pay in Northern Ireland. [900427]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Ben Wallace): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced that, from October, the national minimum wage will increase by 3% to £6.70 per hour, the largest real-terms increase since 2006. The Government are also committed to increasing the personal

allowance to £12,500, and to ensuring that anyone who works at least 30 hours a week on the minimum wage pays no tax at all.

Jo Stevens: The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action has said that introducing the living wage would benefit 173,000 low-paid workers, giving them an average pay rise of £1,300 a year. What are the Government doing to help workers in Northern Ireland, which has the lowest private sector pay rates in the United Kingdom?

Mr Wallace: One of the best ways to help the low paid is to allow them to keep as much as possible of the money that they earn. The hon. Lady will be delighted to learn that, according to the most recent figures from the Office for National Statistics, average gross weekly earnings in Northern Ireland have increased by 10.2% over the past year. That is a whacking, massively great increase compared with the United Kingdom average of 1.7%. I am sure that the hon. Lady will be delighted to recognise that our long-term economic plan is working for the low paid in Northern Ireland.

John Woodcock: I welcome the Minister—my neighbour—to his post, and hope that he will be successful in it.

One in five children in Northern Ireland lives in poverty. The Government are not really considering going back on their legal commitment to tackle child poverty, are they?

Mr Wallace: Like every previous Government, this Government have tried—and, in many instances, continued successfully—to deal with child poverty. Let me reiterate that one of the best ways of doing that is to make sure that works pays, and that people keep the money that they earn. To ensure that that happens, we have increased the personal tax allowance by 63% since 2010, from £6,475 to £10,600.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the key to rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy is reducing taxes and regulation, so that the private sector can invest and create new jobs and opportunities for the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr Wallace: That absolutely is the key, and our long-term economic plan will deliver a rebalancing of the economy and new jobs. I am delighted to say that 40,000 more people are employed in Northern Ireland than was the case in May 2010. Giving people jobs is the fastest way out of poverty, and ensuring that the Northern Ireland economy converges with and improves alongside that of the rest of the United Kingdom is our number one priority.

15. [900439] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Some 89,000 working families in Northern Ireland receive an average of £4,000 a year from the child element of tax credit. How will the Minister help them to restore the money that they will lose when the Prime Minister implements his welfare cuts?

Mr Wallace: The best way to help those people is to ensure that there is an economy that allows them to work, rather than forcing them to rely on the benefits system. It is interesting to note that ours is the party that wants to give people a hand up, while the hon. Gentleman's party seems to want to give them a handout.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I must not pre-empt job news which will be heard later today in Derry, and which will obviously be welcome in a city and region with high unemployment and a lower wage profile. Given that lower wage profile, however, are Northern Ireland Ministers discussing with their Treasury colleagues the possible implications of the changes that are afoot in relation to tax credits, not least the implications for cross-border workers?

Mr Wallace: We are, of course, always talking to the Treasury to ensure that Northern Ireland's voice is heard and its special needs recognised. We are also working hard with the Northern Ireland parties to ensure that, should the Stormont House agreement be fully implemented, we can achieve the most competitive possible corporation tax in the rest of the United Kingdom in order to allow further inward investment.

Fiscal Flexibility

5. **Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): What discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the implementation of greater fiscal flexibility for Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [900429]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): I have regular discussions with Treasury Ministers, including the Chancellor. The Government are giving £2 billion of extra spending power to the Northern Ireland Executive under the Stormont House agreement.

Ms Ritchie: I am glad to hear that Northern Ireland Ministers are having conversations with the Treasury, but will the Secretary of State and her Minister now act as persuaders on behalf of Northern Ireland, which would benefit from a reduced rate of VAT on tourism for the whole United Kingdom?

Mrs Villiers: I know that is a matter of great importance to the hon. Lady and her party. The reality is that the Government have to act with caution when it comes to reductions in taxes. We have identified further increases to the income tax threshold as our priority, but no doubt the Chancellor will be able to share more information on those matters in his Budget.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I am sure the Secretary of State will agree that the last party that should be seeking additional fiscal flexibility for Northern Ireland is the SDLP, given the way in which it and Sinn Féin have put the budget in Northern Ireland in jeopardy. But will she spell out for us the implications for the budget of the financial mess that the refusal to implement the Stormont House agreement has made? What are the implications for the devolution of corporation tax, which has already been agreed?

Mrs Villiers: The implications are very serious: if the welfare question is not resolved, it means that the pressure on the Northern Ireland Executive budget grows considerably and, ultimately, that the Executive will get to a point where they cannot pay their staff and bills, and front-line services will suffer as a result. Without resolving the welfare question, the prospects of corporation tax being devolved and reduced are remote.

Police Officers (Security)

6. **Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): What discussions she has had with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive on security of police officers. [900430]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Ben Wallace): The safety of police officers, and others who work tirelessly and with great courage to tackle the terrorist threat, is paramount. The Government are in regular contact with Executive Ministers, and the Secretary of State and I regularly meet the Chief Constable, the security services and the Minister of Justice to ensure that every effort is made to tackle the threat from violent dissidents.

Jim Shannon: The safety of police officers is critical. Recently, the Policing Board purchased Vauxhall Vectra cars, which are completely unsuitable for policing in west Belfast, Londonderry or south Armagh. Police officers—who have an average height of 5 feet 10 inches—with body armour and weapons cannot get into those cars in time if attacked, and nor can the Vauxhall Vectra be armoured. What discussions will the Minister have with the Policing Board to ensure that this issue is looked at again?

Mr Wallace: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. As someone who previously had to squeeze into armoured cars on the Falls Road, I know, and have full sympathy with, what it is like trying to get into such cars at speed. Procurement decisions are a matter for the Chief Constable, but I take on board the hon. Gentleman's point and am happy to raise his concerns directly with the Chief Constable when I next see him.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I am very curious to establish what criteria the Secretary of State uses to judge appeals by retired police officers who have had their personal protection weapons withdrawn. They feel increasingly vulnerable to attacks by dissident republicans.

Mr Wallace: Obviously we do not comment too much on intelligence matters, but from intelligence and information that we receive on individuals we take into account the threat to them. We regularly review applications, and when a threat increases, or a threat against an individual is demonstrated, we seek to do what we can to protect them.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): With your permission, Mr Speaker, may I pay tribute to the outgoing Minister, the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who has many friends in this House and made many friends in Northern Ireland? He is remembered with affection and respect. I welcome the new Minister, the fifth I have shadowed, to the Dispatch Box, and note that among them have been one Royal Navy surgeon and three former Army officers, all of whom wore their uniform with great distinction—much more than I did, although admittedly the opportunity for gallantry is limited for London Transport bus conductors.

Last year there were 550 12 July parades and the vast majority went off peacefully. Does the Minister not agree that further reductions in the PSNI budget threaten the stability of the peace process, and will he make a statement?

Mr Wallace: Policing budgets are a matter for Stormont and the Northern Ireland Executive, and we are keen to see the current impasse move on so that they can make those decisions. To anyone in the parading environment, the Government's message is that violence does not pay. It helps neither side resolve the issues, and we urge them as much as possible to work together to resolve the often long-held disputes over parading.

Political Situation

7. **Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the political situation in Northern Ireland. [900431]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The political situation in Northern Ireland continues to be very difficult. It is essential that the current deadlock on welfare reform is resolved so that the Stormont House agreement can be implemented.

Jake Berry: What impact does my right hon. Friend think that the failure to implement the Stormont House agreement is having on the international reputation of the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Mrs Villiers: I think it does have a negative impact on the reputation of Northern Ireland. Of course it is crucial that we are all promoting Northern Ireland around the world as a great place in which to invest, and part of that is about ensuring we can deliver political stability. That is yet another reason why the Stormont House agreement needs to go ahead.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the Secretary of State agree that the current political impasse as a result of two parties failing to implement the Stormont House agreement is costing us about 50,000 private sector jobs, as corporation tax reductions and investment in the likes of the Ballykelly camp in my constituency are being held up?

Mrs Villiers: There are the direct consequences that we have talked about before in terms of public finances and the effectiveness of the Executive, but the huge jobs boost that could come with corporation tax devolution is not going to be delivered unless a sustainable budget is settled and welfare reform is implemented.

Security Situation

8. **Pat Glass** (North West Durham) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had on the security situation in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [900432]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism continues to be severe. It is potentially lethal and it is enduring. It is being suppressed through the hard work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and MI5, but the need for a high state of vigilance remains.

Pat Glass: I have just heard the Minister passing the buck on the cuts to the PSNI, but the situation in Northern Ireland goes on, with 171 bombings, shootings and paramilitary actions in the past year. What is the Minister doing to ensure that the PSNI has the resources it needs to meet this ongoing security situation?

Mrs Villiers: The Government have provided £230 million in extra security funding for the PSNI. The primary responsibility for funding the PSNI rests with the Executive, but the Stormont House agreement contains a provision to seek to protect its budget. That is yet another reason why this welfare question must be settled; the PSNI is among other front-line services that will suffer directly if it is not and if the Executive start to run out of money because their budget is unworkable.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): The residents of Randalstown, Ballyclare and Antrim in my patch are all suffering from the police cuts. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that if the Stormont House agreement—or the welfare agreement—does not happen, sufficient funding will be going through to ensure that we have enough police on the ground?

Mrs Villiers: The security situation is one that we monitor at all times, and of course the security implications of the current political impasse will be an important part of our thinking in how we approach it. It is vital that this question is resolved. There is a question for Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour party: do they want to spend this money on a more expensive welfare system or do they want to fund front-line public services?

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Belfast woman Máiría Cahill was raped by Martin Morris, with his crime being covered over by Padraic Wilson. Both those individuals' trials have collapsed. Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a worrying trend that legacy cases in Northern Ireland involving senior republicans are not resulting in convictions?

Mrs Villiers: It is obviously not appropriate for me to comment on the outcome of a particular court case, but these events were very shocking. This is another reason why it is important to press ahead with the new structures on the past, including the Historical Investigations Unit and the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval, which were agreed as part of the Stormont House agreement, because the current systems are not providing good enough outcomes for victims and survivors. Their interests should be at the heart of the actions of all of us in this House and in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Budget (Northern Ireland Executive)

9. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that a viable budget can be set by the Northern Ireland Executive. [900433]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The devolved institutions are responsible for setting a viable budget for Northern Ireland. Under the Stormont House agreement, the Government provided £2 billion of additional spending power to help deal with problems which are specific to Northern Ireland, such as addressing the legacy of its past.

Mr Hanson: While respecting the devolution process and the Stormont House agreement, there is still a £600 million potential black hole in the budget. What steps will the Secretary of State take to bring the parties together to resolve that issue?

Mrs Villiers: I have an almost continuous round of meetings with the Northern Ireland political parties. I have a review meeting on the Stormont House agreement on Thursday, alongside Minister Flanagan from the Irish Republic. I will be doing everything I can to get the process back on the road, but, fundamentally, it is down to Sinn Féin and the SDLP to live up to the commitments they made under the Stormont House agreement.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland made great play in London at the weekend of how the vulnerable are hurting. Will she remind our Deputy First Minister that the vulnerable have been hurting while we have had an impasse over the Stormont House agreement, and they will continue to hurt should there not be any progress on the issue?

Mrs Villiers: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that taking an irresponsible approach to the public finances means that the people who really suffer are the most vulnerable in our community. That is why difficult decisions are needed in Stormont to ensure that a sustainable Budget is passed and that the Stormont House agreement is back on track.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked— Engagements

Q1. [900510] **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 24 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am sure that the whole House wishes to join me in celebrating Armed Forces Week. Our armed forces are the best in the world, and this week is an important opportunity to pause and reflect on their dedication and sacrifice in keeping the country safe.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others and, in addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Martin Vickers: I, too, welcome the Prime Minister's comments about Armed Forces Week, and there is a major event in my constituency to mark the occasion. I thank him for agreeing to meet me and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) following the announcement yesterday of significant job losses by Young's Seafood, which is the largest employer in the area. It is particularly disappointing after a run of good news. Much investment has been attracted with the help of the regional growth fund. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that additional help and support may be given to the area through the RGF. It is important to retain Young's presence in the area.

The Prime Minister: First, I am happy to meet my hon. Friend. As he says, the recent reports surrounding Young's are concerning, and I know that this will be a difficult time for employees and their families. The

company will be talking to employees, and the Government stand ready to assist in any way they can. He is right that the broader picture is more positive. We have the Able UK Marine Energy Park creating up to 4,000 jobs, and also the Siemens' project nearby, which is a major investment for the region. We will continue to provide support for the regional growth fund; 49 awards have been made in Yorkshire and the Humber area. We will keep up with that and with the long-term economic plan to create the jobs we need.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to our armed services, including the Reserves. We honour those who are serving today, and we remember the sacrifice of those who have served in the past. Let us never forget them when we think of the freedom and democracy that we have today. I also pay tribute to the families' federations—the Army Families Federation, the Naval Families Federation, and the RAF Families Federation. The great work they do supporting service families contributes so much to the strength of our services.

We have all seen the chaotic scenes at Calais where British travellers and lorry drivers are facing harassment and intimidation as 3,000 migrants try to get illegally into the UK. The French should be assessing them as soon as they get to Calais to decide whether they are genuine refugees or migrant workers who should be removed. How confident is the Prime Minister that the French are going to start taking effective action? What is he doing to put pressure on them, and will he raise the matter at the EU Council this weekend?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for what she said about forces' families. She is absolutely right. This Saturday, when many of us will be attending Armed Forces Day celebrations and commemorations, is a moment to talk to those families and thank them for what they do when they are missing their loved ones.

The right hon. and learned Lady quite rightly asked about Calais. We have all been witnessing totally unacceptable scenes there over the past day. Of course, a key role was played by the strike that took place in France. She asked specifically about what should be done. Let me answer very clearly that of course we want to see migrants better documented and fingerprinted, but much of that needs to happen in Italy, where they land, rather than in France. There are three things on which we must act. First, we need to work with the French to achieve better security at Calais. We have already invested £12 million, and I am happy for us to do more if that is necessary. Secondly, we must work with our European partners to stop this problem at source—to break the link between getting in a boat and getting settlement in Europe. Thirdly, we must do more to ensure that Britain is a less easy place for illegal migrants to come to and work in, and that is what our Immigration Bill is all about.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister is right that the problem is the responsibility of the Italian authorities and the French authorities, but as he acknowledges, it is also about the security of our border at Calais. Can he say a bit more about what steps he has taken to strengthen security at the UK border in Calais?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right that the juxtaposed border controls on the French side are a good thing for our country, and we should be prepared to invest in them. That is what the £12 million has been about, but in talks with the Home Secretary this morning, we have been looking at whether we can put more personnel and, indeed, sniffer dog teams on that side of the channel to make a difference. Also, more work is being done on installing fencing, not only around the port at Calais, but around the Eurostar and Eurotunnel entrance. All those things can make a difference, and we should work very closely with the French. There is no point in either side trying to point the finger of blame at the other. This is a strong partnership that we have in place and we should keep it that way.

Ms Harman: I thank the Prime Minister for that answer. Efforts on all sides will need to be stepped up.

On another issue, in his speech on Monday the Prime Minister said:

“There's...nothing progressive about robbing from our children”, but is it not inevitable that cuts in tax credits for working families, unless employers raise their wages immediately, will mean that children are worse off?

The Prime Minister: First, what I said in that speech about robbing from our children was about the importance of getting our deficit down and not asking them to pay debts that we were not prepared to deal with ourselves. What we need to do is make sure we go on with a plan that is seeing 2.2 million more people in work. Crucially for children, compared with when I became Prime Minister, there are 390,000 fewer children in households where no one works. My programme for tackling poverty is to get more people in work, get them better paid, and cut their taxes.

Ms Harman: Well, I am asking about robbing from children in families who are facing tax credit cuts. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that cutting £5 billion from tax credits would mean working families losing, on average, £1,400 a year. Now I know the right hon. Gentleman does not have to budget, but many families do—[*Interruption.*] That is the truth—[*Interruption.*] It is the truth. If hon. Members will just for a moment think about a lone parent working part-time: to compensate her for that loss of £1,400, the minimum wage would have to go up overnight by 25%. That is not going to happen, is it?

The Prime Minister: The problem with what the right hon. and learned Lady says is that the last Government did not budget for the country—[*Interruption.*] She asks—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am very worried about the health of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West). She must calm herself. We are at a very early stage in the proceedings. A period of calm must descend upon the House.

The Prime Minister: Because the last Government did not budget for the country, the whole country was plunged into poverty, which is what we have been dealing with. Let me explain what we are going to do. For those

who are out of work, we want to get them a job—a well paid job. That is the best route out of poverty. For those in work, we want to see higher rates of pay and lower taxes. Our programme is simple: let us have an economy with higher pay, lower taxes and lower welfare. What the right hon. and learned Lady seems to want is the current failure of low pay, high taxes and high welfare. That is what we need to move on from.

Ms Harman: You see, Mr Speaker, you do not get higher pay by cutting tax credits. The Prime Minister seems to be saying that low income families will not lose out because, somehow, on the day that he cuts tax credits, every employer in the country will rush to put up pay immediately. To compensate for the loss of tax credits, employers would have to put up pay overnight by twice what the Office for Budget Responsibility has said they will do over a full year. That is not going to happen, is it?

The Prime Minister: We are seeing rates of pay in our economy go up because we have a strong and successful economy due to the decisions we took. What the right hon. and learned Lady does not seem to understand is that if you do not get people back to work and reduce welfare, you will have to make deep cuts in the NHS, which we do not want to see, or put up taxes, which we do not want to see. If the Labour party wants to spend this five years arguing against any change in the welfare system, I say let it; it will end up with the same result.

Ms Harman: What the right hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand is that these are people who are in work. They are going out to work, providing for themselves and their children. The truth is that the Prime Minister will cut tax credits, and will not make up for that loss by putting up the minimum wage overnight. Employers will not make up for that loss either, so millions of families with children will be worse off. He says that he is tackling low pay; he is not. He is attacking the low-paid. So much for the party of working people.

The Prime Minister: The party of working people is the party that has got 2 million more people into work and almost 400,000 more children in households where people are working. That is why people see a party that believes in work up against a party that, according to one of its leadership contenders, is now the anti-worker party—that is what the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) said. I say to the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) that in the week when Greece teeters on the brink, we should learn the lessons of what happens when debts spiral and a country loses control of its economy. Labour is stuck with the same answer: more borrowing, more welfare, and more debt. It is the same old Labour, and it will lead to the same old failure.

Q2. [900511] **Richard Harrington** (Watford) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that one of the best ways of tackling the cycle of child poverty is ensuring that we deal with persistent educational underachievement, so that children get the best start in life, particularly in schools, universities and—just as importantly—vocational education?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we really want to tackle the deep and entrenched poverty that we have in our country, we need to go after the causes of poverty: sink schools, high unemployment, debt, addiction and family breakdown. Those are the things that can make a difference. I was at a school this week on the outskirts of Runcorn with 65% free school meals, yet that school was able to achieve almost two thirds of pupils getting five A to Cs at GCSE. That is a better record, frankly, than that of many schools in leafy, well-off constituencies, so it can be done. Let us go after the causes of poverty; then we can really lift people out of that entrenched poverty.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): We join in the tributes to the armed forces, and to all those people who have organised and will attend Armed Forces Day events across the UK.

The Prime Minister and other UK party leaders made a vow that more powers would be delivered to the Scottish Parliament. The people were promised home rule; they were promised

“as close to federalism as possible”.

Why does the Prime Minister’s Scotland Bill not even deliver the limited Smith commission proposals?

The Prime Minister: The Bill that we put in front of this House does deliver the Smith commission; it fulfils the vow that all of us have kept. Of course, what it does not fulfil is the full fiscal autonomy that the hon. Gentleman’s party would like, which would land Scottish taxpayers with a bill of thousands and thousands of pounds. If that is his policy, when he gets up to speak, he should say so.

Angus Robertson: The House of Commons Library says that important parts of the Smith commission proposals are not in the Scotland Bill that the Prime Minister has proposed. The Bill’s shortcomings have been identified by an all-party committee in the Scottish Parliament—a committee on which the Scottish Conservative party sits. Are all these people wrong? Will the Prime Minister now commit to delivering the Smith commission proposals in full, and all the powers that were voted for by the people of Scotland in the general election?

The Prime Minister: We addressed precisely the points made by the Scottish Parliament committee to which the hon. Gentleman refers. This goes to a larger truth, which is that the Scottish National party only wants to talk about process. It does not dare talk about which of the powers that it is being given it would like to use. If you do not like the way that things are fixed, why don’t you put up taxes and spend more money? Is it not time that you started talking about the policies that you want to put in place, and the outcomes? The truth is that full fiscal autonomy has become FFS: full fiscal shambles.

Q3. [900512] **Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Will the Prime Minister investigate why some Labour-controlled councils, including Leeds, are ramping up their charges to schools wishing to become academies? A good example of this is Woodkirk Academy in Morley and Outwood.

The Prime Minister: I am delighted that Woodkirk Academy and its feeder primary schools have applied to set up a multi-academy trust. It often really works if secondary schools work with primary schools to improve the results in those primary schools. I am also convinced, from looking at the figures, that converter academies are performing better than the local authority main schools. That is why the change is so necessary. I would say to the Labour party: do not stand in the way of this change; help to bring these academies about.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): *The Sunday Times* reported over the weekend that the Department for Transport is planning to scale back and axe rail electrification projects. Will the Prime Minister inform the House, and the people of Wales, whether it continues to be the policy of his Government to complete the electrification of the great western line to Swansea by 2018 and part-fund the valley lines?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we are absolutely committed to electrifying the great western main line to Cardiff and through to Swansea. We are also contributing £125 million to the costs of the wider valley lines electrification. It is vital that this work goes ahead. We need to make sure that Network Rail gets its costs under control and has strong leadership in place, and we will make sure that those things happen.

Q4. [900513] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Unemployment is down by 61% in Thirsk and Malton since 2010—a strong endorsement of this Government's policy to make work pay and of the hard work and investment of business people in my constituency. What further support will the Prime Minister offer to help with much-needed investment in the A64, superfast broadband, and mobile phone coverage, all of which would further help job creation in my area?

The Prime Minister: Let me welcome my hon. Friend to this place and the work that I know he will do on behalf of his constituency. He is absolutely right. In rural areas like the one he represents, better transport, better broadband and filling in the “not spots” on the mobile phone network are absolutely vital. The mobile infrastructure project is providing more homes and businesses with mobile coverage, but we need to make sure that we build the masts. I am pleased to say that the A64 is part of our £3 billion investment in roads in the north-east and Yorkshire. As for broadband, I think that 130,000 homes and businesses are getting access in North Yorkshire, but there is more to be done.

Q5. [900514] **Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): Historically, 500 babies per year are damaged in the womb by sodium valproate, a drug prescribed for epilepsy. Although GPs are now more aware of the risks, the national archives show that the risks were well known by drug companies and Government as far back as 1973, yet mothers were kept in the dark. Will the Prime Minister urge his Health Secretary to meet me and a delegation of mothers who are affected by this issue to discuss their case?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this case. I am not aware of the specific drug she mentions, but I will look at it very closely. As someone who had a son with very severe epilepsy and knows how little we really know about many of these drugs, I will certainly fix the meeting between her and the Health Secretary so that they can make progress on this issue.

Q6. [900515] **William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a northern powerhouse requires proper transport infrastructure? Can he update me on my campaign to get the A6 Hazel Grove bypass to reduce congestion and increase growth in my constituency?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why we are increasing transport levels in the north-west. We are investing £4.3 billion on the strategic road network. As he knows, the A6 to Manchester airport relief road is going ahead. I am pleased to confirm that we have provided Greater Manchester combined authority with £350,000 to fund a feasibility study for the next stage of the bypass route around Stockport and Hazel Grove that he refers to. I do understand that if this could go ahead it would really make a lot of difference in relieving congestion.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): With the death of yet another cyclist—again, a young woman commuter, beneath the wheels of a tipper truck—will the Prime Minister meet a small delegation from the all-party parliamentary cycling group to discuss what more can be done to protect vulnerable road users, including the call by the acting leader of the Labour party for a ban on these killer lorries in our towns and cities at peak times?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to have that meeting. It seems to me that although a lot has been done in London to try to make cycling safer on our roads with the cycling strategy—money is being invested and cycle lanes are being introduced—the number of fatalities is still very high, and it is extremely depressing that young lives are being snuffed out in this way. I am very happy to have that meeting and perhaps keep in contact with the Mayor about this important issue.

Q7. [900516] **Rishi Sunak** (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): As the Prime Minister mentioned, access to high-quality broadband is essential in today's digital economy. Will my right hon. Friend tell us about his plans to get broadband to my rural constituents and those in rural areas across the country?

The Prime Minister: First, let me welcome my hon. Friend to this place. He has the job of following in the footsteps of William Hague, which a number of us have found very difficult in all sorts of different ways, but I am sure he will do it very well.

The figures on superfast coverage are encouraging. We went from 45% in 2010 to over 80%, but obviously there is a real challenge getting to the remaining bits of the country, including the most rural areas. We have the £8 million investment fund and are piloting a number of solutions, one of which, run by Airwave, is testing new technology in the Upper Dales communities, near my

hon. Friend's constituency, so he is on the cutting edge of this digital technology, and if it works we can obviously boost it faster.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Last week, this Government sent out a message to the world that Scotland was closed for business when it comes to future investment in the renewable energy sector. Today, the Cole report on exports estimates that this Government are set to miss their target for exports by up to £300 billion. Will the Prime Minister confirm when he is going to stand up for the best interests of the Scottish economy?

The Prime Minister: If Scotland was not part of the United Kingdom, there would not be the access to the UK energy market—but I suppose we can leave that on one side. I say to the hon. Lady that we have had a huge increase in renewable energy right across the United Kingdom in recent years. We have removed some of the subsidy from onshore wind—we are going to reach 10% of our electricity generation from onshore wind—so now it is right that it should be for local communities to make that decision. Interestingly, before they got into government, that was a position that the SNP agreed with.

Q8. [900517] **Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Last year, the £75 million mis-selling of cashback warranties by Scottish Power, including to thousands of my constituents, was raised with the Prime Minister. A year later, very little has happened, with Scottish Power dodging its responsibilities to 625,000 people across the United Kingdom. In the light of the most recent evidence, will my right hon. Friend urge Ministers in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to look again at this issue, to get people back the money they are owed?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that issue. I understand that the liquidation of the companies involved in the scheme is still under way. As a result, the creditors of the companies have not yet received the reports from the liquidators to see whether that money can be extracted—[*Interruption.*] Before Labour Members get too excited, most of this happened between 1997 and 2001. I have asked the Business Secretary to meet my hon. Friend to discuss his concerns directly.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The great Englishman John Donne said:

“No man is an Island, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main”.

With reference to vulnerable child refugees, does the Prime Minister agree?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do, and that is why Britain fulfils its obligations in taking asylum seekers from all over the world and having a system that many other countries see is robust and fair. It is also why we are playing our role in the Mediterranean—first with HMS Bulwark, now with HMS Enterprise—rescuing people who are desperately in need. It is also why, uniquely among the large, rich countries, we have kept our promise about funding overseas aid and are investing in the north African countries from which these people are coming. I am quite convinced that we are doing what we should to fulfil our moral obligations as a nation.

Q9. [900518] **Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): In the last comprehensive spending review, the clever wheeze of transferring expenditure on the BBC World Service from the Foreign Office budget to the BBC helped to prevent a calamity in our foreign policy capacity. Five years on, foreign policy making and analysis have got considerably more challenging. Will the Prime Minister ensure that a siloed savings requirement is not applied to our capacity to direct the overseas element of our national security strategy or our ability to represent the country abroad?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election as the Chairman of the vital Foreign Affairs Committee of this House. I know that he will always speak out without fear or favour, and that he is vigorously independent.

My hon. Friend is right that the soft power that we have as a country, whether through the British Council, the BBC, the Foreign Office or our overseas aid budget, which I was just talking about, is vital not just to fulfil our moral obligations but to project power, influence and British values in the world. I want to ensure that those things continue. He talked about the BBC funding being a wheeze. I am not sure that I would call it that. It was part of the BBC making sure that it found efficiencies, as other parts of the public sector were.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Yesterday, we heard that early referral for cancer tests could save 10,000 lives a year. Siobhan Galbraith, a 21-year-old Erdington mother of a three-year-old son, suffered in agony for six months. Three times, she was refused a referral; she was told that she was too young. Now, she is battling cervical cancer and will never have another child. Will the Prime Minister ask the Secretary of State for Health to investigate what happened and to meet me? Will he act to ensure that in future we have early referral so that never again are people denied treatment that could be the difference between life and death?

The Prime Minister: I quite understand why the hon. Gentleman raises that individual case, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will look at it specifically. He is right that early referral is the key to improving cancer outcomes. Although I will not stand at this Dispatch Box and say that the problem has been solved, I would say that we are now making sure that about 650,000 more patients are being referred in respect of cancer. Crucially, we are seeing many more of the diagnostic tests that can find out whether someone has colon cancer or bowel cancer—about 400,000 more of those tests are being carried out. The key is to ensure that GPs get the training and information that is necessary to identify cancer early so that they can onward refer rapidly.

Q10. [900519] **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): The Prime Minister made two promises before the general election that were especially important to the people of mid-Wales. He has fulfilled one of them by scrapping onshore wind farm subsidies. When he fulfils the other by visiting the Royal Welsh show in three weeks' time, perhaps he will call in on Montgomeryshire to see the wonderful landscapes that will now not be desecrated.

The Prime Minister: It was a privilege to keep the first promise to the people of mid-Wales in respect of wind farms, and it will be a pleasure to keep the second promise by going with my hon. Friend to the Royal Welsh show.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): This morning's "Today" programme on Radio 4 was partly recorded at Brompton bicycles in my constituency. The concern of Brompton, an award-winning company, and other employers of good quality staff producing good quality goods for export is that the apprenticeship scheme in this country is not fit for purpose to meet their needs. What plans does the Prime Minister have to meet those employers and to develop an effective, quality apprenticeship scheme, rather than the cheap and cheerful scheme that is currently in place?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the hon. Lady to this House. I, too, have visited Brompton bicycles. It is an absolutely excellent firm. I seem to remember that I recorded a party political broadcast while I was there, so it is obviously an equal political opportunities employer, which is very good. It is important to ensure that we have really good apprenticeship schemes. We must focus on the quality as well as the quantity. We are committed to working with employers, and to making sure that those employers work with local colleges, to ensure that the standard of the qualifications is very good.

Q11. [900520] **James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Last week my constituents were very pleased to hear the news that, as part of the measures the Prime Minister is introducing to boost mobile coverage in rural areas, three of our very worst "not spots" have been selected for consideration for new mobile masts, in Boxford, Bildeston and Assington Green. Does he agree that better mobile coverage has an important role to play in improving rural economic growth, and will he continue to do all he can to ensure that we spread the benefits of this technology as far and wide as possible?

The Prime Minister: I warmly welcome my hon. Friend to this place and congratulate him on winning his constituency. He is absolutely right that if we are to have the productivity revolution that the Chancellor and others have spoken about, we must improve broadband coverage in our country. The mobile infrastructure project can make a difference. Three potential sites—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should calm down a little. Three potential sites have been identified in South Suffolk that will make a difference. It is important that all Members of the House recognise that while there are often very strong campaigns against masts, we need to see them built if we are to crack the problem of "not spots."

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): The Prime Minister has repeatedly been reported as saying that he wants to create "a new era of transparency in government." Given that desire, why is the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions refusing to release the statistics relating to the deaths of people who have been declared fit for work, which he has been instructed to do by the Information Commissioner? Will the Prime Minister intervene and get the Secretary of State to comply with the spirit of his desire and the instruction of the Information Commissioner?

The Prime Minister: First, let me reassure the hon. Lady that the data will be published; they are being prepared for publication as we speak. I think that it is important that we publish data, and this Government have published more data about public spending than any previous Government.

Q12. [900521] **Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Over the past few years we have seen some horrendous examples of children being sexually exploited. As a mother, I ask my right hon. Friend what he is going to do to tackle the exploitation of children.

The Prime Minister: Let me welcome my hon. Friend. She is absolutely right to raise this. What we saw happen in Rotherham, Rochdale and in my own city of Oxford was absolutely horrific. Steps are being taken by the police and social services to deal with it much better in future, and there have recently been some very important prosecutions, for instance in Oxfordshire. But I am not satisfied with the progress, so I have asked the Education Secretary to chair a new child protection taskforce to drive fundamental reforms to improve the protection of vulnerable children. I want us to bring the vigour and emphasis on quality that we have brought to education to the area of social work.

Q13. [900522] **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): This month's International Monetary Fund report shows how unequal the UK has become, with 15% of all income in the UK going to just 1% of top earners while over 5 million people earn less than the living wage. Given the evidence showing that increasing the income of the poorest 20% will lead to an increase in growth, why is the Prime Minister contemplating a cut in tax credits to people on low pay?

The Prime Minister: What I would say to the hon. Lady is that the statistics show that inequality in Britain has gone down, not up. One of the reasons for that is that we have 2.2 million more people in work. As I said to her right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), what we want to see in Britain is an economy in which we create well-paid jobs, cut taxes and keep welfare down. The alternative, which is a low-pay, high-tax and high-welfare economy, is what we had under Labour, and it has not ended extreme poverty.

Q15. [900524] **Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Every week, 15 babies die or are stillborn, which is devastating for the families who suffer that loss. In half the cases no cause of death is established. Will my right hon. Friend facilitate a meeting between the Secretary of State for Health and the charities the Lullaby Trust and Sands so that we can try to reduce those figures?

The Prime Minister: I welcome my hon. Friend to this place. She served in the Welsh Assembly and I know she will serve her constituents and this place with great dedication and ability. She proves that by raising such a difficult and heartbreaking case. The death of every child is a tragedy and no words can do justice to the loss felt by parents in such cases. We have made some steps forward with more midwives and, crucially, more health visitors, which can make a lot of difference in the run up to those vital days before birth, but I can tell her that NHS England is going to fund a project to develop a national child death review information system to try to

drive more information. The Health Secretary will keep everyone informed and I am sure that he will want to discuss the issue with my hon. Friend, given her knowledge in this area.

Q14. [900523] **Mr Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): Why has the Prime Minister promised local people the final say on onshore wind farms but denies local people in Blackpool and Lancashire the final say over local fracking applications? Why are there double standards on renewable energy and fracking?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is making a slightly odd comparison. We have taken away the unnecessary subsidy for onshore wind, given that it is now a mature technology, and we have a sensible planning system so that unconventional gas can go ahead under very strict environmental conditions. I will tell him what I want for Blackpool. I want Blackpool to be the centre of expertise and excellence for this industry. I want the jobs, the apprenticeships and the training rather than to see things stuck, which is what he wants.

Border Management (Calais)

12.36 pm

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to make a statement on management of the border in Calais.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Industrial action by striking French workers yesterday caused significant disruption at the ports of Calais and Coquelles in northern France. This action resulted from a dispute between local trade unions and the owners of the French ferry operator, MyFerryLink. As a result of this disruptive strike, the port of Calais was shut for a period of more than 13 hours and train departures were suspended at the channel tunnel rail port of Coquelles. Sadly, the strikers damaged SNCF railway tracks outside the tunnel, which led to the cancellation of all Eurostar services until 6 o'clock this morning. More generally, the disruption caused backlogs of traffic in the Calais area that presented existing migrants around the town with opportunities to attempt to enter slow-moving lorries.

The French and UK Governments were well prepared for this event and tried and tested contingency plans were quickly put in place. Despite the extra pressure caused by the French strikers, Border Force maintained border security by following plans to put additional staff in place to search freight vehicles passing through the affected ports during the industrial action and thereafter. All freight vehicles passing through the Calais ports undergo searching by both the French authorities and the UK's Border Force before boarding a ferry or train. During the course of yesterday's disruption and since, Border Force and the French authorities have successfully identified and intercepted a significant number of would-be migrants.

Last night, I spoke with the French Interior Minister, Bernard Cazeneuve. He was as grateful as I was for the strong co-operation between UK and French authorities during yesterday's incident, and I thanked him for the French police's efforts to maintain law and order in the Calais area. Our two Governments have been working closely and constructively in recent months to bolster security at the juxtaposed border at Calais and other French ports. Last September, Her Majesty's Government committed £12 million to that work. This has led to the installation of fencing around the port of Calais and the approach road and improvements to the layout of the port to speed up flows of traffic and create secure buffer zones for heavy goods vehicles. This is in addition to £3 million spent on the provision of new scanners and detection technology to assist with the searching of freight vehicles and additional dog searching undertaken by contractors. At the port of Coquelles, we have already provided significant investment in upgrading perimeter security and freight-screening technology. We will continue to work with Eurotunnel and the French authorities on installing additional security measures at the site to prevent migrants from making incursions into the port.

More broadly, the ongoing situation in Calais serves as an important reminder of why EU member states need to work together to tackle the causes of illegal immigration in source and transit countries. We are

already co-operating closely with the French to tackle the organised criminal gangs that facilitate the movement of migrants into and across Europe. UK and French law enforcement organisations have already had considerable success in dismantling criminal networks behind people trafficking and smuggling on both sides of the channel, resulting in the prosecution of 223 individuals, and Monsieur Cazeneuve and I have agreed to build on this important work. As the Prime Minister and I have repeatedly made clear, the most important step to resolving the situation in the Mediterranean is breaking the link between migrants making this dangerous journey and achieving settlement in Europe.

Traffic on both sides of the channel is moving again. There will, however, continue to be a significant border security operation as the backlogs of traffic are cleared at the affected ports. The inconvenience caused by the French strikers to the travelling public and lorry drivers is deeply regrettable. Though yesterday's incident was caused by events that were beyond the control of Her Majesty's Government, our law enforcement organisations reacted to the events extremely well. I am sure the House will want to join me in commending the excellent work done by Border Force, Kent police and others on both sides of the channel who have worked tirelessly to maintain border security and minimise disruption to the travelling public. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Hanson: As the Home Secretary rightly says, the situation in Calais has been caused by a wider humanitarian issue across the whole of the Mediterranean and north Africa, which is in turn caused by hunger, civil war, political instability and the movement of people across the Mediterranean. Alongside the strike and the problems in Calais last night, the situation there has been causing problems for some time, as I saw on a visit in November last year, and it remains a real challenge.

Will the Home Secretary tell us what steps she is taking, following her discussions with the French Interior Minister, to ensure that the French Government assess, process, identify and take action on those at Calais? She has rightly said that they are the victims of people traffickers, but they are also in France and the responsibility of the French Government. Will she resist the calls from some quarters in France to end the UK Border Force presence at Calais, given that it is extremely important in maintaining the integrity of our border?

Will the Home Secretary tell us whether, at the European summit this weekend, the Prime Minister intends to raise the points he made at Prime Minister's questions about the situation in Italy and southern Europe? As he and the Home Secretary have said, that situation plays a key role in determining the intentions of the people who come to Calais. Will the right hon. Lady also tell us what proportion of the £12 million that she and the Prime Minister have mentioned has been spent to date? She will recall that the £12 million relates to a three-year programme, and we are now in year one. I would like her to stop talking about the £12 million and tell us what has been spent to date, and whether further resources are required to meet the challenges.

Will the Home Secretary and the Transport Secretary advise hauliers, train operators and the public on the assessments that they should be making, and on whether

compensation claims could be made in the light of yesterday's incident? Will she also ask the Transport Secretary to make an assessment in due course of whether Operation Stack operated as an effective response yesterday in southern England?

The Home Secretary has announced a new taskforce today. Will she tell the House more about its remit and resources, and explain how she would measure any success that it might achieve? Will she also make a further commitment to tackle the scourge of people trafficking through working with our European partners and their police forces? I would like her to make a commitment to report regularly to the House on the success of the taskforce in achieving its objectives.

This is a humanitarian crisis and the Home Secretary will have the support of Her Majesty's Opposition in dealing with it. It is important that we do so not only on behalf of those victims of the crisis, but for the integrity of our borders. The French need to take further action to ensure that they support us in both of those objectives.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman's questions raise a number of issues. He referred to the fact that he visited Calais last year. Indeed, at the time he said of the problems of migrants building up at Calais:

"This is not new—we saw problems over ten years ago."

That is precisely why the previous Labour Government worked with the then French Government to introduce the juxtaposed controls. The Le Touquet agreement was important and I reassure him that we certainly intend to do everything we can to maintain those juxtaposed controls. They are an important part of our border security and we will continue to work with the French authorities, as previous Governments have done, to ensure that they are maintained and operate well.

On the issue of processing people, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister indicated in Prime Minister's questions when asked about it by the acting Leader of the Opposition, there is a challenge to the Italian authorities. People are due to be processed and fingerprinted when they first arrive on European shores, and for the majority of those people that means Italy. My French opposite number and I have been working with the Italian Government and, indeed, other European member states to encourage Italy to do exactly that. The European Council will be looking at the question of Mediterranean migration, as did the Justice and Home Affairs Council that I attended in Luxembourg last week. One of the key messages the United Kingdom has been giving consistently—and others support it—is that the best means of dealing with the issue is to break the link. This is about ensuring that people see that if they make this dangerous journey, they are not going to achieve settlement in Europe.

We need to work to break the organised criminal gangs and the people traffickers. The new taskforce is bringing together people from the National Crime Agency, Border Force, immigration enforcement and the Crown Prosecution Service. Some of them will be based overseas and some in the UK. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that they will be working not just among those British agencies, but with the French authorities and others, to ensure that there is better intelligence and a better understanding of where the gangs are and what the routes are, so that we can take appropriate action against them. I absolutely agree with that. It was this party, as

part of the coalition Government, that introduced the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which makes it easier for law enforcement to deal with human traffickers. Obviously, that is important legislation.

My right hon. Friend the Immigration Minister has had a number of meetings and conversations with representatives of road hauliers about the security aspects. We believe that, overall, Operation Stack worked well. The process has been in place for some time, but the Department for Transport will continue to look at it and about half of the £12 million has already been spent.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): Obviously, none of the member states of the European Union can just take in the vast numbers of people who are fleeing here from poverty and oppression in Africa and the middle east. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the moral and practical dilemma is that it will not be possible for Italy, France or the United Kingdom simply to ship back to Somalia, Eritrea, Syria and other places where they face death and oppression men, women and children who have risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean? In addition to the very welcome steps she has described of EU member states beginning to work together, as opposed to trying to blame each other—it is farcical to blame the Mayor of Calais and the French for the present situation—is any work being done to try to identify, locate and finance civilized camps where people can be held in decent conditions while they are processed and not left drifting destitute to all kinds of places over Europe? While there, they can be processed and proper plans can be made for how to resettle them somewhere they can properly find new lives.

Mrs May: My right hon. and learned Friend raises important issues, but it is wrong to assume that all the people coming through those routes are refugees or have valid asylum claims. Significant numbers come not from the countries to which he refers, but from Senegal, Nigeria and other west African countries, for whom the issue is somewhat different. Many people who come across from Libya into Italy are economic migrants who are trying to get into Europe illegally and to get settlement. That is why breaking the link is so important. Those individuals should know that they should not make that dangerous journey because they will not get settlement in Europe as a result. It is also why dealing with human traffickers and people smugglers is important.

Within the European arena, we are talking about the possibility of establishing places—we are currently looking at west Africa—where it is possible to return people. The other side of the matter is working in countries such as the ones my right hon. and learned Friend mentioned, using aid money, to ensure that we are developing those countries in a way that means we are reducing poverty in them, and reducing the temptation or incentive for people to try to move.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. That exchange was of singular interest, and should probably be preserved, and will be, in the *Official Report*, for the delectation of future generations. However, if others imitate it in length, we will be here for some hours.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): While delays to cross-channel transport are concerning, as is the associated disruption, surely the bigger issue, which others have touched on, is the humanitarian aspect. Some of the migrants trying to cross from Calais to Dover are desperate. Many have gone through unimaginable suffering and are risking their lives in the hope of a better life in the United Kingdom. Many are fleeing countries that the United Kingdom had a hand in destabilising.

We need to take our fair share of refugees in the UK, as we have a proud tradition of doing in the past, from the Kindertransport in the 1930s to the Ugandan refugees in the 1970s. Even Mrs Thatcher took some of the Vietnamese boat people, although not as many as other countries.

The Scottish National party and the Scottish Government remain committed to assisting in this matter. We believe that there should be cross-country co-operation throughout the European Union. Will the United Kingdom Government accept the help of the Scottish Government, and participate in multilateral and collective action across the European Union, to deal with the problem of refugees?

Mrs May: The Government are addressing the issue of refugees in a number of ways. First of all, in relation to those displaced from Syria—refugees as a result of what is happening there—the UK Government are the second-largest bilateral donor to the region in terms of the money we have made available for refugee camps. Many people are being given medical treatment, water, food, clothing and shelter as a result of the money we have given—it is getting close to £900 million. We should be proud that we have done that. Given the number of refugees, they will not be accommodated by allowing everybody to move to Europe. Many of them want to be able to return to their home country in due course. Giving that provision in that area is important.

In relation to Scotland and asylum seekers, it is open to the hon. and learned Lady to encourage local authorities in Scotland to take larger numbers of the asylum seekers that we disperse around the United Kingdom.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I, too, commend the work of Border Force, which has deterred tens of thousands of illegal migrants from coming to this country. Without its effectiveness, the French would have rather a lot more to complain about. If our border became known as a weak link, many thousands more would pour into Calais.

What is the Home Secretary doing to bust the myth that the Home Affairs Committee has identified? Those people who are trafficked to Calais believe that we are some sort of El Dorado, where they will get jobs, benefits and support services. The truth is that they absolutely will not and that they will be illegal. What are we doing to bust that myth to deter people from going to Calais in the first place in the hope of coming here illegally?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is important that people understand what that journey means, what they will be coming to and the dangers of the journey. We have been working with the French authorities on the messages given to people who reach Calais about the fact that they should claim asylum in

France. By the end of this year, the French authorities will have more than trebled the number of people processed in Calais compared with 2013.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): This crisis has been waiting to happen and no blame should be attached to the Government on it, because enormous amounts of money have been spent trying to deal with security in Calais, as the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) and I saw for ourselves. The problem is the Mediterranean. Once people get to Calais, it is too late. Once people enter France, it is too late. That is why I welcome the establishment of the taskforce. The taskforce has to work with the Governments of the Maghreb. They are the key to preventing people from setting sail in the first place. It is not just the Italian border, but the Greek-Turkish border. The Home Secretary will have our support in trying to ensure that other EU countries bear their responsibility as well.

Mrs May: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question and take the opportunity to congratulate him on his re-election to the chairmanship of the Home Affairs Committee. I dare say that he and I will be looking at each other across a room in the House of Commons on a number of occasions over the coming months.

The right hon. Gentleman is right that we need to identify the need to do something about the journeys from parts of Africa through the Mediterranean. The route from Libya to Italy is crucial, but he is right that people are being transported and moved through the Turkey-Greece border into Europe. We will work with Governments in Africa and elsewhere to ensure that we have an understanding of those movements and that we are able to deal with the criminal gangs. That is why I am pleased that the National Crime Agency has already focused on that and is increasing that focus.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I commend the work of our Border Force officers, whose diligent work to protect the UK border was certainly not helped by the actions of the French strikers yesterday.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right. The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) referred to a crisis. The problem of migrants gathering at Calais has been there for some time. As the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), said, we saw that many years ago. Of course, the problem was exacerbated yesterday by the action of the French strikers, which meant that lorries were queuing, and therefore presented a greater opportunity and incentive for the migrants to try to clamber on to them.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I join the right hon. Lady in paying tribute to UK Border Force, which does a fantastic job around the country. Within the past fortnight, a further 50 illegal immigrants were found in the back of a lorry that arrived in another major UK port. We have a serious problem not only in Dover and Calais, but around the UK. UK Border Force redundancies are taking place in Teesport. Will she put a stop to any immediate front-line redundancies and ensure that what is happening down in Calais does not suck resources from around the country and put other ports at risk?

Mrs May: The aim of Border Force is to have a flexible workforce, so that it is possible to move officers around and reinforce particular ports when we need to, as we have seen happen because of the problems in Calais. We are conscious that clandestines have been found in the backs of lorries entering the UK through other ports. I have raised that matter with the Dutch immigration Minister. There will be talks between UK Ministers and Dutch Ministers about how we can help to reinforce the Hook of Holland. We are making extra capacity available to do that.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The path to Calais may begin in Khartoum or Conakry or other places in Africa, but it passes through a number of Schengen countries on the way. Those countries have no borders internally. What discussions is the Home Secretary having with her European counterparts to ensure that they take responsibility for that concentration, which is what we have in Calais, of that humanitarian disaster?

Mrs May: My hon. and learned Friend is perfectly right to point out that migrants who come to Calais will have come through a number of Schengen countries. Obviously, we are not a member of Schengen, and it is up to countries that are members to look at the rules they operate. He may have seen last week that there was activity by the French authorities at the French-Italian border because of concerns about migrants being able to move through from Italy.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary rightly reminded the House of the importance of aid policy in addressing the causes of increased migration. Can we take the opportunity in the next few days to remind our European Union partners of their obligation to match our 0.7% commitment and to press the French Government, who are cutting development assistance at this time?

Mrs May: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I congratulate him on his recent election as Chair of the Select Committee on International Development.

Yes, we do. In fact, at the Justice and Home Affairs Council last week, I raised the need for Europe to look collectively at how its aid money is disbursed to ensure it is being used properly to alleviate poverty in the areas people are coming from.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that preserving good relations with the French Government so that our border is effectively at Calais and Coquelles, as opposed to Dover and Folkestone, is the biggest single contribution to the integrity of our borders in this part of the country. She also said that Operation Stack worked well. May I gently point out that it may work well in administrative terms, but whenever it comes in, it causes huge disruption and misery to my constituents and thousands of other people in Kent? Will she, with the Secretary of State for Transport, take this opportunity to redouble efforts to make sure that alternatives to Operation Stack are brought in? Every time it comes in, it causes massive disruption to one of our biggest road routes to Europe.

Mrs May: I thank my right hon. Friend for gently pointing that out to me. He makes his representations. Representations are also made to me on a regular basis by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) on the impact these incidents have on the port and the surrounding transport network. I will raise the comments my right hon. Friend makes with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): The Secretary of State makes a fair point about the work of humanitarian organisations in the theatre—we all applaud that—but does she realise we are facing the worst refugee crisis since the war and that the UK response has been described as palling in comparison with that of other EU countries? Does she welcome the Scottish Government's offer to work with them and take more Syrian refugees in the resettlement programme?

Mrs May: First, several thousand Syrians have been able to claim asylum in recent years here in the United Kingdom. We introduced the vulnerable persons relocation scheme, which the Prime Minister announced last weekend will be slightly expanded. The scheme, working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, focuses on the most vulnerable. I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that to describe the donation of £900 million of aid to refugees, supporting many people's lives through medical provisions, water, food and shelter, as pitiful is quite wrong. This country should be proud of the fact that we have taken such a leading role.

Stephen Gethins: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Home Secretary is giving her answer to the hon. Gentleman. It is not appropriate to try to raise a point of order in the middle of an answer. It is unparliamentary. It is also—dare I say it?—more than a tad discourteous.

Mrs May: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was merely saying that I think this country can be proud of the contribution we have made to help to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I welcome the measures the Home Secretary is taking to tackle the problems in Calais. Do we not need to work on the longer-term problem of illegal immigrants trying to find their way into Europe and into this country? What measures is the Home Secretary taking to tackle this long-term issue?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to ensure that we deal not with the symptoms of the problem—people arriving at Calais and trying to get into the UK—but the origin of the issue. We need to work with the countries of origin on the provision of support such that people can have a better life: a better economy and the stability to ensure that they are less likely to wish to move to Europe. We must also ensure that we catch the criminals, the people smugglers, who are helping people on their way. They take people's money and then put them into dangerous conditions on the sea. We must break that link, so people see that paying out that money will not actually get them to Europe.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. Is she aware of the media reports this morning indicating that some eastern European countries will not stop illegal immigrants coming through their countries, thus increasing the impact on France and the United Kingdom? What steps can she take to address that issue?

Mrs May: I am aware that a number of countries in eastern Europe are taking a number of measures. Some of them are putting in place greater physical security on their borders, while others are looking at the operation of what is known as the Dublin regulations, which require the claiming of asylum in the first country that an individual enters. We will be discussing these issues with our European colleagues.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is right that the scenes we are witnessing in Calais are the natural result of the failure of the borderless Schengen area. Is she pleased, as I am, that we are not in it? Will she confirm that we will never join it?

Mrs May: I am very happy to answer, briefly, that I am pleased we are not in the Schengen area. That is absolutely the right decision. We need to be able to maintain control of our borders and we will not be joining Schengen.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Home Secretary think that deeper UK engagement in resolving the problems Italy and Greece are facing in handling large numbers of refugees and economic migrants would maximise the chances of securing a European solution to the European problem at Calais?

Mrs May: We are working with a number of Governments across Europe. Indeed, as part of the Greek action plan agreed across Europe and put into effect by Frontex some time ago, we have been putting resources into that plan to help to support the Greek authorities to deal with the numbers they have coming across their border.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Surely, two of the issues are these. First, we are seen as an El Dorado because we have high employment rates compared with the rest of continental Europe. We do not want to change that. The second issue is Schengen. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the French Government to strengthen border controls, which she has already mentioned, with Italy and other countries? Schengen partners are allowed to do that in such emergencies.

Mrs May: As I said in response to a similar question, we are not part of Schengen and any discussions on how the Schengen rules operate are predominantly for those countries within the Schengen area. As my hon. Friend will have seen, the French have taken recent action. This is not the first time such action has been undertaken. I am aware that the Schengen countries have had discussions on the question of internal border controls, should emergency circumstances require them.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Is the Home Secretary concerned about reports today that people traffickers are now causing a proliferation of people smuggling by recruiting businessmen, students and day

trippers to bring people into the country in their cars, which are subject to less scrutiny than lorry transport? What steps can be taken to deal with this new development without massively disrupting traffic through ports?

Mrs May: Sadly, the situation we face is that the people smugglers and the human traffickers will try every way possible to ply their trade. That is why it is so important that our law enforcement agencies, working with law enforcement organisations in Europe and elsewhere, are identifying trafficking routes, traffickers and people smugglers and can take action against them.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree that the scale of the problem yesterday was exacerbated by the French strikers gaining forcible access to the channel tunnel, leading to the closure of services there as well as at the port, and that the French authorities need to do more to secure the channel tunnel at Coquelles? Has she been given any reassurance by the French Interior Minister on that point?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right to identify the fact that the problem yesterday was the strike and the damage to the tracks. Lorries and other vehicles were queuing or moving very slowly, which gave the migrants a greater opportunity to try to clamber aboard. I have had discussions with the French Interior Minister, both last night and previously. We are looking at what extra security can be put around Coquelles, in addition to the extra security at Calais. I have been reassured by the French authorities that they intend to ensure a police response is available at the ports, so that we can deal with this problem as it arises.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): It is estimated that one in 122 people on the planet is now a refugee, and many of them are children. Will the Secretary of State tell us how much of the £12 million is being spent on child protection for those children collected at the borders who are vulnerable to being seduced into paedophile rings and trafficked again by criminal gangs?

Mrs May: The hon. Lady has misunderstood, as the £12 million is specifically for improving border security at the juxtaposed controls. In respect of the issue she raises—children being exploited and trafficked—we are stepping up the efforts we are able to make as a Government. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 is a seminal piece of legislation, the first of its kind in Europe. It is very important, giving extra powers to law enforcement agencies and ensuring that victims are taken into account. We are taking a number of actions to provide extra support to victims of human trafficking when they are identified.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Many of these criminal gangs will, of course, have links to the funding of terrorism, and the capability of civilian police forces in Europe is somewhat limited by comparison to the military. It is unlikely that a UN resolution will be granted for limited and targeted NATO military action in north Africa, but what progress, if any, is being made on an EU resolution to deploy an EU military force to disrupt and degrade the logistical supply chains?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Taking action on this matter has been discussed at the European level, but action against the boats setting forth from the Libyan coastline has to be done in discussion with the Libyan authorities. Those discussions are taking place. The United Kingdom is also playing a leading role within the UN in looking to see whether a resolution can be brought forward that would enable action to happen.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, particularly in respect of transport logistics. The Home Secretary has rightly explained that this is not a recent issue—indeed, it has been an ongoing problem. She also rightly identified that Coquelles and Calais should be the border. Many commercial drivers, however, are stopping much further away from the port on the French side and are being targeted by highly organised criminal gangs, sometimes in places more than 100 miles from Calais. Can she reassure us that the conversations she is having take that issue into account and are aimed at enforcing the rule of law, so that commercial drivers are protected all the way through their journeys?

Mrs May: Yes, we are absolutely looking at that issue. There are two aspects to it. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration is having discussions with the Road Haulage Association to talk about its point of view, and the National Crime Agency, in tandem with other law enforcement organisations, is working with law enforcement bodies elsewhere in Europe to identify the routes and where the potential attempts at incursion can take place and to take appropriate action.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Further to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), will my right hon. Friend or her Ministers have ongoing discussions with their continental European counterparts to ensure that the security arrangements are resilient enough to withstand the type of industrial action that we have seen recently?

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. When Border Force looks at security issues around the ports, it takes into account the work necessary to deal with the migrants building up at Calais and Coquelles, but it has contingency arrangements in place to deal with potential strike action, which actually took place at Calais yesterday. It will continue to look at those arrangements and make sure that they are robust, so that we can, as far as possible, ensure that the cross-channel routes can be maintained, while we maintain the security of our borders.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Many of these people are coming from Italy. Given that Italy is feeling absolutely overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the numbers coming in, what specific help is the Home Secretary offering to her Italian counterparts to deal with those problems in Italy?

Mrs May: The longer-term answer is, of course, working with Italy and others to break this link, so that we do not see people trying to make this journey. Some members of the organised immigration crime task force

will operate in Italy, working with the Italian authorities and others. Extra resources are also being offered to the Italian authorities for asylum processing in Italy.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Home Secretary can be rightly proud of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the fact that there are now tougher penalties for traffickers, that it is easier for the police to take action and that a commissioner has been created. However, these are evil criminal gangs, equal in evil to the gangs that deal in drugs, yet we put in only a proportion of our resources for fighting traffickers and much more for fighting drugs. Can we look at that balance to see if we have it right?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right. He is well aware of these issues from when he was chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on human trafficking and of the terrible evil that, as he says, lies behind this crime. We do indeed look at the balance, and I have asked the National Crime Agency to provide a focus on human trafficking. We should not think that the gangs deal either in drugs or in people: sadly, these gangs will deal in anything that they think will make them money. Many of them are therefore dealing in people and drugs.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Secretary of State claims over and over again that the way to tackle the crisis in the Mediterranean is by breaking the link between travel and settlement. Is that the reason behind the Government's unbelievable decision to scale down our capacity to undertake search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean? Does she not recognise that that decision will cost lives and should be reversed?

Mrs May: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has been misinformed about exactly what happened. I think that he is trying to refer to Mare Nostrum, which was not a European-wide engagement but one done by the Italian Government. Indeed, in the year Mare Nostrum was in place, more people died in the Mediterranean than in the previous year. There is now a Frontex operation, to which the UK Government give support. The Prime Minister referred earlier to HMS Bulwark, and it will be replaced by HMS Enterprise. There are also two Border Force cutters taking part in the enterprise of saving lives in the Mediterranean. The UK is certainly playing its part.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): I join hon. Members across the House in commending the work of the UK Border Force in securing our border over the last year or so. I welcome the extra investment that the Government have made in bolstering security across the ports in northern France. Will my right hon. Friend tell us in a little more detail what that includes?

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about Border Force and its work. The money made available covers physical security, in the form of extra fencing and looking at the layout of a port to make it more secure by providing larger areas for lorries, for example. We have also put in some extra sniffer dog capacity by increasing the numbers in the teams, as well as extra detection equipment, so that we can identify when clandestines are in lorries.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Before I first came to this place, I represented the Home Office in several people-smuggling cases, and I echo the comments of other hon. Members in commending Border Force officers. Will my right hon. Friend say more about investigatory powers for police officers, the duties of investigation for haulage companies and sanctions for breach?

Mrs May: These are areas where, in respect of human trafficking, we have been able to bring offences together in one Act of Parliament, increase sentencing and make extra powers available to the police to deal with those responsible. In the immigration Bill, which will be forthcoming later this year, we will look at the responsibilities on hauliers and other parties to make sure that our border is as secure as possible.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I am glad that the Home Secretary mentioned the work of Kent police in her statement, because they have been working tirelessly on the whole issue. Whenever industrial action of this nature takes place in France, it has a knock-on impact in Kent and causes problems for both motorists and the police. I understand that the police were given extra resources to help them to tackle the issue, but will the Home Secretary keep their funding under review, so that they can continue their good work?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right. Given that the Kent force polices the Dover area in particular—but, obviously, other Kent ports as well—it often finds itself having to react to various initiatives, and in need of resources to enable it to do so. We do, of course, consider the basis on which police forces are funded, and take account of their requirements.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I understand that we are not part of the Schengen agreement, but actions taken by Schengen countries clearly have an impact on our borders. Will my right hon. Friend encourage the French to conduct more operations

like the Italian border operations, to ensure that the problem is not concentrated on Calais as it has been to date?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The more that can be done to stop the flow of people further upstream, the better it will be for Calais and the less pressure there will be not just on the French authorities there, but on Border Force and our juxtaposed controls. I assure my hon. Friend that healthy discussions are taking place in the European arena about the actions that can be taken by Schengen countries.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): May I ask the Home Secretary to continue the hard work that is being done to deal with the confusion caused by a failure to differentiate between the economic migrants who often come here to work and the vulnerable refugees who come here in search of a place of safety? I think that those who are considering the arguments from the outside feel very confused about the work that the Government are doing, and I therefore welcome the forthcoming immigration Bill, which will help to tackle the problem.

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend for drawing attention to that issue. Reports about what is happening at Calais and about people crossing the Mediterranean often use terms such as “refugee” or “asylum seeker” to describe all those people, although, as we know, a significant proportion of them are economic migrants who are trying to enter Europe illegally. We think it important to break that link, so that people are made aware that they cannot make those journeys, arrive in Europe illegally, and settle here.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I commend the Home Secretary for her efforts to establish a taskforce, but how will its important activities be reported to the House?

Mrs May: If my hon. Friend is interested in the activities of the taskforce, he may wish to attend Home Office questions, so that he can ask Ministers about it.

Point of Order

1.23 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Monday, I asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions why he was refusing to publish information about the number of people who had died within six weeks of claiming incapacity benefit or employment and support allowance, “including those who have been found fit for work”, although he had been ordered to do so by the Information Commissioner on 30 April. The Secretary of State replied:

“She knows very well that the Department does not collate numbers on people in that circumstance.”—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 611.]

His statement was in direct contradiction of his own Department’s submission to the Information Commissioner, which stated that it did collate those data and had last published them in November 2011. I should be grateful for your guidance, Mr Speaker, on how we can correct the record and seek an explanation for the error. This happens too much, and it brings the House into disrepute.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and for giving me notice of her intention to raise it. If there is an inconsistency between what she has been told in the Chamber and what has been said elsewhere by the Government, and if that is a matter of fact, it will be apparent to Ministers, who are responsible for the accuracy of what they say, and, in the event of inaccuracy, for ensuring it is corrected. I cannot say more than that today, but the hon. Lady has made the point with crystal clarity; it is on the record, and it will have been heard by Ministers. I think that she should, at this stage, await events.

BILLS PRESENTED

ASSISTED DYING (NO. 2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Rob Marris, supported by Crispin Blunt, Heidi Alexander, Lucy Allan, Jim Fitzpatrick, Paul Flynn, Norman Lamb, Karin Smyth and Stephen Twigg, presented a Bill to enable competent adults who are terminally ill to choose to be provided with medically supervised assistance to end their own life; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 7).

ACCESS TO MEDICAL TREATMENTS (INNOVATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Heaton-Harris presented a Bill to make provision for access to innovative medical treatments; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 8).

DEFENCE EXPENDITURE (NATO TARGET) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Gerald Howarth presented a Bill to make provision about the meeting by the UK of the NATO target for defence expenditure in each member state to constitute

not less than 2 per cent of gross domestic product; to make provision for verification that NATO’s criteria for defence expenditure are met in calculating the UK’s performance against this target; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 October, and to be printed (Bill 9).

HOSPITAL PARKING CHARGES (EXEMPTION FOR CARERS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Julie Cooper presented a Bill to make provision for exempting carers from hospital car parking charges; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 October, and to be printed (Bill 10).

NHS (CHARITABLE TRUSTS ETC) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Wendy Morton, supported by Mr Adrian Bailey, Neil Carmichael, Maria Caulfield, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr Nigel Evans, Jeremy Lefroy, Stephen Pound, Mary Robinson, Mr Barry Sheerman, Keir Starmer and John Stevenson, presented a Bill to make provision for, and in connection with, the removal of the Secretary of State’s powers under the National Health Service Act 2006 to appoint trustees; to make provision transferring to Great Ormond Street Hospital Children’s Charity the right to a royalty conferred by Schedule 6 to the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 November, and to be printed (Bill 11).

COMPULSORY EMERGENCY FIRST AID EDUCATION (STATE-FUNDED SECONDARY SCHOOLS)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Teresa Pearce, supported by Sir David Amess, Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods, Dawn Butler, Thangam Debbonaire, Mr Nigel Dodds, Bill Esterson, Mr Philip Hollobone, Jason McCartney, John McDonnell, John Pugh and Mr John Spellar, presented a Bill to require the provision of Emergency First Aid (EFA) education by all state-funded secondary schools; to require that EFA education include cardiopulmonary resuscitation and defibrillator awareness; to provide for initial and continuing teacher education and guidance on best practice for delivering and inspecting EFA education; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 November, and to be printed (Bill 12).

RIOT COMPENSATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mike Wood, supported by Mrs Cheryl Gillan, Byron Davies, Chris Heaton-Harris, James Morris, Andrew Griffiths, Craig Tracey, Nigel Mills, Amanda Milling, Simon Hoare, William Wragg and Wendy Morton, presented a Bill to repeal the Riot (Damages) Act 1886 and make provision about types of claims, procedures, decision-making and limits on awards payable in relation to a new compensation scheme for property damaged, destroyed or stolen in the course of riots.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 December, and to be printed (Bill 13).

OFF-PATENT DRUGS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Nick Thomas-Symonds, supported by Dan Jarvis, Dr Liam Fox, Liz Saville Roberts, Dr Phillip Lee, Dame Angela Watkinson, John Healey, Jessica Morden, Mr David Nuttall, Carolyn Harris, Robert Neill and Glyn Davies, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to seek licences for off-patent drugs in new indications; to require the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to conduct technology appraisals for off-patent drugs in new indications; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 November, and to be printed (Bill 14).

HOMES (FITNESS FOR HUMAN HABITATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Ms Karen Buck, supported by Kate Green, Jack Dromey, Matthew Pennycook, Emily Thornberry, Andy Slaughter, Mr Gordon Marsden, John Pugh, Lyn Brown, Rushanara Ali, Clive Efford and Fiona Mactaggart, presented a Bill to amend the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to require that residential rented accommodation is provided and maintained in a state of fitness for human habitation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 15).

PAVEMENT PARKING (PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE PEDESTRIANS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Simon Hoare, supported by Mrs Cheryl Gillan, Scott Mann, Johnny Mercer, Bob Stewart, Wendy Morton, Craig Williams, Richard Burgon, Stephen Twigg, Caroline Lucas, Robert Ffello and Mr Clive Betts, presented a Bill to make powers available to highway authorities to make further provision for the safety, convenience and free movement on pavements of disabled people, older people, people accompanying young children and other vulnerable pedestrians; to clarify, strengthen and simplify the law relating to parking on pavements in England and Wales; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 December, and to be printed (Bill 16).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (TENURE INFORMATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Dame Angela Watkinson, supported by Sir David Amess, Bob Blackman, Lyn Brown, Meg Hillier, Mr Stewart Jackson, Boris Johnson, Charlotte Leslie, Paul Maynard, Mark Menzies, Bob Stewart and Mr Mark Prisk, presented a Bill to amend the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to make provision for collecting information about tenure and the details of private landlords; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 October, and to be printed (Bill 17).

ON-DEMAND AUDIOVISUAL SERVICES (ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AFFECTING HEARING OR SIGHT OR BOTH)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Lilian Greenwood, supported by Peter Aldous, Sir Peter Bottomley, Neil Carmichael, Rosie Cooper, Kate Green, Norman Lamb, Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Ian Mearns, Jim Shannon, Ruth Smeeth and Dr Eilidh Whiteford, presented a Bill to require the appropriate regulatory authority of on-demand audiovisual programme services to draw up a Code relating to the provision of subtitles, signing and audio-description for persons with disabilities affecting their hearing or their sight or both; to require the appropriate regulatory authority to consult before issuing any such Code; to make provision for minimum requirements to be included in the Code; to require that on-demand programme services providers observe the requirements of the Code; to provide for regular consultation about and review of the minimum requirements; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 November, and to be printed (Bill 18).

HIGHWAYS (IMPROVEMENT, TRAFFIC REGULATION AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir William Cash presented a Bill to make provision for the prioritisation of maintenance of unclassified roads; the management of heavy commercial vehicle traffic; the regulation of the use of certain roads by such vehicles; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 November, and to be printed (Bill 19).

CRIMINAL CASES REVIEW COMMISSION (INFORMATION)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

William Wragg, supported by John Howell, Mr Peter Bone, James Davies, Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, Keith Vaz, Mr Graham Brady, James Berry, Dr Liam Fox, Dr Tania Mathias and Seema Kennedy, presented a Bill to extend the Criminal Cases Review Commission's powers to obtain information.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 December, and to be printed (Bill 20).

HIGHER EDUCATION (INFORMATION)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Heidi Allen, supported by Sir Oliver Heald, Mr Jonathan Djanogly, Kevin Hollinrake, Oliver Colville, Mr David Burrowes, Daniel Zeichner, Caroline Ansell and Victoria Prentis, presented a Bill to require information to be made available to prospective undergraduate students about what is provided to students for the tuition fees charged, how tuition fee resources are expended and what is expected of students; to establish transparency in how tuition fees are spent; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 October, and to be printed (Bill 21).

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (YOUNG PERSONS'
ENFRANCHISEMENT AND EDUCATION)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Vicky Foxcroft, supported by Ms Mhairi Black, John Pugh, Justin Madders, Ruth Smeeth, Keith Vaz, Clive Lewis, Ian Mearns, Conor McGinn, Tulip Siddiq, Stephen Kinnock and Caroline Lucas, presented a Bill to reduce the voting age to 16 in general elections, elections to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Parliament, local government elections and referendums; to make provision about young people's education in citizenship and the constitution; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 22).

CROWN TENANCIES

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mark Pawsey, supported by Andrew Bingham, Graham Evans, Oliver Colvile, Jeremy Lefroy, Jack Lopresti, Karen Lumley, Jason McCartney, James Morris, Wendy Morton, David Mowat and Craig Tracey, presented a Bill to provide that Crown tenancies may be assured tenancies for the purposes of the Housing Act 1988, subject to certain exceptions; to modify the assured tenancies regime in relation to certain Crown tenancies; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 23).

MENTAL HEALTH (INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY)
(ENGLAND)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Geoffrey Cox, supported by Stephen Hammond, Mr Charles Walker, Mrs Sheryll Murray, Stephen Phillips,

Oliver Colvile, Mr Nigel Evans, Daniel Kawczynski and Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, presented a Bill to amend the Mental Health Act 1983 to make further provision for powers and responsibilities of independent mental health advocates for qualifying patients in England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 November, and to be printed (Bill 24).

HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE (POWERS)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

James Cleverly presented a Bill to confer further powers on the Health and Safety Executive.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 25).

ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES
(IMPACT ON FAMILIES)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Caroline Ansell, supported by Mr David Burrowes, Mrs Anne Main, Mary Glendon, Richard Graham, Fiona Bruce, Martin Vickers, Jeremy Lefroy, Mr Peter Bone, John Howell, James Cleverly and Jim Shannon, presented a Bill to require ministers to carry out an assessment of the impact of government policies on families by giving statutory effect to the family test; to place a duty on the Secretary of State to make a report on the costs and benefits of requiring local authorities to carry out equivalent tests on their policies; to require the Secretary of State to establish, and make an annual report on, indicators of and targets for the government's performance in promoting family stability; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 December, and to be printed (Bill 26).

Opposition Day

3RD ALLOTTED DAY

A&E Services

1.29 pm

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes that hospital A&E departments have now missed the four-hour A&E target for 100 weeks in a row; further notes that trusts are predicting record deficits this year; believes the pressures on hospitals are a consequence of declining access to out-of-hospital services under this Government, including fewer older people receiving social care and more people waiting a week or more for a GP appointment; further believes the increasing bill for agency staff is also adding to the pressure on hospitals; notes that the Government plans to stop the weekly reporting of A&E data; believes this decision will make the NHS less transparent and make it harder for patients to judge the performance of their local hospital; and calls on the Government to reinstate the publication of weekly A&E data and to set out how it will tackle hospital deficits in 2015 in order to protect services.

I want hon. Members from all parts of the House to cast their minds back to the week commencing 14 July 2013: the country was still basking in Andy Murray's historic win at Wimbledon; England had just embarked on a successful Ashes series against Australia; and hospital A&E departments achieved their target to see 95% of patients within four hours. Since then a number of unlikely things have happened: the then reigning world champions, Spain, have crashed out of the World cup in the first round; a group of scientists remotely have landed a probe on a comet hundreds of millions of kilometres from earth; and Cuba and the United States have begun to repair diplomatic relations. But in the same period some sadly predictable things have occurred: England have crashed out of the World cup in Brazil; they have been whitewashed by Australia in the cricket; and under a Conservative Government hospitals in England have now missed their A&E target for 100 weeks in a row.

I start this debate by paying tribute to the hard-working staff at every level of our national health service. They work tirelessly in trying circumstances, and without them there would be no NHS. Ministers have in this place adopted the practice of attempting to pretend that any criticism of Government policy is a criticism of the health service or its staff, so let us make clear one thing right at the start of this debate: NHS staff are remarkable and we are all in their debt. The achievements of NHS staff are despite Government policy, not because of it.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): What have the Opposition learned from the Mid Staffs disaster and tragedy, where they were hitting the targets but missing the point? What should they learn about how one drives quality forward in the health service?

Mr Reed: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that question. If he paid attention to the Francis report, he would learn that it was not the targets themselves that were to blame for the Mid Staffs tragedy, but the way they were applied in that hospital. That is clearly stated in both the first and second Francis inquiries; indeed, it was a point that the Prime Minister made on the Floor of this House when he reported to Members.

In the past 100 weeks, nearly 2.4 million patients have waited more than four hours in hospital accident and emergency units in England.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Why does the hon. Gentleman think that in my constituency A&E targets have been met for 97% of patients, that in his own hospital in his constituency in England they have been met for 93% of patients, but that in Wales they have been met for only 83%?

Mr Reed: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question. Had he been in this House longer and paid more attention to these issues, he would know that the datasets comparable between England and Wales are not actually the same. He would know also that the last time we had a Conservative Government people in Wales were waiting two years for operations, and that nobody campaigns more than I do on behalf of hospitals in my area on the waiting times there.

In the past 100 weeks nearly 2.4 million patients have waited more than four hours in hospital accident and emergency units in England; almost half a million people have spent more than four hours on a trolley waiting to be admitted; and more than 1,500 have waited more than 12 hours to be admitted.

Those figures offer a stark analysis of the difficulties facing accident and emergency. Even in this week of the summer solstice, this Government's A&E winter crisis shows no signs of abating. In a debate in January the Secretary of State for Health said that the NHS had just been through a tough winter, but the evidence from NHS England shows that accident and emergency departments have had two tough winters and are well on their way to a third tough summer. Under this Government accident and emergency is experiencing a permanent winter.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): My hon. Friend will know that Northwick Park hospital in my constituency has had some of the worst waiting times in the country over the past year. Does he understand, and will he address in his remarks, the fact that the ageing population—those over the age of 80—in Brent has increased by 50%, yet the funding available to cope with that increase has been reduced by 25%? It means that, of the 250 people who attend A&E each day, 100 are dementia patients who become bed blockers because the integrated care package is not in place and is not working.

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. He is right to mention those issues, which I will come to later. I pay tribute to him for doing so.

The reason for those pressures on A&E, in addition to the issues that my hon. Friend raises, is the sharp increase in people attending A&E since 2010. In the past the Secretary of State has tried to claim that the increase is the fault of the previous Labour Government, but that is patently nonsense. Annual attendances at hospital accident and emergency units increased by 60,000 in the four years before 2010, whereas in the four years after they increased by nearly 600,000—10 times faster. The reality is that A&E dramatically improved between 2004 and 2010, when 98% of patients were seen within four hours. This is a crisis that only started on

the Tories' watch—after they made it harder to see a GP, after they started stripping back social care services and after they launched their damaging top-down reorganisation.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman not think that the closure of A&E at Crawley hospital in 2005, under a Labour Government, was distinctly unhelpful to A&E waiting times?

Mr Reed: The hon. Gentleman has made that point on the Floor of the House on many occasions, and he has been a constant voice with regard to the hospital services used by his constituents. That was a decision made by clinicians in the area, and he will recognise that. He will recognise also how much the framework has changed and how much more difficult the Government have made it for communities such as his to have their say on health reconfiguration.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The point is not that there should never be any change in our national health service. When clinicians plan it and put it forward to improve services, we are right to support it. The difference is that the Conservative-led Government came in and attempted to close A&Es from the centre, such as Lewisham A&E, which they were going to close. They said they would not close Sidcup A&E, but they closed it within months of entering government. That is the difference: the Government dictated the closures, not local clinicians.

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The lesson that the Prime Minister and Secretary of State drew from those episodes was, "When you get beaten in the courts, change the law"—a completely different approach from that of the previous Labour Government.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) mentioned the distressing figures at Northwick Park hospital, but the Government's solution was to close Central Middlesex hospital's A&E. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) think that that added to the crisis or made it better?

Mr Reed: Everything that transpired in my hon. Friend's constituency made the situation much worse, as many medical professionals have said.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Is there not an extra pressure, with many trusts ending the year with deficits? Wythenshawe hospital, which is looking at a £3 million deficit, has decided to try to cut 33 district nursing posts, yet when the Health Committee looked at winter A&E pressures we found that it was important to hang on to district, community support and hospice nurses. Is it not just madness to force hospitals with deficits to cut district nurse posts?

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend puts her finger on the problem precisely. It is absolute madness, and it is happening at trusts throughout England, as their deficits edge up towards £1 billion for this financial year.

The number of patients waiting more than four hours each year has rocketed by more than 1 million, meaning that there are now almost four times as many people as

there were five years ago waiting more than four hours. That is a damning record, and based on the performance over the previous Parliament five more years of the same will see almost 2.5 million patients each year waiting more than four hours by 2020. For the benefit of patients, medical professionals and the healthcare system as a whole, that cannot be allowed to continue.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): The hon. Gentleman may know that I spend my weekends working in the NHS, attending seriously ill patients. We are seeing more patients who are elderly, who have a higher acuity and who need admission to hospital; hospital is the only place for them. On his suggestion that the situation has arisen on the Government's watch, how does he account for the Royal College of Nursing's telling the Health Committee that the decisions that needed to be taken to deal with this demographic shift should have been taken a decade or more before my party entered government?

Mr Reed: If the hon. Gentleman wants to compare the records of this Government and the previous one, we will do that all day long and he will come out on the wrong side of that debate. On the ageing society, we would think from listening to Ministers and Government Back Benchers that this has just been sprung upon us. He is right to say that it has been coming for a long time, but we did an awful lot more to address it than this Government are doing. I will go on to explain why in just a moment.

A real worry for the NHS, and for those of us who use it or work within it every day, is the Government's plan to suspend the work of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on its safe staffing programme. That move is a rejection of a key recommendation made by the Francis report, and in response to the move, Sir Robert Francis said:

"I specifically recommended the work which NICE has been undertaking for a reason...I would not be surprised if this news generates a significant level of concern, and it seems a shame that the work of NICE has been stopped."

Dr Clifford Mann, president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, has said:

"There are real pressures on nursing levels in Emergency Departments."

He has also said:

"We are concerned about patient safety and staff welfare."

I would be grateful if the Minister could explain to me, and to Sir Robert Francis, why on earth the Government have suspended this crucial work.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I read the hon. Gentleman's motion carefully and I was left slightly bewildered, as he seems to be suggesting that the solution to this problem is more resources for A&E and for primary care, yet I seem to recall that just a few weeks ago I was standing in an election campaign where my party pledged £8 billion more for the NHS and his party failed to back that. Can he explain where he will find the resources?

Mr Reed: That is the kind of magical thinking that afflicts Conservative thinking. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that at the last general election we talked about a specific £2.5 billion fund to train 20,000 more

[Mr Jamie Reed]

nurses, 8,000 more GPs and so on. What we always said was that the NHS would get the money it deserves, quite separately from that £2.5 billion, from a Labour Government. That remains the case and he knows that that is the truth. It is true that certain societal changes, including the ageing society, pose new challenges and offer new pressures for the NHS, but the service is also under increasing financial pressure as a direct result of Government policy.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): May I tell my hon. Friend that we should not recommend to anybody that they rely upon the promises of the Conservative party, because it promised to keep Chase Farm's A&E unit open—the Prime Minister himself promised that at the 2010 election—but then he closed it? Every A&E department in the surrounding area that now serves the people of Enfield—those of the Royal Free, Barnet and North Middlesex hospitals—continually miss their A&E waiting time targets.

Mr Reed: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention, and may I say what a pleasure it is to see her again in the House of Commons? She is entirely right in what she says. We all remember the pictures, and we remember the Prime Minister's promises and those from the previous Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend is right to say that nobody should ever take any lessons from Conservative Members or believe what they are being told by them—not one bit.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Why is it that when an A&E department is lost from a Labour constituency it is the Government's fault, but when one was lost in a Conservative constituency under the previous Government that was "clinically led"? Can the hon. Gentleman explain the contradiction?

Mr Reed: I am afraid the hon. Gentleman is not listening; the rules have changed. The system whereby these processes are undertaken has comprehensively changed. If he were to draw a golden thread through Conservative health policy over the past five years, it would be that the public do not matter and are not listened to, and that change is driven from the centre, irrespective of what local clinicians say.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): This is all a little ironic, given that in my constituency the Labour party went around petrifying local people by saying that the A&E unit at Kettering general hospital was going to close, but it is still open and it is performing better. Would the hon. Gentleman like to apologise?

Mr Reed: If the hon. Gentleman is seeking an apology, would he like to apologise for the fact that A&Es in England have missed their waiting time targets for the past 100 weeks? I do not see any trace of an apology or any scintilla of embarrassment on his face.

It is true that certain societal changes, including the ageing society, pose new challenges and offer new pressures for the NHS, but the service is also under increasing financial pressure as a direct result of Government

policy. First, the declining access to social care and the squeeze on primary care have forced people to turn to A&E in increasing numbers and have also meant an increasing number of admissions that could have been avoided if people had received better care outside hospital. Secondly, the Government wasted £3 billion, at least, on a damaging top-down reorganisation that nobody wanted and nobody voted for, and which was hidden from the electorate. That reorganisation sucked resources from front-line patient care. We know that senior members of the Cabinet believe that the reorganisation was a catastrophic mistake. We know that, in the words of British Medical Association chair Mark Porter, "the damage done to the NHS has been profound and intense", and we know that the reorganisation has not made the NHS more productive or more efficient.

Thirdly, the effect of that wastage has been compounded by the short-sighted cuts to nurse training places at the beginning of the previous Parliament. That means that there are not enough staff working in hospitals—that was a key criticism by the Keogh review. In addition to compromising patient safety and clinical outcomes, this Government's decision has left trusts over-reliant on expensive agency staff.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): When I worked in hospitals and was responsible for arranging community-based discharge, two major problems created a delay in discharge—I hate the expression "bed-blocking" as it is such an insult to elderly people. One was access to community care facilities—home care support—and the other was ensuring that we had community equipment, such as hospital beds, hoists or bathing equipment. If we do not have all the pieces in place, which often come not from NHS funding but from local authority funding, it will not happen. That is exacerbating the problem in A&E.

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend makes a prescient point. The Government talk the talk but do not want the walk, and she has detailed precisely why that is the case.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, particularly as he has just responded to the intervention by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who is from Wales. Does he accept that in every financial year since 2010 the NHS in England has had a real-terms increase in funding, albeit a modest one, but that there has been a cut of 8% by the Labour Government in Wales and the A&E target in Wales has not been met since 2008?

Mr Reed: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his knighthood—it is remiss of me not to have done that. He will know that real-terms increases and cash increases are not the same. He will also know, because he voted for it, that the budget in Wales has been cut by this Government by more than £2 billion. Let us compare like with like.

The Royal College of Nursing has calculated that almost £1 billion—£980 million—was spent on agency staff in the last year alone. Those and other choices made by this Government have meant that, collectively, trusts in England reported a total deficit of £822 million in 2014-15. That is simply unsustainable. A recent survey by the King's Fund found that 90% of trust financial

directors and 85% of commissioners are concerned about the financial state of their local health economies, and that view will be shared by many Members on both sides of the House. An investigation by Pulse revealed that clinical commissioning groups were being forced to use their 2015-16 winter pressures allocations just to maintain regular services.

Questions must also be asked about this week's revelations that thousands of foreign nurses working in our NHS could be forced to leave the country as a result of the Government's immigration rules. The RCN points out that this would cause chaos for the NHS and waste tens of millions of pounds—the Secretary of State laughs as I mention that. It would make matters much worse for patients and for front-line clinicians. Will the Minister tell us how many nurses will be lost from A&E and how many will be lost in total as a result of this move? Where in the country will they be lost? How will the vacancies be filled? What will this cost? Has he or any Minister in his Department made representations to the Prime Minister about the effects of this policy? If so, will he share those with the House? When did Health Ministers know that this policy might cause so much damage?

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): When the Minister replies it will also be interesting to hear him say exactly how that cut and restriction on nurses will impact on the Royal Stoke university hospital, which had the great misfortune, for patients and the public more generally, of topping the list for the longest waits last winter of more than 12 hours on trolleys.

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Stoke deserves better, and no one has worked harder than him to ensure that it gets something better. Let us ensure that the Minister answers those points.

The understaffing crisis represents a dire situation that will only get worse unless the Government demonstrate an understanding of these issues and give them the attention that they deserve. We know that, as well as deficits this year, the five-year forward view is based on assumptions that the NHS can save £22 million by 2020. Will the Minister assure us that this will not result in any fewer medical staff or cuts to hospital or community services? Will he also commit to placing the analysis and the assumptions behind the efficiency plans in the public domain so that we can have an informed and honest debate about NHS funding? We do not want a programme of services being set up to fail and then being cut by stealth.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I worked as a nurse under the previous Labour Government. That Government may have kept numbers the same, but they reduced the skill mix, which greatly affected the safety of patients both on wards and in outpatient facilities. Can the hon. Gentleman explain that?

Mr Reed: It is a matter of fact that we increased nursing numbers. The hon. Lady will be well aware that when we came into office in 1997, we were training 15,000 nurses a year, and when we left office in 2010, we were training 20,000 nurses a year.

On social care, under this Government, 300,000 fewer older people are getting the care they need, with more and more people being forced to stay in hospital. But

that is only part of the story. When someone who needs care cannot get the help they need, it increases the risk that they will struggle or fall ill and have to go to accident and emergency. That is clearly demonstrated in the increasing number of older people arriving at A&E by ambulance. Almost 100,000 extra patients over the age of 90 were brought to accident and emergency by ambulance last year. That is an indictment of Government policy towards older people, and the problem is further exacerbated when the true scale of the damage to social care is revealed.

Before the election, the National Audit Office published its report on the impact of Government cuts on local council budgets. The report found that 40% of the total savings between 2013-14 and 2014-15 were made through reducing adult social care services.

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has calculated that a further £1.1 billion will be cut from adult social care over this financial year, and the president of the association said:

“Short-changing social care is short-sighted and short-term.”

The number of patients ending up in A&E because they cannot get the care they need to help them stay healthy outside hospital is clear evidence of this short-termism.

Cutting the social care budget is clearly a false economy, as thousands turn to A&E as a result. That is bad not only for the patient, but for the taxpayer. If a patient is not getting the care they need, their condition will deteriorate, which means that more complex interventions will be needed. A recent poll commissioned by the Care and Support Alliance found that nine out of 10 GPs believe that deep social care cuts are responsible for the overcrowding in our accident and emergency departments. The Government need to get a grip and address the crisis in social care in order to relieve the pressure on A&E departments and GP surgeries. Instead, they have chosen to risk putting more pressure on the health system at all levels by announcing further cuts of £200 million to the public health budgets of local authorities without any idea of whether they can be made without harming vital services—services that potentially save money.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the shadow Minister recognise the initiative that is happening in north Northamptonshire? Kettering general hospital will have not only an A&E, but urgent care, social care and mental health facilities and GPs all on the same site. People can go to the hospital and be dealt with there and then, correctly. I will also have an urgent care centre in my constituency. Is that not the way forward?

Mr Reed: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I absolutely agree that models such as that and local best practice can exist in pockets all over the country. It is just a shame that so many health economies are getting cut to the bone, because that stops them from developing such care models. He is right that it is precisely that kind of integration that points the way to the future. Have the effects of these public health budget cuts on primary care and accident and emergency been modelled by the Department, and will the Minister share that work with the House? If that work has not been done, will he explain why? Has the Department consulted on these latest cuts, and what was the response?

[Mr Jamie Reed]

I now wish to turn to the situation in general practice. In the previous Parliament, we saw a marked increase in the number of people waiting longer for a GP appointment. By 2013-14, almost 6 million people could not get a GP appointment. If the trend continues, that figure could be around 10 million by the end of this Parliament. Those people are often left with little option but to turn to accident and emergency. The GP patient survey suggests that almost 1 million patients went to A&E last year because they could not get a convenient GP appointment. It is clear that the GP workforce crisis is a major driver of the issues under discussion today.

Robert Flello: My hon. Friend is making an extremely good speech and is being very generous in giving way. On that point, Stoke-on-Trent has traditionally had far more patients per GP than the national average, and the age of that population is rapidly approaching and often way past retirement age. What we are seeing is not that people cannot get an appointment when it is convenient, but that they cannot get an appointment for days on end.

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend makes the case. What is happening in Stoke, I regret to say, appears to be something of a canary in a coal mine for the NHS around the country, and its issues will increasingly be seen in areas all over the country.

It is clear that the GP workforce crisis is a major driver of the problems. The number of full-time equivalent GPs per head has fallen over the past five years, even as demand has increased.

Henry Smith *rose—*

Mr Reed: I have been generous with time, so I must press on.

In 2013, the Government announced a call to action to improve general practice access and experience for patients. They set out six key indicators to rate the quality of access and experience for patients. One year later, every single indicator had shown a deterioration in performance. Fewer people described the overall experience of their surgery as good and fewer people were able to get an appointment. The Government must address that finding. Only by addressing the crisis in general practice in addition to social care can the Government begin to relieve the pressures on A&E departments.

When the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister discuss the NHS in this House, they like to use words such as “openness” and “transparency”. Sadly, their actions betray that sentiment on a routine basis. I refer again to Professor Keogh’s seminal letter to the Secretary of State two years ago in which he refers to the use and principle of transparency in the NHS as representing “a turning point for our health service from which there is no return.”

Except that, for this Government, it seems that there is a return.

Currently, NHS England publishes the performance measures for each A&E in England every week. Those figures contain a wealth of information for each trust and it makes that data available to the public. The data show how each A&E department is performing across a

range of measures, and it can be used to target specific interventions at trusts that are struggling. This reporting time period also means that issues can be identified quickly and resolved promptly. Rather than taking action to ensure that hospitals in England meet this target, the Government are seeking to hide the performance data. We will not be able to see how A&Es are performing each week; we will have to wait until the end of each month. By publishing a significant number of performance measures from across the NHS on the same day, the Government appear to have found an innovative way of burying bad news—publishing even worse news at the same time. Patients deserve better than that. Clearly, Ministers find it more palatable to be reminded of their failings just once a month, rather than at the end of each week. This move is designed to make the red box lighter and the scathing headlines kinder. Will people not conclude that the monthly publication of A&E data—unlike other monthly data sets—has nothing to do with patient care and everything to do with political and media management?

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Reed: I must make some progress.

The issues facing A&E departments, GP surgeries and social care services will not be solved by amending the date on which performance indicators are published. The public will be rightly sceptical about the motivations behind the reduced publication of data that illustrate both good and bad performance. It is a move designed to take the pressure off Ministers as they turn a blind eye to the pressures that they are inflicting on our health service.

The pressures that the Government have introduced into the health service have built up until the system can no longer cope. A&E is full to bursting and social care has been cut to the bone, which means that patients cannot be discharged, wards are getting fuller, there are delays for admission and more people are waiting longer for treatment. That is indisputable. In England, the target for seeing 95% of patients within four hours has been missed for 100 weeks in a row. Instead of easing the pressures in A&E, this Government have decided to make it harder for patients to see the effects of Government policy on the services that they use by restricting the performance data that are available. Under this Government, it is getting harder to see a GP, harder to be seen at A&E and harder to see how the NHS is performing.

Not only is the record of this Government shameful, but their cynicism and complacency are, too. Professional bodies and Opposition Members have long warned the Government that the path they have placed the NHS on is damaging the service, working against patients’ best interests and causing unprecedented professional concern. Having done that, the Government are now trying to evade scrutiny. Today, Ministers must explain why they are seeking to make NHS performance less transparent and to hide the damage caused by their policies from patients and the public, and how they intend to protect services and tackle hospital deficits this year.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the Minister, I am putting a six-minute time limit on Back Benchers—that does not apply to Front Benchers. Six minutes is already a little over-generous, so may I make a plea for few interventions, so that we can get in as many Back-Bench speakers as possible? With that in mind, I call Ben Gummer.

2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): May I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is a great pleasure to speak for the first time with you in the Chair. You will have noted that the subject for debate on the Order Paper is A&E services—an important matter that everyone in this House cares much about. You will also have noted that there are several proposers of the motion, including the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Secretary of State and the shadow Minister for care and older people. My first question is why, on this important issue, which the Opposition seem to think is critical to their programme for the NHS, the shadow Secretary of State for Health cannot be here to make the argument himself. Further, we understand that the shadow Minister for care will not be wrapping up the debate.

Mr Jamie Reed: I can tell the Minister where they are not: they are not hiding behind trees, and they are not meeting Rupert Murdoch in an underground car park.

Ben Gummer: I am not sure I get the gist of the hon. Gentleman's point, but I do think that the shadow Secretary of State for Health should propose the motion in an Opposition day debate on health matters. I hazard a guess that there has been a disagreement between the two shadow Ministers—perhaps a suggestion that one of them is using health debates as opportunities to grandstand. I hope that that is not the case.

I am slightly concerned that we are about to see another episode of the ongoing psychodrama which is the Labour party. We had the TB-GBs and then, when that very happily came to an end, we had the Miliband “Band of Brothers”—a disaster for that family but happily not for the country.

Barbara Keeley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I really wonder whether this is within scope. Is it at all orderly to be debating which Minister is answering or proposing a debate? This happens quite a bit in this House—for example, the Chancellor did not come last week. It is just not orderly to be starting off the debate in this way.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I thank the hon. Lady for that point of order. I think the point has been made. Perhaps we can move on with the debate.

Ben Gummer: It is a matter of importance, Madam Deputy Speaker, because in this episode of “Health Handbags”, we have been given an insight into the crisis within the Labour party and Labour Members' inability to understand what the priorities are for the NHS and for the country.

If the NHS and A&E services are of such importance to the Labour party, one would expect the shadow Secretary of State—

Robert Flello: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Ben Gummer *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. If the Minister could sit down for a moment, I will take the point of order, which I imagine is very similar to the previous one. It would be nice if we could move the debate on, as there are several maiden speeches waiting to be taken. It is an important subject and I would like to move on, rather than get bogged down in this. I will take the point of order, and then I hope we will move on.

Robert Flello: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. For the benefit of new Members on both sides of the House, I think it would be helpful if you spent a moment clarifying when it is in order to challenge the Chair's ruling on something and when it is not.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Thank you very much. It is the person in the Chair's decision whether something is within scope or not. I did not take the Minister's response to my decision as a challenge to the Chair; I merely wanted to point out that it would be nice to get on with the debate and to allow other hon. Members to speak, especially new Members who wish to make their maiden speech. If the Minister could move on, we would all be very grateful.

Ben Gummer: With pleasure, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In the absence of the shadow Secretary of State, I shall channel him, which is something I enjoy doing. I like the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham); he is a man who often—sometimes; a few times—speaks some sense. Just before the last election, he said that after the election,

“we need to come together, and then allow the NHS to get on with the job of building 21st-century services”.

What I do not understand about the motion that he and other Opposition Members have put before the House is that, far from coming together and trying to build consensus on the future of the NHS, what they are seeking to do—once again—is reproduce the golden oldies of criticism that they put before the country before the last election, and that were so roundly rejected.

That comment was about after the election. What I do not understand is what the shadow Secretary of State felt was the purpose of leading a campaign so politicising the NHS before the election. I, like so many others, had a leaflet through my letterbox saying that there were 24 hours to save the NHS—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. We are straying into the general election, which has passed, and away from what is on the Order Paper, which is a debate on A&E services. If the Minister could stay on that subject, I would be enormously grateful.

Ben Gummer: With pleasure, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point is that we were warned that there were 24 hours to save the NHS, yet it is still there, and the A&E crisis, which is named at the top—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. If the Minister could resume his seat, we are beginning to stray into the realms of challenging the Chair's decision. We do not have much time and I do not want to take any more points of order on this one subject, so if he could stick to the subject on the Order Paper and let us move on, I would be very grateful to him.

Ben Gummer: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The motion is about A&E services, and I would like to talk about the progress that the NHS has made in the past five years. Far from the picture painted today by the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) and Members who intervened during this speech, the NHS is treating more people than ever before, it is treating more people in A&E than ever before and it is treating more people at a higher rate of satisfaction than ever before, and the result of that is that patient outcomes—something we did not hear much about from the shadow Minister—have improved. We are treating more people to a higher standard.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is it not the case that the excellent policy of seven-days-a-week GP services means an expansion in the amount of GP services, which will provide welcome relief from the pressures on A&E, which will add to the good work being done in hospitals?

Ben Gummer: That is precisely the sort of policy on which we will seek consensus in the months and years ahead. There is a choice for Opposition Members. I know there are many new Members who wish to make their maiden speech in this debate, and I would just say to them that the choice is this: to come together to try to model better care within the NHS and better outcomes for patients, or to seek division.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I want to raise a point of substance that affects my constituents. There are young people in my constituency who would love to train as nurses and work in the NHS, but by cutting the number of training places in London by 25%, the Government have made that much harder. At the same time, when I last spoke to the recently retired chief executive of King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, he told me that he was recruiting nurses in the Philippines, because there are not enough nurses—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. When the Chair is on her feet, Members sit. I have said before that interventions need to be very short and kept to a minimum. That was too long.

Ben Gummer: The shadow Secretary of State cut the number of training places for nurses; it was increased under the last Government and is now at a record level.

We were on the subject of performance, which is at the heart of the motion. The shadow Minister can speak warm words about the workforce, but he failed to congratulate them on their exceptional performance under unprecedented pressures. At no point in his speech did he acknowledge the real increase in pressure on A&E services in the NHS. Some 3,000 additional patients a day are being seen, treated and discharged in accordance

with the 95% target; that is being delivered by NHS staff across the service. He fails to point out the places where we have seen remarkable successes. He fails to give the example of Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust, which saw a 16% improvement in A&E performance times in the last year. That is front-line staff delivering better outcomes as a result of changes made by the Secretary of State over the past five years.

Mr Jamie Reed: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, but he gives an absolutely fictional account of my remarks to the House. If he is so confident in his description of what is happening in the health service, can he explain why a comedy document produced by the Conservative research department says:

“New polling by Conservative peer Lord Ashcroft found that 47 per cent of voters believe Labour has the best approach to the health service while just 29 per cent picked the Tories”?

Ben Gummer: As Madam Deputy Speaker pointed out, we have just had an election, and the voters' voice on the NHS was loud and clear. There is a simple point to make about the performance of this nation's NHS: an independent think-tank—one of the most respected in the field—has rated it the best performing national health service in the world. It is better than that of Scotland, Northern Ireland or Labour-run Wales. A&E, as measured by countries across the world, performs no better in any country than in this. If we wish to go to international comparisons, the shadow Minister would do well to accept the extraordinary work that NHS staff are already delivering to make this the best health service in the world.

Mr Reed: I wish the Minister was right. I genuinely wish ours was the best A&E provision in the world. However, I have to draw his attention to an article in the *International Business Times* in January this year. When a journalist contacted the Department of Health to learn the basis for that claim by the Secretary of State, they were told that there was

“no concrete research on which Hunt had made the statement”. This is a complete fabrication. Will the Minister set the record straight?

Ben Gummer: The shadow Minister should know that we in this country perform best of all countries that measure A&E, and that is the only way that we can judge this. The trouble is that by talking down that remarkable fact, all we do is denigrate the work of the people who deliver that every day.

I move on to the financial performance of the NHS, the second point that the shadow Minister raised, which lies at the heart of his motion. Let me set the financial context. [*Interruption.*] While Opposition Members are giggling, they might like to remember that they went into the last election not willing to commit to the NHS's own plan for the next five years. Only one major party pledged to give the NHS the funding that it requested for the next five years: the Conservative party. The history on delivery is clear: we are talking about an additional £12.9 billion of cash in the last five years; a contribution of £2 billion this financial year, and a further £8 billion to fulfil the five-year plan. That is the financial background to this debate—a background

that the Opposition refused to match at the last election. Money on its own does not get to the root of the problem, which I am afraid is not recognised in the motion, namely the relationship between quality, standards and money.

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): Does the Minister agree that it would probably do the shadow Minister and other Opposition Front Benchers a great deal of good to move down to Wales, where there has been an 8% cut in the budget? Wales has not met A&E targets since 2008.

Ben Gummer: It is a real delight to respond to my hon. Friend. It is a good thing for the shadow Minister and those living in England that they do not have to endure the experiences of people in Wales, which have, I am afraid, been inflicted on them by the appalling management of the Labour Government there, who chose not to invest in the NHS in the way that we did, in a time of constrained budgets across the public sector. I have to say to the shadow Minister that by concentrating on money—he cannot match the Conservative party's commitments on that anyway—he misses the points around quality and safety, which are conjoined with money. If we go back to the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust—[*Interruption.*] Opposition Members may groan, but they may wish to reflect on why Stafford hospital went wrong. It was within budget and was hitting its targets, yet at the same time it was killing people. Until that simple fact is remembered, and until we put quality and patient care first, we will not get the efficiency, as regards either care or money, that I am sure Members on both sides of the House wish to see.

Barbara Keeley *rose*—

Ben Gummer: I am sure that the shadow Minister has come to the House without reading the speech in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State directly addressed the issues caused, in some trusts, largely by agency spending, which took place because of the chronic understaffing created by the previous Government, and put right by us. That led in part to the catastrophe at Mid Staffs. The shadow Minister has not read my right hon. Friend's comments about limiting the salaries of highly paid managers in the NHS, or his comments about cutting consultancy pay. It is precisely that kind of action—including enabling chief executives of NHS trusts to control their budgets—that this Government are taking to ensure that, nationally and locally, we are living within our means.

Clive Efford: The Minister says that the Government responded to Mid Staffs. Will he give us a guarantee that there will be no removal of the minimum staffing requirement that came in on the back of the Mid Staffs report?

Ben Gummer: I can guarantee that to the hon. Gentleman. On minimum staffing, it was in response to the Francis inquiry that this Government, in their previous incarnation, set the Care Quality Commission a specific target of doing something about minimum staffing. That did not happen before then. He understands that relationship between safe care and money. I just wish that he was able to explain it to his colleagues on the Front Bench, because if they went to the Salford Royal

hospital, they would see how, through instigating safer care, it is saving £5 billion a year. It is by combining quality and efficiency that we get the double benefit of better care for patients and better returns for the taxpayer.

Barbara Keeley *rose*—

Tom Pursglove *rose*—

Ben Gummer: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Tom Pursglove: Under the coalition Government, a new urgent care centre opened in Corby, which is providing an excellent service for my constituents. That is in addition to the service in Kettering. Does the Minister agree that it is important that care is not only accessible, but as local as possible?

Ben Gummer: My hon. Friend, and our hon. Friends in Northamptonshire, have worked hard together—as Northamptonshire MPs did previously on a cross-party basis—to find the best configuration of services for their county. It is a great shame that that model of cross-party working cannot be echoed or reflected across the House. In that vein, I would prefer it if the Opposition had come here to talk about plans for social care. They have two competing visions for social care. We sometimes hear thoughtful remarks from the shadow Minister for care and older people, but then there is the shadow Secretary of State's repetition of the phrase about wanting a top-down reorganisation of the NHS around a social care model. None of that will deliver what we all want: an integrated NHS and social care model, which is what we are beginning the journey of creating. We are doing that by reflecting locally what local places need in terms of integration rather than creating a national model to which they have to adhere. Again, it is important to fix all this—

Barbara Keeley: Will the Minister give way?

Ben Gummer: I will after I have finished this comment.

It is important to put all this in the financial context. I have been through the Lobby with the shadow Minister and with many Labour Members who were in the previous Parliament. We went through the Lobby just before the election when we agreed to cuts in public expenditure in the first two years of this Parliament and the former shadow Chancellor committed the Labour party to cuts in local government spending. Difficult choices are forced on us by the catastrophe and chaos that we were left in 2010. Labour Members need to confront those difficult choices. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot, on the one hand, say that we need massive increases in payments for social care and, on the other, say that they are going to constrain public spending. The answer to that dilemma is surely to try to find a better way of integrating social care that I hope would see cross-party consensus rather than the politicking we have just seen at the Dispatch Box.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): The Minister is talking about the financial context. My worry is that a lot of NHS managers in London talk about a Lewisham-sized hole in the NHS budget in south-east London. We stopped the Secretary of State closing Lewisham's A&E last time. Can the Minister promise me today that he will not be coming back to Lewisham for another go?

Ben Gummer: My right hon. Friend never planned to close Lewisham hospital. I give the hon. Lady this promise: I will certainly come and speak to her about her constituency before anything happens—in fact, if nothing happens—because I care very much about the provision of secondary and tertiary care there. That also goes for my colleagues on the Front Bench.

Let me give the facts of what we are doing in funding better social care and integrated social care in the NHS. We are already transferring £1.1 billion of NHS spending into social care funding as part of the additional £8 billion over the next five years. That money will be for social care as well as the NHS. It is part of an integrated system that NHS England envisages. Through the better care fund, funded to the tune of £5.3 billion, we are funding the local integration of social care and health care. That will produce a different solution in Manchester than in Ipswich, and that is a good thing because those two places are different.

Barbara Keeley: Will the Minister give way?

Ben Gummer: I will.

Barbara Keeley: I thank the Minister for giving way eventually, because he has made a number of points about my local area. In Salford, we are moving heavily into integration—we are one of the better places in the country for that—but the work there is not assisted by a number of things. The better care programme funding is not extra funding. A large hole has been created, as in Lewisham, by cutting back on social care funding. Even at a smaller level, the closure of walk-in centres in Salford and the ending of active case management as efficiency cuts are made have not helped. All these things are part of the jigsaw. All we have seen is cuts.

Ben Gummer: Walk-in centre closures were supported by the hon. Lady's hospital because that gave a safer service. I walked through the Lobby with her also. Because her party is unable to make a decision about money being spent on benefits and on the general budget for government, she would not be able to pledge any more than my party; in fact, she could only promise less funding for social care. She has to be straight with voters. Labour Members cannot have it both ways. They cannot spend money on the NHS, benefits and all the other things that they are pledged to increase funding on, and also claim to be the party of fiscal responsibility. It just does not hang together.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I welcome the focus on integration, particularly in relation to social care. Enfield suffers from historical underfunding, with a lack of fairness in relation to the growing deprivation and age profile. We have made great progress, but we need to make more to ensure that there are winners, such as Enfield. That may lead to other parts of London, and inner London, being losers, but let us take these decisions now and make funding fairer, particularly in relation to social care.

Ben Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. Again, he highlights a local solution to a serious problem, and one that will not reflect what is needed in other parts of the country. That is why it is so important that we concentrate the additional money that we are providing on local solutions rather than on a top-down reorganisation.

The shadow Minister spoke about primary care. He does not seem to have listened to my right hon. Friend's latest announcements on the new deal for GPs to increase the workforce, support new buildings for GPs, and improve access through local innovation. We are trying to reduce the pressures that we understand are on GPs and that go back many years, not helped by the GP contract signed by his Labour predecessors. We have a choice in government about whether we declare an ambition—the ambition on primary care declared by Labour at the last election was, the Royal College of GPs said, an

“ill-thought out, knee-jerk response”—

or we can try to do something about it, listen to concerns, and remodel care so that it helps patients. That is what the Government have done. My right hon. Friend has spoken about it, and the work is being carried on by the Minister with responsibility for primary care, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt).

Dr Murrison: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ben Gummer: I am not going to take any more interventions, if my hon. Friend does not mind, because I want to cover the additional issues raised by the shadow Minister. Before I do so, I would like to know whether the shadow Minister agrees with our target for 5,000 additional GPs, which can be afforded only because of the £8 billion that we have committed to the NHS—a commitment that, again, he has been unable to sign up to.

Mr Jamie Reed: The Minister has touched repeatedly on issues of finance. He has not given an accurate reflection of the Labour party's position going into the general election with regard to NHS funding. Let me ask him again: will he explain how the £22 billion of efficiency savings is going to be made, and will he give a guarantee that it will not affect hospital services, A&E services, staff numbers, or any front-line services in any community in this country?

Ben Gummer: I find it difficult to have to repeat to the hon. Gentleman, as I have to the shadow Secretary of State on a previous occasion, that this is a plan by NHS England. It is a plan that we supported before the election and afterwards, and a plan that the Opposition failed to support. The details of the plan have been worked out by NHS England and will be revealed in due course. Our part of the deal is that we provide the money that it has requested, which is £8 billion. We will see the plan as it is revealed by NHS England. It is an ambitious plan but one that we will fund from our side of the bargain.

The shadow Minister reveals in his comments and in the motion to which he has put his name that his motives are not pure. He speaks about the reporting targets for A&E departments around the country, but does not mention that the decision to change the reporting standard was made not by the Government but on the basis of a recommendation made by Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, who did so as part of a general review of reporting standards. When the shadow Minister talks about reporting standards, he does not mention that we are bringing those for cancer waiting times forward from a quarterly to a monthly basis, which I would hope he would have welcomed.

The shadow Minister does not mention that, for the first time, we are introducing mental health waiting times, as well as putting into the NHS constitution parity of esteem, which was not in the original constitution written and instituted by the shadow Secretary of State. Those are two matters of vital concern to our constituents which we are correcting on the recommendation of Professor Sir Bruce Keogh. Nor does the shadow Minister mention that Sir Bruce recommends that the A&E targets are brought on to a monthly reporting basis so that they can have clinical parity with all other standards and produce a better quality of statistical reporting.

In this debate, the shadow Minister finds himself on the wrong side of the clinical evidence given by Sir Bruce; the Patients Association, which welcomed the change; and the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, which said:

“The move from weekly to monthly reporting better reflects meaningful trends and will in fact increase the validity of this key metric, by reducing the effect of short term and unforeseeable events”.

The Nuffield Trust said that

“the replacement of weekly A&E figures with a monthly publication of indicators for many targets should help us understand changes in performance in a more meaningful way”.

The hon. Gentleman is on the wrong side of clinicians, academics, the Patients Association and the Royal College of Emergency Medicine—and on the wrong side of the argument.

The reason why is that the hon. Gentleman has made a choice. I appeal to the new Opposition Members who are sitting behind him: they can go through the next five years, motion by motion, vote by vote, opposing everything that is done on the basis of clinical evidence, just for the purpose of making political gain. If they do that, I, in turn, will remind the Opposition of the scandal of mixed-sex wards; the scandal of the highest hospital infection rate in the developed world; the scandal of a doubled pay bill for managers; the scandal of Morecambe Bay; the scandal of Mid Staffs; and the scandal of some of the worst cancer outcomes in the world. I will remind them of those every time they seek to oppose us for political reasons. The choice is theirs—or they can take the other tack and try to listen to clinicians, to be constructive and to de-weaponise the NHS.

I will seek to do what the shadow Secretary of State claimed to want to do, which is to come together and allow the NHS to get on with the job of building 21st-century services. However, if the Opposition make the wrong choice, all they will do is confirm in the minds of the British people that they put politics before the NHS, and that for the Labour party, the party comes first—always—whereas for Conservative Members, the NHS and patients always come first.

2.32 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): It is obviously a lively debate on both sides of the House. As someone who is not long from being on the front line, as a surgeon in the NHS, I find it a bit sad to listen to how angry this debate is. The four-hour target should be a tool and not an end in itself. It is used to take the temperature and to understand what is happening underneath. We would not shove a patient in a bath of ice water if they had a temperature; we would look for

the infection, try to understand it and try to treat it. Unfortunately, the four-hour target has simply become a stick, and today that stick just seemed to be being thrown backwards and forwards.

People working in A&E face great difficulty, which is why we are not recruiting trainees to A&E and why we are losing senior doctors at an incredible rate from A&E. Instead of being one of the most rewarding places to work, people see it as the most miserable.

Dawn Butler: Although the target is used as a measure, or to take the temperature, does the hon. Lady not feel that the fact that it has gone up 401% since 2009-10 is something to be worried about?

Dr Whitford: Did the hon. Lady say that the target has gone up 401%?

Dawn Butler: The time that people have had to wait for four hours has gone up—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Interventions should be kept to a minimum. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) is not on a time limit, but please be aware that many Members are coming in to speak. Thank you.

Dr Whitford: Absolutely, we have seen the performance drop across the UK. The Minister quoted a report showing that England was performing better than Scotland. I would be interested in seeing that one—where it is comparing like for like with core A&E services—because those are not the figures I have seen. However, we all face the same challenge. We are dealing with older patients, who are more complex. The figures from Scotland last winter showed that we did not have a huge increase in numbers, but far more of those patients had to be admitted. Nothing else could be done, and we will face that situation more and more in future. The problem is that we are losing the staff to deal with that, and we are talking about A&E, but in the vast majority of cases, the key issue does not lie with A&E. There are two simple things: the number of patients coming in, which relates to out-of-hours GP access, and patients getting back out, which is described by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine as exit block.

It is important to remember that the four hours does not involve someone sitting on a chair, waiting for four hours. People are often given that impression—that they turn up in A&E and sit there, and no one will touch them for four hours. However, they will be triaged, see a clinician, have a history taken and have investigations. They may well get sewn up or be given something, and they will go home. Those patients are moving through. Our problem is the patients who have to come in, and it results in a whole cascade of issues, such as people stuck on trolleys getting the start of a bed sore, or families made miserable, or staff very depressed at trying to look after people in a corridor. It also results in people ending up boarded to any ward—any port in a storm—so that people are not in the correct ward and not getting the correct treatment from the correct team. We know that that, bizarrely, results in longer patient stays, which exacerbates the problem.

What we need to do—as we have done in Scotland, where we set up the unscheduled care action plan—is to work with all stakeholders. That involves looking at how patients flow through. It is not about people being

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

obsessed with measuring the target and counting it, but about people opening the gates in front of the patient. The data on how long patients wait should be automatically available to staff from their system; it should not require an extra body to generate that data.

If we have the data weekly, which means we are getting them timeously, we can see one week from the other and ought to be able to see the patterns. The problem with monthly data for something that is identified as a currently acute issue is that, by the time they are collated, verified and out, staff may not remember quite what made that a bad week, whereas with weekly data, they can see whether they are getting a response to their actions.

I support keeping weekly measurements, but I do not support them being used as a tool—and certainly not for beating one another across the Benches here. I can tell hon. Members that staff in the NHS feel that they are beaten over the head with these targets, so it is not about having a target, but about how it is used. In the paper released by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine here yesterday, one of its myths was that the four-hour target is a distraction. It pointed out that it allowed a focus.

To try and tackle the problem in Scotland, we have ensured that the majority of our A&Es have a co-located out-of-hours service. I mentioned before that achieving 8 till 8 in every GP practice is so far in the future that it cannot be reckoned on as a solution to this problem. We are unable to fill the GP vacancies we have now. Telling them that they will be working from 8 till 8 on Saturday and Sunday is not overwhelmingly attractive.

The pilots that have been done have started to report in the last fortnight, and they have reported a very poor uptake. When people want to deal with an out-of-hours problem, they come to A&E. Rather than trying to change the whole population, we could have a system in which people are easily diverted once they get there: “If you have this, please step next door to our primary care service.” We need to look at those solutions, and some are working quite well.

The other issue is health and social care. To get patients out at the end of their journey, they need to be able to get into care. We need to remember that, although extra money may be given to health and social care through the health side, if we are cutting local authority budgets at the same time, we end up cutting the legs from under the NHS.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The hon. Lady is making thoughtful comments and I am following them carefully. I agree with her that co-location can work in some places, but clearly it is not going to work everywhere. Does she not agree that most people who attend accident and emergency departments are neither accidents nor emergencies, and they would be much better cared for by general practitioners? To do that, however, GPs need to be trained for that case mix and incentivised for it, and most importantly, the public needs to be trained, too, about accessing the proper professional.

Dr Whitford: Before the movement of out-of-hours GP services under the banner of NHS 24, most local areas had a doctors-on-call service. In my county, we

had Ayrshire doctors on call, which was provided by local doctors at rooms in the A&E departments in our two hospitals. Patients quickly learned where they could go to be seen quickly. We also had a car service that allowed us to make home visits. That functioned very well until NHS 24 came and pulled it away.

We have to get back to local GPs working like that as part of a co-operative in a focal position. Each practice cannot generate enough GPs or work to have someone sitting there all day Saturday and all day Sunday. When the Secretary of State talks about 8 till 8, it is not clear whether he means that that will happen in each individual practice or on a regional basis. Most of the pilots that have started to publish their experiences have quickly made it into a doctors-on-call service. There is more common sense behind that approach and it is more sustainable.

We have to look at the flow within hospitals. We should not have trackers running around bean counting when patients had what done, but people going in front of patients, opening the gates, looking at bed management and ensuring that patients are in the right place.

All these matters cascade back on to staff. We are struggling to maintain and recruit staff. There was only a 50% take-up of trainees for accident and emergency, and we are haemorrhaging senior people, which exacerbates the problem. We need the co-location of GPs and we need to look at the exit block, not only out of A&E and into the hospital, but out of the hospital.

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): A 25% reduction in the number of GPs and practice nurses has been forecast over the next five years. I have the statistics to prove that. People talk about the cost of agency staff and locums in hospitals, which is out of all proportion. There are also massive increases in costs—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. It is essential that we keep interventions to the absolute minimum.

Dr Whitford: The problem with moving patients into hospitals is being exacerbated by the reduction in in-patient facilities. Every new hospital seems to have fewer beds than the old hospital it replaces. The Scottish Government finally accepted the view of clinical staff that that could not go on. We now treat people in a different way. People used to get a hernia done and lie there for a week. My breast cancer patients used to come in and stay for 10 days. That has changed, which is great for those patients, but there is an inexorable rise in the number of older patients who have complex needs. The problem is not that we are living longer. I get quite upset at the phrase, “the catastrophe of living longer”. I suggest that Members think about what the alternative is. At medical school, I was definitely given the impression that people living longer was the point.

People are surviving their first major illness and, actually, their second major illness. They may present with breast cancer in their mid-70s to someone like me and have four co-morbidities. Such patients do not get in and out quickly for elective surgery, and they do not get out quickly when something major goes wrong, such as pneumonia or a chest infection. We therefore need to stop the downward trajectory in the number of beds, because we will not get the flow of patients if we go on cutting beds.

For me, the key things that we need are the co-location of GPs; an out-of-hours service for out-of-hours issues that are better dealt with in primary care; and enough beds in the right places. Finally, we need to smooth the way of our patients to get back to their homes. In Scotland, we have free personal care that allows us to keep more people at home and stop them going into hospital and to get more people back out of hospital.

I commend the “Five Year Forward View”. Much of it is taken from something that was written in Scotland several years ago called “2020 Vision”, which was about integrating health and social care.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I am not aware of the position on co-location in Scotland, but one barrier to the successful implementation of co-location in England is that the tariff and the funding mechanism mean that it is not efficient. Will the hon. Lady say what the position is in Scotland, because perhaps we can learn from that in England?

Dr Whitford: As I am sure the hon. Lady is aware, we have a totally separate system, for which I am grateful. We do not have a system of tariffs. We have a single NHS, so we can sit around a table and try to work out a solution. That is one of my concerns about the situation that the NHS in England faces and it is where I would veer away from the “Five Year Forward View”.

The principle of working together and integrating health and social care is commendable. The integration boards in Scotland started work in April because “2020 Vision” is a few years older than the “Five Year Forward View”, but we face the same challenge: local authorities are struggling with their budgets, which can end up eating away at the health side.

The four-hour target is still useful as a weekly target to provide a quick response to what is going on in our hospitals. However, it should not be used as a stick to beat staff or to beat ourselves in this House and make public capital. The NHS is too precious for that.

2.46 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). The House should listen to what she says about the point of targets.

I thank NHS staff across the UK and, given the subject of this debate, particularly those who work in the 181 emergency departments across England. Those people face immense challenges. Last year, they cared for 14.5 million patients—an increase of 500,000 on the previous year. As the hon. Lady said, this debate is about not just numbers, but complexity. We have to face that. It is a disappointment to those NHS staff when they see the debate descend into political diatribes. They want to hear constructive diagnoses and solutions from this House; they do not want to see this issue being used as a football. Let us move forward in that vein in this debate and look at the challenges.

This issue is immensely complex. Anyone who says that there is a single answer is not looking at the scale of the problem. In the few minutes I have, it would be impossible to address all the issues, so I will focus on the workforce challenge, which is key. That challenge does not relate just to emergency departments; there is a complex interaction that includes primary care, ambulance services and the voluntary sector.

We know that about 15% to 20% of people who are seen in emergency departments would be better seen in another context. How do we get the skill mix right? We need to consider the fact that not every place needs the same solutions. The solutions that are right in a rural constituency are very different from the solutions that are right in an urban area.

We need to look at the challenges of recruitment, retention and retirement. We have heard that 50% of training places are not being filled, but there is also the leaky bucket of those leaving the profession. We must consider the fact that it costs about £600,000 to train someone to senior registrar level in emergency care. The scale of the brain drain is enormous, particularly to Australia and New Zealand. How do we address that? Of course, there will always be junior doctors who want to spend a year working abroad and then return with the skills that they acquire. We should not discourage that, but we could do more to make it a two-way process. The main problem is the loss of those higher professionals who have not only the skills that are needed to look after the most unwell patients in our emergency departments, but the confidence and decision-making skills that are required to know when it is safe for patients to go home.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I absolutely appreciate what my hon. Friend says about the leaky bucket. Does she agree that every school and every careers adviser should be advising people to go into the NHS, given the 300 careers that it offers?

Dr Wollaston: Indeed. I was going to comment further on the issue of the skill mix. This is about not only those higher skill professionals, but the mix within the NHS. I do not think that we should talk that down. We simply will not be able to manage unless we broaden the skill mix. Healthcare assistants, for example, make an extraordinary contribution to the NHS and social care. One of the reasons we lose so many of them is the lack of access to higher professional development; it is not just about a low-wage economy. This is about how we can create more pathways to becoming, for example, assistant practitioners and physician assistants, how we can use them and how we can bring in more pharmacists, who train for five years in their specialty, into what we do across the NHS?

Helen Whately: Picking up on my hon. Friend’s point about healthcare assistants, does she agree that improving the opportunities for healthcare assistants is a huge opportunity for the NHS at the moment?

Dr Wollaston: It is a huge opportunity and we must go further with that, because continuing professional development across the NHS workforce is part of addressing the burnout that the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire talked about. We must do more to address the rotas and see what is causing our staff to leave the NHS, because it is not just about pay or the allure of working in a sunnier climate—we cannot do much about that. It is also often about the work-life balance they face and how that compares with abroad. We have got into a vicious circle of increasingly having to rely on locums to fill those gaps, and that money could be far better spent addressing why the NHS is haemorrhaging so many skilled staff abroad and to outside professions.

[Dr Wollaston]

When we talk in this House about the challenges facing primary care and A&E departments, we must be careful not to talk them down. We know that medical students find going into A&E attractive, so let us not cut off the supply any further by talking about it in terms of doom and gloom. There are things we can do to improve the working lives of people in A&E, so we should get on and do the job, and I think that this House should do so in a far more constructive frame of mind. It is time to put aside the difference we have had in the election. We have five years to go until the next election. Let us show an example to those following this debate outside by looking at this in entirely constructive terms.

I want to return to an issue the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire touched on: seven-day working. Just as we should not be trapped by targets, let us not be trapped by political dogma. Let us look at what the unintended consequences sometimes can be if we are driven by the mantra that it must be 8 till 8 and seven days a week in every situation. I used to practise in a rural community. If we create a system in which we make it deeply unattractive to work in small, rural practices and in which we divert resources from the key priorities of seven-day working—which should be to reduce avoidable mortality and unnecessary hospital admissions—and if we take our eyes off that as the key priority and drive towards having to achieve 8 till 8 in every location, we could find that we have a further recruitment shortfall, as has happened in my constituency. That can translate into real unintended harms, such as the closure of many beds at Brixham hospital because the GPs could no longer safely man the in-patient beds. We could find ourselves in a spiral of unintended consequences. Let us listen to those on the front line and to our patients and keep them first and foremost in our minds when we consider what we are doing in the NHS.

2.54 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is an exceptional pleasure to speak while you are in the Chair. I hope that I will be forgiven for returning to the motion, which seems to have slipped Members' minds over the past hour or so. It specifically states:

“That this House notes that hospital A&E departments have now missed the four-hour A&E target for 100 weeks in a row; further notes that trusts are predicting record deficits this year”.

The Government were asked to respond to that. As the Minister singularly failed to do so at the start of the debate, I hope that he will return to it in closing.

I have in my patch the University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, where I first met a heart surgeon call Sir Bruce Keogh—I am not entirely sure what happened to him. I therefore have either the highest or the second highest proportion of constituents who are either doctors or who work in the health service, so the NHS and everything associated with it is something that I cannot escape. I thought that it would be useful to have an NHS tracker survey, which records over a period of time how the health service is seen not just by those who use it, but by those who work in it. I want briefly to share the results of the surveys with the

House, because they show that the people who use the NHS and who work in it are becoming increasingly concerned about the conditions in which they are treated or in which they work.

I received about 400 responses to the last survey. Some 74% of respondents said that they were very concerned about the future of the NHS. One respondent commented:

“I work in a large university hospital Emergency Department”.

We have a number of large trusts in the west midlands conurbation, so people might be living in my constituency but working in a different trust.

“The hospital bed occupancy consistently exceeds 99%, with hundreds of well patients in beds unable to be discharged due to inadequate social care. Consequently, the A&E is overwhelmed with patients lying on trolleys while I scuffle around trying to get something done.”

Another respondent said:

“My work load leaves me worrying about my own health in the future.”

Another referred to

“staff shortage on wards leading to the use of more agency staff, wasting money on unnecessary management... staff are stressed due to doing more shifts to make ends meet.”

Another said:

“All parties want better 24-hour access but there are not enough trained doctors—especially GPs—coming through the system, and too much money is spent on bank staff and locums.

That is not political scaremongering; that is what people who work in the health service have said.

We have face up to that. It is no good sitting here and pretending that we have no control over it. Decisions on the NHS are political decisions, because we decide annually how much money to spend on it. That means that there has to be some element of control. University Hospitals Birmingham has said:

“Emergency Department activity has continued to rise with the Trust passing the 102,000 ED attendances a year... equating to a 4.9% increase”.

Those are enormous numbers—102,000 emergency admissions in one hospital—and they are going up year on year.

That brings me to the targets. I know that they are difficult, but I remember that when we introduced them they were about the only way we could get good consultants to change their way of doing things. They kept saying, “This is the only way of doing it,” so we said, “Let’s try with targets.” If we look at the most recent statistics on waiting times of four hours or less in the west midlands, we see that Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust has achieved 95%; University Hospitals Birmingham has achieved 95%; but University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust achieved 79%; Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust achieved 81%; and the University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust achieved 87%. That tells us that something is going on that is not quite right. I think that we ought to start debates such as this one by saying, “Both sides agree that something is going on that is not quite right.” These figures are not just inventions. They tell us the trend, so how do we address it?

The Government got rid of NHS Direct, and 111 did not replace it—[*Interruption.*] It is no good the Minister shaking his head. I set up NHS Direct, and the big thing was that there were trained nurses, not call handlers.

They managed to deal with demand because the person on the other end of the phone could make a clinical decision, not just pass it on. We have had those knock-on effects. I hope that at least at some stage over the next two hours the motion on the Order Paper will be addressed. The trend is in the wrong direction and we need to think about what to do about it. People are waiting longer and the hospital deficits will be horrendous. This will be a problem for us all.

3 pm

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): It is a delight to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who made some very interesting points. When I read the motion, what struck me most was that if I had read it having just stepped off the Mars to Earth express, I would have believed that Britain's national health service was a total disaster and that nothing was being done to improve the services that were being delivered. Yes, there are still problems in the NHS, particularly in lots of our larger general hospitals, such as Medway Maritime Hospital, which provides services for my constituency, including A&E cover. Medway Maritime has faced big challenges for a number of years, including under the previous Labour Government, and among those challenges was a failing A&E department. There were a number of reasons for the challenges, including the limitations of the site on which it is located and the demography of Medway towns in general.

Last year, those challenges came to a head and Medway Maritime was put into special measures. Following the appointment of a new chief executive and new trust chairwoman and with the budding arrangements that have seen Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust provide Medway with advice and expertise, the hospital is beginning to see some improvement. Of course, much more needs to be done before Medway Maritime can provide my constituents with the health service they deserve and to which they are entitled.

There is general agreement that one way to relieve the pressure on the hospital is to transfer more of the services it provides into the community. In my constituency, I have two excellent community hospitals, Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital and Sheppey Community Hospital. They both provide local people with a very good service, albeit for a limited range of healthcare needs. I would like the services they provide to be expanded. Okay, we will never see a fully fledged accident and emergency department in Sittingbourne and Sheppey, but there is no reason why my two community hospitals cannot provide other services. Today's Opposition motion contains the statement that

"the pressures on hospitals are a consequence of declining access to out-of-hospital services".

There are a number of things going on in my neck of the woods that belie that statement, with a number of initiatives and pilots taking place that in the long-term will benefit not only my constituency but the wider NHS. Let me tell Members about a couple of them.

Last week, I met managers from the South East Coast Ambulance Service, SECAMB, who told me about the vanguard initiative in which they are involved in Whitstable, just outside my constituency. It is one of several initiatives nationwide that will provide specialist out-of-hospital care in the local community and involves

a SECAMB paramedic team, led by a specialist paramedic, working with local GPs to provide people with home treatment rather than their being taken to hospital. SECAMB is keen to replicate the model in other areas, including the Isle of Sheppey in my constituency.

Dr Mathias: Does my hon. Friend agree that with home treatments, the patient becomes the patient expert, which is another way of moving forward local solutions and the community helping itself?

Gordon Henderson: I very much agree, and I shall come onto that point in a moment. I am interested in getting that model on the Isle of Sheppey and I hope that NHS England will see the merit in the initiative and provide SECAMB with the necessary funding.

I mentioned earlier the excellent Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital in my constituency. It, too, is running a pilot that I believe should be extended into other areas. Last December, a wound medicine centre was opened in the Memorial. It is a specialist service for patients across Swale who have chronic, complex or surgical wounds and it is operated under the care of the Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust. The centre uses telemedicine, with community nurses visiting patients in their home. By using mobile computer tablets to photograph wounds, nurses can send pictures back to specialists based at Sittingbourne Memorial to provide an instant professional opinion. The system can also track the progress of healing wounds and use the data to work out the best treatment options, including the correct type of dressing. That has the potential to save the NHS thousands of pounds in the wasted procurement of unnecessary dressings.

Last month, I was honoured to open the HEM ultrasound clinic in my constituency. It is a new unit that provides a wide range of ultrasound scans and is the first static clinical ultrasound service in Medway and west Kent. Although it is a private clinic, it is just been contracted to Medway Maritime to help bring down its waiting lists. HEM is undertaking an average of 35 scans on behalf of the hospital every day, seven days a week. The cost to the NHS of the clinic's service is the same as if the hospital undertook the scans itself. Let me tell those who accuse the Government of wanting to privatise the NHS that using facilities such as HEM is not about privatising the NHS but about the sensible use of private facilities to supplement NHS treatment and reduce waiting times for worried men and women.

I want to mention one particular concern. My local Swale clinical commissioning group is led by an excellent team whose members are fully committed to providing local people with more local services to reduce pressure on Medway Maritime, but Swale CCG is one of the smallest in the country and its size presented big challenges, as does the historic health deprivation in some of the wards in my constituency. Last year, Swale CCG received an above-average increase in its budget and I want to take this opportunity to urge the Government to ensure that it receives an above-average increase again this year.

3.7 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): It is the ultimate honour to be here today to deliver my maiden speech as the Member of Parliament for Dewsbury, Mirfield,

[Paula Sherriff]

Denby Dale and Kirkburton. To every man, woman and child living in my wonderful constituency, I promise to be their champion and stand up for them at every opportunity. I warmly congratulate my fellow new Members on their excellent and eloquent contributions and I continue to enjoy my whistle-stop tour of the UK through their speeches. In keeping with tradition, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the input of my predecessor Simon Reeve, and I wish him well for the future.

The suffragette movement fascinated and inspired me from a young age and visiting the cupboard where Emily Wilding Davison hid in order to be included in the census as a resident of this building reminded me of the ongoing struggle that women have both in society and in politics. It is refreshing that 65% of the new Labour intake are female, but there is a lot more to do and I look forward to contributing to that cause. As James Brown famously sang, "It's a man's world, but it ain't nothing without a woman or a girl." It is therefore a particular privilege to be the first female MP elected in the constituency since Ann Taylor, who now sits in the other place. Every corner of the constituency still holds great affection for Ann for both her unstinting commitment and her no-nonsense approach. I have big shoes to fill and I thank Ann for the generosity of her advice and support. I aspire to make her proud. On the subject of inspirational women it would be remiss of me not to mention Betty Boothroyd, born in Dewsbury, the daughter of textile workers, who broke new ground by becoming the first woman to be elected as one of Mr Speaker's predecessors.

The Dewsbury constituency is a wonderful place in which to live, work and indeed play. Dewsbury itself is often referred to as the heavy woollen district, a nod to the manufacture of heavyweight cloth that saw a significant population of South Asian origin relocate there in the late 1950s, many of Kashmiri and Gujarati heritage. Indeed, the town maintains a rich manufacturing industry and has something of a monopoly in the bed and mattress industry.

In common with many other northern market towns, Dewsbury is struggling economically, with the town centre crying out for regeneration. It is therefore most welcome that Dewsbury has been earmarked as an enterprise zone. Dewsbury is also famous for its hospitality and the warmth of its welcome. It is perhaps unique in that, when visiting a constituent's home intending to stay a short time, I can be greeted with a three-course banquet and an invitation to the family wedding. Many people will have shed a tear watching Mushy overcome his stammer on "Educating Yorkshire", the fly-on-the-wall documentary filmed at Dewsbury's own Thornhill Academy.

The town of Mirfield has strong socialist roots. The Community of the Resurrection, an Anglican religious community for men, was founded there in 1898 and hosted Keir Hardie and Emmeline Pankhurst in its incredible outdoor amphitheatre. Denby Dale and Kirkburton comprise a number of small villages and arguably boast some of the finest scenery in Yorkshire—or God's own county, as it is better known. I always know I am near home when I catch sight of the splendid Emley Moor mast, which, at 1,084 feet, is the tallest free-standing structure in the UK.

Many will know that I am a trade unionist, having previously acted as a shop steward and equalities officer. I will continue to seek to strengthen the bond between the Labour party and the trade union movement. The trade unions were instrumental in creating the Labour party to fight for working people in Parliament, and in this time of insecure employment, zero-hours contracts and exploitative labour, the unions have never been needed more in the workplace, just as the voice of working people has never been more needed in Parliament. This Government's shameful attempt to weaken that collective voice should be universally condemned throughout this House.

I must also acknowledge my parents, Barbara and Michael, who taught me that I did not have to go to university to achieve my dreams and that I should maintain the courage of my convictions and never give up on my principles. I am proud to bring over 20 years' experience on the front line of our public services to this Parliament. After some time working with the victims of crime, I worked in a front-line healthcare role for 13 years prior to taking my seat in this place. The last two years of that were challenging, as the service I worked in was privatised.

On my first day working for Virgin Care, I was advised that my political beliefs did not fit in with the company objectives. As my beliefs involved free healthcare at the point of need and always putting patients before profit, that affirmed my fears that the health service was moving away from its fundamental principles. I shall have more to say about Virgin Care in future debates. I will also continue to campaign tirelessly for a fully renationalised NHS and, on the subject of today's debate, I will fight for the future of Dewsbury hospital, which remains under threat of significant downgrade and whose accident and emergency service is fighting for its life.

Dewsbury has many challenges ahead over the next five years, not least in relation to the growing inequality we now see in our country. I intend to use my time diligently as Dewsbury's Member of Parliament to redress that, and to fight for the fairer, more equal society that my constituents deserve.

3.12 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) on her eloquent maiden speech. It is great to see another strong woman in the House.

I am mindful of the time constraints in the debate and, although I would love to talk about GP access and hospital finances, I shall concentrate on accident and emergency targets and, in particular, the target of 95% of patients being seen within four hours. I speak as a nurse who has worked in A&E under the last Labour Government when the four-hour target was introduced. I hope that my clinical experience will be used to inform the debate and take it forward.

I want to make four key points on A&E targets and the four-hour wait. First—like the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) and my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston)—I am not a fan of targets. As a healthcare professional, I found them increasingly frustrating. They are great as a tool, but they are being used as a political stick with which to beat healthcare workers and the system. There was no

clinical rationale for choosing the four-hour target. There is no evidence that the morbidity or mortality of someone who waits for four hours and 30 minutes is compromised. Similarly, there is no evidence that the healthcare received by someone who has waited for three hours and 30 minutes is any better than that received by someone who has waited for four hours. The four-hour target is actually not that helpful.

Karin Smyth: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Maria Caulfield: I will not take any interventions owing to the restriction on time.

I shall give the House an example. When I worked as a nurse in A&E—under the Labour Government—an elderly gentleman was brought in during a busy night shift. He had fallen at home and broken his hip, and he was put in a corridor to wait. After three hours and 30 minutes, he called me over, saying, “Nurse, I desperately need to go to the toilet.” I had nowhere to put him. The best thing I could do was to wheel a curtain around his trolley, and there, in the middle of a busy hospital corridor, that elderly gentleman with war medals on his chest went to the toilet. He was seen within four hours. That box was ticked and he was deemed to have had good healthcare, but I was not particularly impressed with that care. Let us not kid ourselves that meeting that target always means that the patient experience is good or that the outcome is any better.

My second point, which relates to my worry that this debate is being used as a political football, is that the four-hour target is not being seen in the context of the bigger picture. Other targets show that, even with the increased numbers attending A&E, more and more patients are getting their treatment within four hours. Similarly, the clinical outcomes—surely the most important factor—relating to diseases such as heart attacks show that morbidity and mortality rates have improved. There have also been better outcomes for people who have had strokes and for trauma victims. So outcomes for patients are improving despite the four-hour target not having been met during the past 100 weeks. We should welcome that and congratulate our NHS staff on achieving it.

Thirdly, if this is a serious debate about A&E services throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, which we are surely all here to represent, why are we not looking at the rate in Scotland of only 87%, in Labour-run Wales of 83% and in Northern Ireland of 79%? This debate is a political one, and as a healthcare worker, I find that distressing. It is interesting that those Members who have worked in the NHS believe that the four-hour target is a useful tool but that it should not be used as a political stick.

Dr Philippa Whitford: I would like to know where the hon. Lady got her figure of 87% from. Our figure is 92.6%, and we measure it every week.

Maria Caulfield: I was given the figure by the Nuffield Trust.

Dr Whitford: Not by the NHS?

Maria Caulfield: It is an NHS figure.

I shall attempt to move the debate forward with my fourth point. If we are serious about tackling the issues resulting from the number of patients using A&E services, we need to acknowledge that 15% of patients who go to

A&E could receive treatment elsewhere, in local community facilities. We need to look seriously at the Government’s proposals for seven-day-a-week health service, and if Opposition Members are serious about working with healthcare professionals to improve the experience of patients, they should surely welcome the introduction of out-of-hours services to take the pressure off A&E.

The thing I find most distressing about the motion is that it is full of criticism and complaints but offers no solutions. My plea to Opposition Members is that we should work together for the benefit of patients. We cannot continue to have patients whose care is being compromised even though they have ticked the four-hour box. We have only to look at the example of Mid Staffs, where the four-hour target was met time and again while terrible incidents were happening behind the scenes. Let us stop using the NHS as a political football; let us start working together. I would welcome the efforts of all Members to work together with the Government to deliver out-of-hours services and take the pressure off A&E units and the staff who work in them.

3.19 pm

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): This is the first opportunity I have had to welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am extremely pleased to see you in what I think is your rightful place.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) for her excellent speech. She is part of a very talented 2015 intake—far too talented for my liking, I am afraid to say. She has already demonstrated a strong reputation for standing up for her constituency—often in the face of terrible attacks—in terms of fairness, tolerance and decency in public services. She is a strong asset to this House and I welcome her.

The issue of accident and emergency services is important for Hartlepool, because we lost our A&E in August 2011. That closure has been felt very deeply by my constituents, who now have to travel to North Tees, which is some 13 miles away, for accident and emergency services. Given the appalling provision of public transport, the low level of car ownership and the relative levels of deprivation, that is too far to travel for far too many of my constituents.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend comment on the impact of that A&E closure on, and its implications for, areas below the River Tees, including my constituency? In South Tees, despite the best efforts of our NHS staff, waiting times have increased and the A&E target in particular continues to be missed.

Mr Wright: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Having fewer A&E departments puts further strain on other parts of the system, such as A&E at James Cook hospital, and other parts of the NHS, such as ambulance services. They are queuing up outside James Cook hospital, but it does not have the throughput it needs.

It is important that A&E returns to the town of Hartlepool. Given the level of health inequality, as well as the high proportion of older people relative to the rest of the country, there is a greater risk of accidents and, therefore, I think it is fair to say, greater reliance on A&E than other areas.

[Mr Iain Wright]

To be frank—this is not a party political point—the closure was based on clinical safety factors. The number of medical staff to cover two rotas at both Hartlepool and Stockton was deemed insufficient, and the supervision of junior medical staff was deemed inadequate, as it did not meet modern guidance criteria. Additional resources will need to be provided for adequate staffing to ensure that A&E can return to Hartlepool. North Tees and Hartlepool Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has a financial deficit of £4 million, which is expected to worsen over the coming years.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): In the coming winter months the Royal Free hospital in my constituency will once again face pressure in A&E and other services. Does my hon. Friend agree that the extra winter NHS funding should be allocated sooner rather than later so that hospitals can start planning, and that it should be included in the forthcoming Budget?

Mr Wright: My hon. Friend makes a really important point. On the additional resources, the north-east region has not been provided with anything, despite the level of health inequalities and the additional pressure on resources.

Lynne Hodgson, the director of finance at the trust, has said:

“The whole system is stretched financially.”

The situation is so bad that the trust has recently taken out a £2 million loan. That is not for investment in health services—it is not helping to pump prime the return of A&E to Hartlepool—but for paying the wage bills of current staff. When an organisation has to borrow to meet obligations for something as fundamental as its staff’s monthly pay packets, something is fundamentally wrong with the system.

I am arguing for the services to be returned to the town, but given the precarious finances of the trust I am fearful that most services will move further away or simply cease to operate, putting further pressures on the local health economy, such as James Cook hospital, and other parts of health and social care. What will the Government do to ensure that the finances of the North Tees and Hartlepool trust are put on a more secure footing while at the same time allowing such essential services to return to the town?

I fully accept that clinical safety for A&E services is paramount—I will never argue against that—but I have to question the model of acute accident and emergency services in my area. Over the past two decades or so, there has been a tendency to centralise services at North Tees, to the detriment of patients from Hartlepool and those slightly further away in south-east Durham. The momentum programme was going to centralise services on to a single site, culminating in a new hospital at Wynyard that would serve the populations of Hartlepool, Stockton, Easington and Sedgfield. The Government have made it perfectly obvious through their actions that Wynyard will not go ahead, which, together with NHS England’s “Five Year Forward View”, shows that smaller hospitals can thrive. Indeed, we have seen that across the region and the country. Darlington, whose population is only slightly larger than mine and which comes under the County Durham and Darlington NHS

Foundation Trust, is able to maintain an A&E. Hexham has a population not of 92,000 like Hartlepool, but of 13,000, and it is able to maintain an A&E at Hexham general hospital. Clearly, centralisation is not the answer everywhere. Different clinical models and reconfigurations are available to allow smaller towns to retain their A&Es.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that there needs to be more transitional care, with step up, step down facilities, and that we need to address the skill mix of different clinicians in those facilities?

Mr Wright: That is an incredibly important point. I started with staffing and I will end on it.

I want to make a vital point. The Minister spoke of local solutions, and the people of Hartlepool, Hartlepool Borough Council and I, as the MP for Hartlepool, want that to be the approach, but we are not being heard. I understand that there are always tensions between the wishes of the public with regard to where health services are located and the essential requirements of clinical safety, but, as shown by the examples I have given, there are other ways. The local trust is simply not listening. Given that I, the people of Hartlepool and the local authority—regardless of its political complexion—want this, what will the Government do to ensure that, in the shaping of local accident and emergency services, the voices of local people and their democratically elected representatives are genuinely heard?

As I said, I started by addressing staffing and I want to finish on that, too. I hope I have made it clear that I want A&E to return to Hartlepool, but it is clear that the pressure on acute services would be reduced if there was more access to primary care. The GP per head of population ratio is low in Hartlepool, with 63 GPs per 100,000. That is significantly lower than the north-east regional average—only Stockton has a lower ratio—and it is lower than the average in England. Greater access to GPs and better integration of all health and social care services has to be the way forward, but that also includes giving the people of Hartlepool what they want, which, put simply, is a fully functioning hospital in the town and an accident and emergency department at its very heart.

3.27 pm

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in this important debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I join other hon. Members in welcoming you to the Chair? This is the first time I have spoken with you in your place, and it is very good to see you there. May I also extend my congratulations to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) on her maiden speech? Like other hon. Members, I thank sincerely the people who work in our NHS and perform such an important task on behalf of the nation’s health.

When the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed), introduced the debate, I intervened and mentioned the fact that, in 2005, under a Labour Government—the decision was made in the then Labour Department of Health—Crawley hospital lost its accident and emergency unit. In the six decades of Crawley new town’s history, that will prove to be the worst possible mistake. The people of Crawley, which is the natural

population centre of the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust area, had to travel up to 10 miles up the road, on single carriageway highways, to access East Surrey hospital. The result has been at best inconvenience and at worst dangerous situations for many patients trying to reach the hospital. The South East Coast Ambulance Service does sterling work, but it has been a great challenge.

I am pleased that, in the past five years, hospital services have returned to Crawley hospital. We have an urgent treatment centre that is open seven days a week, 24 hours a day. We are about to have new GP primary access at the Crawley hospital site in West Green, and I was delighted a few years ago to open the new digital mammography unit. We have increased beds and staff at Crawley hospital, and I was pleased to open a new MRI scanner earlier this year.

None of that would have been possible without the previous Government's commitment to increase funding on the NHS. Through the Health and Social Care Act 2012, they ensured that many more decisions are made locally by the Crawley clinical commissioning group, which means that local doctors and clinicians have far greater influence to meet the needs of my population and my constituents in Crawley. It was a very welcome development.

I support the Government's commitment to invest further in the NHS and to increase its funding, and their commitment to ensure that GP services are extended, not only for patients' convenience, but to ensure that, as far as possible, we divert those unnecessary attendances at the urgent treatment centre at Crawley hospital and A&E at East Surrey hospital. That initiative will have a significant impact on reducing the pressure on A&E.

In addition, I support and welcome the Government's commitment to ensure that social care plays an important part, so that people who should not be detained in hospital any longer, not only for their own health needs but for the health of the healthcare system, are moved into appropriate care settings. That will mean more capacity for A&E.

Finally, on the future of healthcare in the Crawley area, my constituency contains Gatwick airport. Next week, we will hear the results of the Airports Commission into runway expansion. If Gatwick is the commission's choice, an awful lot of infrastructure investment will need to be placed into the area, not only for transport such as rail and roads but for healthcare. Should Gatwick airport be the Government's final decision—for the reasons of infrastructure pressure, I do not believe Gatwick is the appropriate location—an absolute necessity would be a new acute hospital with full A&E.

I welcome what the Government have done to support our national health service and their commitment in this Parliament, and I look forward to playing my part in ensuring that the needs of our patients and the needs of our NHS remain a central priority.

3.33 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech during this debate.

Earlier this year, our A&E department at Salford Royal hospital—a flagship of NHS excellence—endured a period of crisis that was a symptom not just of the

national shortfall in funding but of the far wider challenges we face in my constituency of Salford and Eccles. None the less, Salford, Eccles, Swinton and Pendlebury collectively make an amazing place to live, in terms of both the spirit of their people and their ambition to achieve the unthinkable.

We have a rich political history. I am a proud socialist, and if any city personifies the struggles of the working class and the Labour movement, it is Salford. Salford was pivotal in the creation of the trade union movement, with Salford and Manchester trades councils founding the TUC in 1868. On 1 October 1931, thousands swarmed to Salford town hall, where a violent demonstration took place. It came to be known as the battle of Bexley Square. They were protesting at the 10% cut in unemployment benefit introduced by the new national Government. Sadly, we face similar struggles in Salford and Eccles today.

Freidrich Engels's pioneering work, "The Condition of the Working Class" was inspired by the struggles he witnessed in Salford, where he owned a factory and could often be found drinking in The Crescent pub with Karl Marx. Members will be delighted to know that Engels's magnificent beard has inspired a climbing wall sculpture in Salford. The 16-foot beard statue—a "symbol of wisdom and learning"—will stand on the University of Salford's campus. Members will be able to scale the impressive beard to a viewing platform at the top, where they might find time to rest and contemplate.

We are a city facing the legacy of post-industrial decline. Members may recall the song "Dirty Old Town", penned by Ewan MacColl and later sung by, among others, The Pogues, about finding love in 20th century industrial Salford by the gasworks wall. The gasworks wall still exists today, but Salford's gas industry has largely disappeared, along with our mining community, destroyed in the 1980s, as was our large shipping, engineering and manufacturing base. Thousands of lives, hopes and dreams were shattered, with generations locked in a cycle of low-paid unskilled work. We were told that free market globalisation of industry would eventually see wealth trickle down from the top. We are still waiting.

We were a city on its knees and we can be thankful for the foresight of Salford's Labour councillors who encouraged investment and growth. They championed the transformation of the derelict docks into Salford Quays, now a residential and cultural quarter housing the Lowry gallery, theatre and shopping centre. Again, it was the Salford Labour Council and our local MPs who ensured the building of Media City, the new headquarters for the BBC and ITV, against resistance from a southern-based media that saw anything north of the Watford gap as a social and cultural backwater.

I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Hazel Blears. Elected alongside a record number of women MPs in 1997, Hazel is admired by many, including me, for breaking the glass ceiling not just for women in Salford but for all women from working class backgrounds like myself. Indeed, much of Hazel's time in the House was dedicated to promoting schemes that would give young people from disadvantaged areas the chance to forge a career in politics and other vocations.

I would also like to honour Ian Stewart, who served as MP from 1997 to 2010, for the now abolished constituency of Eccles. Ian was a proud trade unionist,

[Rebecca Long Bailey]

like myself, who never forgot the poverty and struggles of his childhood. Recently, in his current role as Mayor of Salford, Ian urged the Government to rethink the savage cuts to the Salford City Council budget, austerity measures that are neither justified nor necessary. These cuts are now sawing through the bones of our already fragile public services and they severely impact on the most vulnerable.

It might startle hon. Members to hear that life expectancy in the more deprived parts of my constituency is lower than the life expectancy of people living in the Gaza strip. Some 30% of children in parts of my constituency live in poverty. Our unemployment rates are above the national average and our wages for those in work far below it. Many families are trapped in a cycle of poverty and low-paid and insecure work. The gap between rich and poor is now growing at a faster rate than in the Victorian era. Evidence from the world over indicates that health outcomes are linked not just to material poverty but economic inequality. It reduces social cohesion, leading to more stress, fear, and insecurity, which places even greater strain on our NHS and public services. Our NHS will only truly succeed when we invest in people and their quality of life. That means adequate funding for our public services, decent and affordable housing, well-paid secure jobs and a clear and apparent reduction in income inequality between those at the top and those at the bottom.

My constituency and its people have a proud socialist history. I intend to use my time in the House to fight for them to have a proud socialist future as well.

3.39 pm

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Before I move on to the comments I intend to make, may I pay tribute to an excellent maiden speech by the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey)? Her pride in her home town is obvious. It shone through in a very punchy and effective maiden speech, and I thank her for giving it.

My mother spent most of her professional life as a midwife in Lewisham hospital, the hospital of my birth. I used to go to her office and do my homework there after I left school, so I was literally born and brought up in Lewisham hospital. Both my sons were born in Lewisham hospital—a hospital I love and am proud of. I do not doubt for a second the passion of Opposition Members for the NHS. I remind them, however, that they do not have a monopoly on passion and respect for the national health service.

We are talking today about waiting times in A&E. There are many complicated and compounding pressures that drive those waiting times. This debate could and should have been an opportunity to discuss them and look for solutions and mitigations. I was taken by the calm and professional speech of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). While she was speaking, it was impossible to be in the Chamber and not to be heavily influenced by the remarks she made. We would all be in a significantly better place if, during the rest of this speech and the rest of our time in this Parliament, NHS debates could be conducted in the manner in which the hon. Lady delivered her speech.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

James Cleverly: I will not take interventions, because I am conscious of how many others wish to speak.

A&E waiting times are driven by three factors: the number of people coming in; the time it takes to treat them; and the ability to discharge or transfer patients. I do not have time to discuss the process that happens while patients are in an A&E department, so I will let others with more direct operational experience do that. It is ridiculous for any of us to pretend that the changes to the GP contract of 2004 did not have a significant and detrimental effect on waiting times for A&E. The fact that 90% of GPs chose to opt out of out-of-hours provision must have had an effect on the number of people going to A&E departments.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab) *rose*—

James Cleverly: I am not taking interventions.

The fact that the ability to discharge patients back into the community is dependent on the ability to care for them while they are in the community means that adult social care must be considered an essential and integral part of the A&E mix. If general wards are not able to discharge into the community, they are not able to make bed spaces available and, in turn, A&E departments are not able to transfer to other wards within the hospital.

I therefore pay tribute to the excellent work done on the Manchester model, putting together NHS provision and adult social care, so that the obvious inter-relationship between the two could be looked at holistically. I am happy that some Opposition Members—perhaps only some of them—welcomed the introduction of the Manchester model. Again, if we could work in a cross-party, collegiate way to learn the lessons from that integrated service model in Manchester and roll it out nationally, I think we would be in a much better place for looking at and subsequently dealing with the problem of A&E waiting times.

It has been alleged—I am sure Opposition Members will all leap to their feet to deny it—that Labour Members were keen during the last general election to weaponise the NHS. [*Interruption.*] Those were not my words. This is too important an issue to turn into a party political football. I will make this commitment—
[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order.

James Cleverly: I am obliged, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Let me make this commitment: if I perceive that my own Front Benchers are trying to turn the issue into a political football, I will be as critical of them as I am of Opposition Members.

Money is a very important of the NHS mix, and I welcome the fact that my party has committed itself to funding the NHS to the levels recommended by experts in the field, but money alone is not enough. More money has been given to GPs' surgeries, but the St Lawrence medical practice in my constituency is still struggling, which is forcing a number of people to use local A&E services.

This is an important issue; let us discuss it with decorum. I commend the Government's actions.

3.45 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you and the House will indulge me if I spend my six minutes giving an update on the “Shaping a healthier future” programme, which afflicts west and north-west London. I have done so several times during the three years since—to the consternation and disbelief of 2 million people in those areas—the programme was announced, although there was something of a hiatus over the election period.

I do not want to be self-indulgent, but I think that the subject of “Shaping a healthier future” is one to which all Members will wish to pay attention, because it is the biggest closure programme in the history of the NHS. Four out of nine A&E departments and two major hospitals have been substantially downgraded. Many see the programme as a prototype for the Keogh review of urgent and emergency care. I wonder what has happened to the latest stage of that review; we heard nothing about it from the Under-Secretary of State. It was put on ice last year because a proposal for the downgrading of most of the type 1 A&E departments in the country was seen as political suicide, but it now seems to have disappeared completely. I hope that there are good clinical reasons for that.

Reference has already been made to the excellent briefing with which Members were provided yesterday by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine. Here are three of the statistics that the college came up with. The increase in A&E attendances last year was equivalent to the workload of seven large A&E departments; only 2% of A&E attendances involve major trauma, stroke and heart attack patients; and a maximum of 15% of patients who attend A&E departments could be seen in a non-hospital setting. Even that must be subject to a caveat, because I suspect that a fair number of the people who go to A&E departments are not knowingly accelerating their symptoms or time-wasting, but have genuine concerns, perhaps for a child with a fever that might be a symptom of flu but, again, might be due to meningitis.

The solution proposed by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine is co-location. Its briefing states:

“Costly and time-consuming efforts to encourage patients to seek advice on urgent care by telephone or to attend elsewhere... have not reduced A&E attendances. Rather than blaming patients for attending A&E, when we know they have great difficulty accessing supposed alternatives, RCEM advocates a completely new approach. We believe that the issue should be dealt with by collocating”.

However, many hospitals in west London are already co-located, so that cannot be a solution for them.

There have been a number of developments in the past three or four months. Chelsea and Westminster hospital is about to take over West Middlesex University hospital. That new trust will believe that it can maintain two fully functioning type 1 A&E departments—unless another is to close in the area. Why, then, is Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust expected to manage with only one major A&E service in its three hospitals?

Ealing hospital’s maternity unit will close on 1 July. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), who could not stay for this part of the debate, asked me specifically to mention that, because it is a matter of great concern, not least because it will have an impact on other maternity services in the area.

We are still suffering the effects of the closure of the A&E departments at Hammersmith and Central Middlesex hospitals last September, including four-hour waiting times at other hospitals such as Charing Cross hospital in my constituency, which is persistently below target. At the same time, stroke services are being centralised at Charing Cross for at least the next five years, having been transferred from St Mary’s hospital, although the plan is to move them away in due course.

In the last two years, £33 million has been spent on consultants just for the purposes of the “Shaping a healthier future” programme, of which £12.5 million was spent on a single consultant, McKinsey. That is £27,000 a day, and it could pay for 300 new nurses. Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust is spending one eighth of its staffing budget on bank and agency staff, and the most recent figures show that it had an £18.5 million deficit.

Against this crisis—and it is a crisis—in A&E, the proposal in relation to Charing Cross, a major emergency hospital in my constituency, is that all its buildings be demolished, that its beds be reduced from 360 to 24, and that it lose all consultant emergency services. The population of London, and of west London in particular, is going to go up massively over the next 10 years. That is unprecedented. This is a very poor scheme, not just clinically for the reasons that the Royal College of Emergency Medicine gives, but logistically, spatially and financially.

I am grateful to the Minister and the Secretary of State for the opportunity, at last, before the summer recess to meet and discuss these matters in depth. I will therefore say no more about them today. I look forward to that opportunity, and I know the Minister will attend in good faith and look at the concerns we all have about the “Shaping a healthier future” programme. These are not idle concerns. It is obviously in the Whips’ brief for Government Members to say, “Let’s not make the NHS a political football,” but I do not think any Opposition Member is doing so. We are not in an election period.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a bit rich for Government Members to accuse us of using the NHS as a party political football, when prior to the 2014 local elections the Ilford North Conservative Association put out a leaflet claiming that King George hospital’s A&E would not close, when before the general election we were told its closure would be reprieved, and when the NHS trust chief executive has now told us that the closure plan will be published in the next six to nine months. That was playing party politics with the NHS, cynically.

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I make sure that every time I refer to what is happening in my local NHS now, I look into the voluminous papers on “Shaping a healthier future”, or what the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust actually says, so that I am clear that I am describing what is happening, not giving my opinion or saying something that has come from a party political standpoint. I simply wish that the Government would listen and respond in kind.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I apologise for coming late to my hon. Friend’s speech. The reason why is that outside Ealing hospital there are

[John McDonnell]

currently 200 people demonstrating because of the maternity unit's closure, which will put undue stress on the local community. He has listened to many of the arguments regarding its closure, and none of them stacks up. Perhaps those 200 people will be listened to.

Andy Slaughter: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. No one does more than him, directly and positively, to draw attention to the crisis in the NHS in west London. His local hospital, Hillingdon, is not closing, but throughout the process over the past three years he has been absolutely steadfast in defending and supporting those of us whose local NHS is being downgraded, not just because he is a good comrade, but because he knows that the knock-on effect of hospital closures will make it impossible for any of the 2 million people throughout north-west and west London to receive a decent health service.

I shall say no more today, as other Members wish to speak. I again thank the Minister for the opportunity we will have to make our case. I hope the Government are listening on this matter, which is the most urgent matter that I have dealt with in my 30 years as a councillor and as an MP. It is about the preservation of the NHS for a substantial part of London's population. These are genuine and legitimate concerns, and I hope the Government will listen to them.

3.53 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I, too, congratulate the two new Members, for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) and for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), who have spoken. I made my maiden speech a couple of weeks ago and know what a terrifying experience it is.

As Members from all parts of the House may already know, I have watched the NHS provide first-class healthcare to my mother, who has had a debilitating long-term musculoskeletal condition for the past 20 years. I am absolutely certain that without the support of the NHS her pain and suffering would have been an awful lot worse. Having said that, I should note that on a number of occasions she has needed to visit A&E to make her condition a little better, and, although improvements have been seen, her experiences have been mixed. I appreciate that my family's case is just one example of this care. Improvements have been seen but people from around the UK are facing a mixed picture on care received at A&Es.

From the outset, I wish to stress, in agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), that turning this issue into a political football is not helpful and that this is not a new issue. I have worked alongside the NHS for seven years and have given advice and support to four Health Secretaries, both Labour and Conservative, with each saying that they would do all they could to improve A&Es across the UK and more than their predecessor to cut unnecessary bureaucracy for medical professionals. As I said, this issue is not a new one. Emergency medical professionals have been warning that a hiatus has been on the horizon for a decade or more. I am therefore pleased that this Secretary of State has recognised the need to look at the issue much more seriously and holistically.

I would like to spend some time correcting a number of myths that have been espoused by the Opposition. First, and most importantly, I should say that the increase in A&E attendance is not because funding has been cut. The better care programme, designed to integrate health and social care services between national Government and local authorities, is predicted to reduce A&E admissions by 3%. The 111 service launched in 2013 directs 8% of callers to A&E departments, whereas 30% of these people would have gone to A&E if the service were not available. In addition, £150 million has been provided to fund evening and weekend GP appointments, through the Prime Minister's challenge fund, meaning that people can access care through GPs instead of having to go to A&E.

Given that picture, we are clearly not going to be able to provide the high-quality care that is needed without proper investment. I am pleased that this Government have decided to take on board the recommendations of Simon Stevens and invest a further £8 billion in the NHS. That, of course, will have a significant positive effect on A&Es. Last year, the Government invested a record total of £700 million, ensuring local services had the certainty of additional money and time to plan how best to use it. As the Royal College of Emergency Medicine said:

"This represents the largest annual additional funding yet seen."

I know from speaking to people at the Royal United hospital in my constituency that this additional investment has really helped.

The Opposition spend most of their time trying to do down our achievements, which the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), espoused in his opening remarks, but the protection of the NHS budget and the additional funding since 2010 has enabled A&E departments' capacity to increase significantly since 2010. That additional funding has paid for 2,500 beds in both acute and community treatment, and the equivalent of 1,000 new doctors. We have now added almost 1,200 additional A&E doctors, including an additional 400 A&E consultants, and 1,700 additional paramedics since 2010. The additional £2 billion being invested in front-line care in 2015-16 will go a long way to supporting the NHS into the next winter.

My next point relates to weekly reporting of A&E data. The Opposition will be very much aware that the best healthcare decisions are clinically led, although it seemed as though they disagreed with that earlier on. As Sir Bruce Keogh rightly explained in his recent letter to the chief executive of NHS England:

"There is concern that, in a small number of instances, some targets are provoking perverse behaviours and the complexity of others is obscuring their purpose and meaning."

I agree with him that the A&E standard has been an important means of ensuring that people who need to get rapid access to urgent and emergency care do so, and we must not lose that focus. I also agree that with him that we do not need to review the four-hour standard at this time and that we need to look at a wider range of measures if we are to drive improved outcomes across the entire system.

I totally agree with the suggestion that we standardise reporting arrangements so that performance statistics for A&E, referral to treatment times, cancer, diagnostics,

ambulances, 111 and delayed transfers of care are all published on one day each month. That fits very nicely with the calls from medical practitioners across the UK for a reduction in the burdens of bureaucracy that have been crippling productivity at the heart of our NHS. One key reason for my brother and his wife leaving this country to practise medicine in New Zealand was this overarching issue of bureaucracy. I very much hope this plan will show medical professionals and patients that we all look to improve the quality of data collection.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I do not know whether my hon. Friend had this experience, but during the election campaign a number of constituents told me how excellent the services were in A&E. Of course we have a brand new unit at the Lister hospital, but did he have the same experience?

Ben Howlett: Yes, absolutely, I did. When I was speaking to countless residents on the doorsteps across Bath, I found that the quality of provision of the Royal United hospital and other hospitals around the rest of the UK was tremendous. I spend a lot more time than Opposition Members do in thanking NHS professionals for the work they are doing in my constituency and elsewhere.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab) *rose*—

Ben Howlett: I am coming to my conclusion, so I will not take an intervention.

In conclusion, I very much hope that the Secretary of State will continue to find the investment that is needed in our A&Es to keep up with the pressures; think about the need to encourage better access to primary care and community care; and reduce the burdens of bureaucracy that have afflicted our NHS for so long, and that resulted in my brother and his wife fleeing to New Zealand to escape.

4 pm

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): It is indeed a huge honour, Madam Deputy Speaker, to be called by you today to make my maiden speech in this very important debate on A&E services in the NHS. As an introduction, I can report with a small measure of glee that the NHS in Dumfries and Galloway has treated 96.8% of all A&E outpatients within the Scottish Government's target of four hours. The NHS remains safe in public hands north of the border.

As is customary, I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr Russell Brown, who was elected to this House in 1997 on a tidal wave of Blairite euphoria, ousting the seemingly immovable Sir Hector Monro. My election to this House has absolutely nothing to do with Russell Brown as a person or as a constituency MP. He was merely a victim of the political reawakening that has occurred all over Scotland, and the resultant Scottish National party tsunami, and he was let down badly by his party. My message to Russell is simple: thank you, Russell, for your tireless dedication to the people of Dumfries and Galloway.

The Labour party has left the people of Dumfries and Galloway and of Scotland; it is not the other way round. My message to those on the Labour Benches is simple: can they please get their act together? We had an opportunity to defeat this Tory Government

last week to create a referendum fairness board, and they blew it. They would rather sit on their hands or vote with the Tories than support an SNP proposal. They should ditch the tribal opposition and work with us so that we can put this wafer-thin majority to its full test.

This SNP group is determined to dismantle the myths that surround our brand of nationalism. Perhaps I am in the best position to dispel those particular myths, because I am not from a traditional SNP nationalist household. Independence is not an argument that I used to subscribe to; I actually voted no to devolution in 1997, and I only joined the SNP four days after the independence referendum. My conversion has been protracted, evidence-based and not led by blind patriotism. As a dual qualified lawyer and businessman, I was invited to speak at a town hall debate, a mere 15 months ago, during the referendum, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh). I kept getting invited back—almost 50 times in fact. Here I am, 15 months later, in this world famous Chamber representing the people of my home region. What a privilege it is. A special mention goes to my wonderful wife, Anne, whose dedication to our two young children allows me to take up the privilege in this House.

Dumfries and Galloway, or the Scottish Riviera as I prefer to call it, is a constituency of serene beauty, abundant wildlife, vast forestry, rolling hills and a coastline that stretches almost 200 miles. It runs from my home town of Stranraer in the west to Wigtown, Newton Stewart and Whithorn in the Machars, to Gatehouse of Fleet, Kirkcudbright, Castle Douglas in the Stewartry, all the way across to Dalbeattie and Dumfries in the east. There is something for everyone. It is a place that I love dearly, and we are indeed a resilient bunch. It is, and should be even more, a tourist mecca. There are so many festivals and community initiatives—simply too many to mention in total. Members should visit the book town of Wigtown, the artists' town of Kirkcudbright, and the Wickerman festival. They should watch out for the UK's finest oyster festival in Stranraer, coming soon. We are a region of entrepreneurs, innovators and inventors. We invented the pedal bicycle and discovered electro-magnetism, and we gave Christianity to Scotland in the fifth century through St Ninian of Whithorn.

In my view, Dumfries and Galloway is dynamic and growing, with more small businesses employing fewer than 10 people per head of population than any other constituency in Scotland—a remarkable statistic, given the rural economic disadvantages that we suffer. Small businesses are our largest employers, the lifeblood of our community and the lifeblood of our economy, but they need serious help to fulfil their potential. Throughout my constituency, 3G networks are very rare and 4G virtually non-existent; fibre-optic cables do not reach the outlying areas. That is simply not good enough. Would it not be fantastic if 5G was rolled out with 100% geographical coverage in the rural areas of the UK that need the help the most—places like Dumfries and Galloway? That is the real way we can rebalance our economy and it is something I pledge to fight extremely hard for in the coming years.

No maiden speech by an MP for Dumfries and Galloway would be complete without reference to our national treasure, Robert Burns. Although he was born

[Richard Arkless]

in Ayrshire, we in Dumfries and Galloway claim Scotland's national bard as our very own. Burns wrote of the River Nith, which runs through the heart of Dumfries,

"The banks of the Nith are as sweet poetic ground as any I ever saw".

It is hard to disagree. Dumfries was inspirational to Burns, who was at his most productive when living there, composing classics such as "Auld Lang Syne" and the masterpiece "Tam o' Shanter". However, poverty and hunger were ever present in Robert Burns' life. We have food banks in Dumfries and Galloway, frequented not only by the poor and the disadvantaged, but by victims of draconian benefits sanctions and, more important, the working poor—people who work full-time but still find themselves living in poverty. In 2015 in my constituency, children are going to school hungry. Austerity policies are literally starving our children not just of a happy childhood, but of a successful future. Burns' gratitude for good nourishment was clear when he wrote:

"Some hae meat and canna eat,
And some wad eat that want it,
But we hae meat and we can eat,
Sae let the Lord be thankit."

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I call Andrea Jenkyns. The time limit is now four minutes.

4.7 pm

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) on his passionate maiden speech. I know how nerve-racking it can be to speak here.

I have experienced the good and the bad of the NHS. I have lost a loved one, but also seen the excellent care that my mum received when she had a knee replacement recently, and that my sister has received for her multiple sclerosis. For my university research dissertation, I looked at healthcare systems around the world, their per capita spend and outcomes. I can honestly say that my research showed that no country and no Government get it right 100% of the time, but I for one am proud of our NHS and I urge Labour Members to stop talking it down and to drop their selective amnesia. Every Member of this House has something to learn from our party history and I would like us all to pull together for the NHS.

We all have lessons to learn, so let us look at the UK statistics on A&E services. NHS England has a 95% A&E target and achieves 93%; the figure for Labour-controlled Wales is 83%, and for SNP-controlled Scotland, 87%. [Interruption.] Those are the figures from NHS Scotland, so perhaps hon. Members should check that out.

Karin Smyth: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Andrea Jenkyns: No, as I have only three minutes.

My point is that every Member of this House has lessons to learn. I think we should be critical friends, looking honestly at what works and what does not, and sharing best practice. If we look at our record, we see that NHS England has the best emergency care of any western nation. We should celebrate that fact. In Yorkshire and Humber alone, we have 582 more doctors and nurses than in 2010, and I celebrate that. I have worked

for healthcare charities for the last four years. Today I met a patients' association and, together, we are setting up an all-party parliamentary group on patient care. We need to do things in a constructive manner, rather than using this issue for political means. It is only through collective working, including working with patients' groups and healthcare charities, and by looking at strong local leadership on a ward-by-ward basis, that change can happen.

I welcome the Government's decision to have a seven-day NHS. We will need to look at how that is managed, but it will take pressure off our A&E services. I will finish by saying that we need to be a critical friend. We need to be honest and make sure there are consequences when things go wrong, and that lessons are learned. We also need to celebrate our fantastic NHS, in which we are still investing. I urge every Member in the House to support that.

4.10 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): First, I place on record my condolences to the friends and family of the two people who tragically lost their life at Ealing Broadway station yesterday. I am sure that all Members of the House will join me in that.

Who was it who said,

"I think of the emergency nurse practitioner in Surrey, still in his overalls, telling me that closing A&E means an hour long drive to hospital for some people, and potentially lives lost"?

Does anyone know? It was the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) in 2007. In my constituency, that possibility is becoming a reality. Four of our A&E units have either been closed or are closing. Charing Cross hospital has numerous specialisms, but 55% of the site has been earmarked for luxury housing—you couldn't make it up. Both Hammersmith and Central Middlesex hospitals' A&Es have already shut their doors, although Central Middlesex's was a brand-new, well-rated facility. People are being diverted to Northwick Park, over 7 miles away from those two, which the Government's own Care Quality Commission has rated as a failing hospital.

The Government claim that these units have been saved, but their replacement—urgent care centres—cannot be used for emergencies, are staffed by general practitioners rather than consultants, and do not take ambulances. In short, they are not A&Es. Ealing hospital—my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has gone now—loses its maternity services this month. The last projected birth is today, 24 June. People see that as a precursor of things to come, given what is happening to A&E.

Ealing hospital is where I lost my dad in September, so it is a place I know well. I remember the building going up in 1979. My dad was nearly 80 and had been ill for a long time, but we hear of cases such as that of the two-year-old in north London who was taken to what people thought was an A&E, but it had closed down, and he died. These cases are dismissed as anomalies, but they will become more and more frequent, if not the norm.

In my constituency, Mrs Khorsandi lives in the next road to Central Middlesex hospital. In November, after its closure, she had a seizure and was taken to Northwick Park. Her daughter Shappi Khorsandi told me that the

hospital discharged her, even though she was not well enough. It was clear that there was no room for her. Her daughter said, “As I don’t drive, she came home in a taxi. She has no recollection of that.” The mother had another fit at her daughter’s house, hit her head on the sink, was taken to hospital again, and had a third seizure in front of the doctors. The daughter told me that they were amazing. Out of nowhere, five people appeared, and they were excellent; however, they had no time to breathe, let alone answer questions. NHS staff are doing the best they can, but they are operating in incredibly uphill circumstances.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that while her urban constituency contrasts dramatically with my rural constituency, Government Front-Benchers should recognise the challenging geographical differences between our constituencies? The reason why the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust may run a £26.3 million deficit is our challenging rural area.

Dr Huq: Yes. My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Another constituent of mine, Mr Anand, lives near Hammersmith hospital and its now closed A&E. He wrote to me describing what he called “near third-world conditions”, and a queue of 10 ambulances. NHS North West London has had the worst waiting times in the country. We have witnessed cutting corners in a process that adds up to its fragmentation and selling off.

The Tory promise, “No top-down reorganisation of the NHS”, did not come to pass for my constituents. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) described, NHS North West London has spent £33 million in two years on consultants. It spent £13.2 million this year alone, including on Saatchi and Saatchi and McKinsey, through its programme “Shaping a healthier future”, which the locals see as trying to justify the closure of hospitals. Do not get me started on the famously airbrushed poster from 2010 that proclaimed, “I’ll cut the deficit, not the NHS”. In west London, that does not ring true. Ealing used to be known for comedy, but what has happened to our NHS locally has gone beyond a joke.

4.15 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): We have had a good debate. I pay tribute to hon. Members who made their maiden speeches. I particularly congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) and for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey). Having been a student at the University of Salford, I had not realised until now that I followed in the footsteps of Marx and Engels by supping in The Crescent; you learn something new every day. The hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) also made his maiden speech. I congratulate them on their contributions. It is clear that all three will make their presence felt in the House of Commons in the coming years.

I thank the other Members who have contributed, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who leads on health issues for the SNP. On the Government Benches, we

heard from the hon. Members for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson), for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), for Crawley (Henry Smith), for Braintree (James Cleverly), for Bath (Ben Howlett), and for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns). Many Conservative Members stuck very closely to their party’s policy research unit paper, a copy of which I was conveniently sent earlier today. I congratulate them on being so loyal to their Whips Office.

It would be very remiss of me not to place on record my own tribute to the doctors, nurses, healthcare assistants and other dedicated NHS staff who provide such extraordinary and professional care. Many Members of this House who have been here for a number of years will know that I had a run of bad health about five years ago. As a result, I became far more familiar with my own local hospitals, Tameside general and Stepping Hill, than I had hoped to, even given my position as a constituency Member of Parliament and a shadow Health Minister. I have experienced the very best of NHS care. If I am honest, I also experienced some care that did not meet the standards that we perhaps expect of our NHS. I know, however, that we have a workforce who are completely dedicated and caring.

The House should be in absolutely no doubt, though, that those staff are under a great deal of pressure—sustained pressure that has been building over the past five years. The facts need to be laid out in the open, and Ministers need to be challenged on their fictions. They made all sorts of desperate promises to get them through an election campaign, and now they need to show where the money is going to come from to pay for those promises and to set out exactly how they are going to deliver them. Yet what have Ministers been doing since the general election? I do not disagree with Professor Sir Bruce Keogh’s decision to improve the publication of data for mental health and for cancer—that is welcome—but I do disagree with what this Government intend to do in relation to A&E data. Instead of dealing with the pressure facing the NHS in England, they have decided to stop publishing weekly data about those pressures.

Helen Whately: Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the NHS leads the world in transparency, and that an excessive focus on one data point—the four-hour target for A&E—is detrimental overall to patients?

Andrew Gwynne: We should remember, of course, that the last Labour Government started that transparency with heart and stroke data.

I think we all know what is going on here. There can be no clearer sign of the Tories’ failure on the NHS than the fact that hospital accident and emergency departments have now missed their own four-hour target for 100 weeks in a row. This is a landmark failure, to which the Prime Minister promised he would not return. The reality is that this Government caused the crisis by making it harder to see a GP and by stripping back social care services.

Let us be under no illusions—[*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State can chunter, but social care cuts are NHS cuts. The Government made damaging mistakes that have seen the number of people going into hospital soar. The best thing that they could do is to admit it and explain what they are going to do to fix the problem. It is stunning that their only solution is to spin their mistakes and to make the NHS less transparent.

[Andrew Gwynne]

Let me briefly come on to nurse staffing problems. Only this week, we have seen yet another example of poor policy coming out of the Department of Health. If it insists, along with the Home Office, that migrants not earning £35,000 after six years must go home, that will cut a hole right through the middle of our NHS. The Royal College of Nursing estimates that 6,620 nurses will have to leave the country by 2020. Because of the Government's failure to train adequate numbers of nurses in the UK, those nurses will have cost almost £40 million to recruit from overseas. People coming from other countries to work in the NHS make a huge contribution and our health service would not be able to cope without them, but this is now a mess entirely of Ministers' own making.

The short-sighted cuts to nurse training in the early years of the last Parliament left NHS hospitals with no option but to recruit from overseas or hire expensive agency nurses. That is also one of the main reasons why many hospital trusts are now in deficit. It was an absolutely profound error and I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that. As ever with this Government, patients and taxpayers will pay the price for the Prime Minister's mismanagement of the health services.

There have been further mistakes. On GP access, it stands to reason that if it is made harder to see a GP, people will be more likely to end up in hospital. As we have heard, the reasons for the crisis are many, but the lack of access to GP services appears to account for much of the problem. No amount of obfuscation and massaging of figures can hide the fact that this Government have made it harder to get a GP appointment. All Members will know of constituents who have had to phone their doctors only to be told that no appointments are available and that they should ring back the next day—which they do, only to experience the same problem again. That they end up in frustration in A&E should not come as any shock.

The Prime Minister has now repeated his 2010 promise to provide access to GPs seven days a week, but he cannot even provide access to them five days a week. When patients want up-to-date information on how their local hospital is performing, this Government plan to publish the data less frequently. I hope that the Government will now see sense, and I commend our motion to the House.

4.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): Time is rather short, but I want to start by acknowledging one or two things. First, it is nice to see at least one signatory to the Labour non-grandstanding pact present for the closing speeches, if not the opening ones.

More importantly, there were three maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) mentioned James Brown, and the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) mentioned The Pogues, so a musical theme has run through the debate. The hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) took us to the Scottish riviera, via a wonderful Burns quote. We all enjoyed their maiden speeches very much. We also heard some thoughtful speeches from people with experience in the service.

I say to those who are new to the House that those of us who were here in the last Parliament have a sense of déjà vu about this debate and, indeed, the motion. We want to move on from that. The public gave us a mandate in the election based on our record on the NHS, our commitment to safeguard its future, our honesty in accepting the challenges that lie ahead and the need to find long-term solutions. A number of right hon. and hon. Members alluded to those challenges and solutions. The public saw through the Opposition's tired attack at the election and realised that we were the party that was not only acknowledging the long-term pressures, but committing the resources that the NHS said it needed to continue to be the best health service in the world. That remains the big challenge for the Opposition.

As was said by the Chair of the Health Committee, whom I congratulate on her re-election, the election is behind us and we need to look forward; we need to look at the areas where there is consensus and remember the impact that debates in this House have on the wonderful staff in our NHS.

Let me put on the record what is happening in our accident and emergency services. The NHS in England achieved 94.9% of people in A&E being seen, treated and discharged in four hours. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who spoke for the SNP, underlined just what an achievement it is to deliver on those targets. We all enjoyed her thoughtful and measured contribution very much.

The change from weekly to monthly A&E performance reporting is based on the clinical advice of Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, the NHS medical director, as other Members have said. Far from reducing transparency, the change will increase it because, from August, NHS England will publish the key NHS performance data together. That will include more frequent reporting of cancer waits—something that is widely welcomed by cancer charities. The change is not only clinically based, but is supported by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, the Nuffield Trust, the NHS Confederation and the Patients Association. The Opposition are way out of line with all those bodies in their criticisms of the change.

There has been talk of deficits in NHS providers. Of course that is cause for concern, but we are taking action on those deficits. As I said, during the general election campaign we talked about what we could do to address such long-term challenges. In opening the debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer) mentioned the specific measures that are being taken to address trusts' deficits and help them get back into a better situation.

On GP access, the fact is that four out of five people are able to get an appointment when it is convenient. We are building on that by investing £175 million in extending GP access. By March next year, the Prime Minister's challenge fund will cover 18 million people, who will get extended hours and weekend appointments if they need them.

We have heard from hon. Members that GPs and other health professionals are responding positively to the challenges that the circumstances have set them. I was interested to hear of the innovations that my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) told us about in his area. We

heard about the focus on increased access to mammography in Crawley. There were many other great examples of how the service is innovating.

To meet demand, we have 1,200 more GPs than in 2010. The Secretary of State spoke only last week about a new way forward for GPs and an increased focus on under-doctored areas. That came out in a number of contributions, including that of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright).

Providing the funding to support the NHS's "Five Year Forward View" has only been possible because of our long-term economic plan. We remain committed to listening to and supporting the NHS as it works through the detail of the delivery of the "Five Year Forward View".

We are building on our record of achievement. Compared with five years ago, our NHS performs over 1 million more operations; has 9,100 more doctors and 8,800 more nurses; and sees, treats and discharges 3,000 more people within the four-hour target. We intend to build on those achievements in this Parliament. It is a great track record. However, the NHS simply cannot go on treating more people at that rate, so as Simon Stevens has said, we need to go up several gears on prevention—a subject to which I hope we will return at another time.

There is growing political consensus on the need to integrate health and social care, which hon. Members have spoken about, and this Government have started to do that. It is all right to talk about it, but with the better care fund the Government have started to do it.

A strong NHS needs a strong economy, and that remains the unanswered question for the Opposition, both in the election and every time they sponsor one of these debates. We are committed to supporting our NHS, not running it down. We are backing the NHS's own plan for meeting the challenges and opportunities of the future. That promise was not matched by the Opposition, and the public knew it. It remains the elephant in the room for their Front Benchers.

As we go forward, that is where we on the Government side will be putting our collective energy: patients before party; prevention as well as cure; backing our NHS, not running it down. I urge the House to reject the motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 270, Noes 309.

Division No. 24]

[4.30 pm

AYES

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Abbott, Ms Diane | Blackman, Kirsty |
| Abrahams, Debbie | Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta |
| Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina | Blomfield, Paul |
| Alexander, Heidi | Boswell, Philip |
| Ali, Rushanara | Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben |
| Allen, Mr Graham | Brennan, Kevin |
| Anderson, Mr David | Brock, Deidre |
| Arkless, Richard | Brown, Alan |
| Ashworth, Jonathan | Brown, Lyn |
| Austin, Ian | Brown, rh Mr Nicholas |
| Bailey, Mr Adrian | Bryant, Chris |
| Barron, rh Kevin | Buck, Ms Karen |
| Beckett, rh Margaret | Burden, Richard |
| Berger, Luciana | Burgon, Richard |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Butler, Dawn |
| Black, Ms Mhairi | Byrne, rh Liam |
| Blackford, Ian | Cadbury, Ruth |

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Cameron, Dr Lisa | Harpham, Harry |
| Campbell, rh Mr Alan | Harris, Carolyn |
| Campbell, Mr Ronnie | Hayes, Helen |
| Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair | Hayman, Sue |
| Carswell, Mr Douglas | Hendrick, Mr Mark |
| Chapman, Douglas | Hendry, Drew |
| Chapman, Jenny | Hepburn, Mr Stephen |
| Cherry, Joanna | Hermon, Lady |
| Clwyd, rh Ann | Hillier, Meg |
| Coaker, Vernon | Hodge, rh Margaret |
| Coffey, Ann | Hodgson, Mrs Sharon |
| Cooper, Julie | Hoey, Kate |
| Cooper, Rosie | Hollern, Kate |
| Corbyn, Jeremy | Hopkins, Kelvin |
| Cowan, Ronnie | Howarth, rh Mr George |
| Cox, Jo | Hunt, Tristram |
| Coyle, Neil | Huq, Dr Rupa |
| Crausby, Mr David | Hussain, Imran |
| Crawley, Angela | Irranca-Davies, Huw |
| Creasy, Stella | Jarvis, Dan |
| Cruddas, Jon | Johnson, rh Alan |
| Cryer, John | Johnson, Diana |
| Cummins, Judith | Jones, Gerald |
| Cunningham, Alex | Jones, Graham |
| Cunningham, Mr Jim | Jones, Helen |
| Dakin, Nic | Jones, Susan Elan |
| Danczuk, Simon | Kane, Mike |
| David, Wayne | Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald |
| Day, Martyn | Keeley, Barbara |
| De Piero, Gloria | Kendall, Liz |
| Debonnaire, Thangam | Kerevan, George |
| Donaldson, Stuart Blair | Kerr, Calum |
| Doughty, Stephen | Khan, rh Sadiq |
| Dowd, Jim | Kinahan, Danny |
| Dowd, Peter | Kinnock, Stephen |
| Dromey, Jack | Kyle, Peter |
| Dugher, Michael | Lammy, rh Mr David |
| Durkan, Mark | Lavery, Ian |
| Eagle, Ms Angela | Law, Chris |
| Eagle, Maria | Leslie, Chris |
| Efford, Clive | Lewis, Clive |
| Elliott, Julie | Lewis, Mr Ivan |
| Elliott, Tom | Long Bailey, Rebecca |
| Esterson, Bill | Lucas, Caroline |
| Evans, Chris | Lucas, Ian C. |
| Farrelly, Paul | Lynch, Holly |
| Ferrier, Margaret | MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan |
| Field, rh Frank | Mactaggart, rh Fiona |
| Fitzpatrick, Jim | Madders, Justin |
| Flelo, Robert | Mahmood, Mr Khalid |
| Fletcher, Colleen | Mahmood, Shabana |
| Flint, rh Caroline | Malhotra, Seema |
| Fovargue, Yvonne | Mann, John |
| Foxcroft, Vicky | Marris, Rob |
| Gapes, Mike | Marsden, Mr Gordon |
| Gardiner, Barry | Maskell, Rachael |
| Gethins, Stephen | Matheson, Christian |
| Gibson, Patricia | Mc Nally, John |
| Glass, Pat | McCabe, Steve |
| Glindon, Mary | McCaig, Callum |
| Godsiff, Mr Roger | McCarthy, Kerry |
| Goodman, Helen | McDonagh, Siobhain |
| Grant, Peter | McDonald, Andy |
| Green, Kate | McDonald, Stewart |
| Greenwood, Lilian | McDonald, Stuart C. |
| Greenwood, Margaret | McDonnell, Dr Alasdair |
| Griffith, Nia | McDonnell, John |
| Gwynne, Andrew | McGarry, Natalie |
| Haight, Louise | McGinn, Conor |
| Hamilton, Fabian | McGovern, Alison |
| Hanson, rh Mr David | McInnes, Liz |
| Harman, rh Ms Harriet | Meacher, rh Mr Michael |

Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Pound, Stephen
 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
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth

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
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bridget Phillipson and
Tom Blenkinsop

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
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake

Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 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
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 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
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 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
 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
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, 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
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 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
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 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, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris

Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 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
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 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:

Guy Opperman and
 Jackie Doyle-Price

Sport and the 2012 Olympics Legacy

4.43 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I beg to move,

This House notes that the number of people participating in regular sport or physical activity has fallen significantly since the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; fears that the Government has squandered the Olympic legacy it was bequeathed in 2010; believes that increasing participation in a wide range of sports is key to creating the next generation of elite athletes and to improving the health and wellbeing of the nation; and urges the Government to take urgent action to boost participation and support local grassroots sports clubs and associations.

Nobody seriously doubts that the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games were an enormous success. They were a beacon for the world; we showed how these things can be done and should be done, from the magnificent opening ceremony with its celebration of the industrial revolution and Labour's part in creating the NHS through to the best-attended Paralympic games ever. Team GB won 29 gold, 17 silver and 19 bronze medals at the Olympics, and 120 medals at the Paralympic games. There were so many great moments: Mo Farah; Jessica Ennis; Charlotte Dujardin; Alistair Brownlee; Ellie Simmonds; Jade Jones; Nicola Adams; Chris Hoy, winning his seventh Olympic medal; Victoria Pendleton, winning her third; Rebecca Adlington and Katherine Grainger, winning their fourth medals; and David Weir and Sarah Storey, winning four golds each in just one games.

The very fact that the baton was passed from Labour to the coalition underlined basic British values: democracy, fair play—or, as we say in Wales, chwarae teg—and the rule of law. They were great times, but the point of hosting the games was never just to run a big event; there had to be a legacy. We were spending a lot of taxpayers' money and diverting £675 million of lottery funds away from good causes, including the arts. The total cost of both games came to just under £9 billion, so there had to be a legacy; otherwise, it was just the most expensive party in our history.

When we were in government and made the original bid, we said that we wanted to see

“millions more young people—in Britain and across the world—participating in sport and improving their lives”.

The coalition reaffirmed that in 2010, saying that it wanted to

“foster a healthy and active nation.”

That is why Labour set a target of getting 2 million more people in England being active by 2012 and set up a £140 million fund to provide free swimming to the over-60s and the under-16s.

In December 2010, the coalition set itself four legacy aims: increasing grassroots sporting participation; exploiting opportunities for economic growth; promoting community engagement; and ensuring the development of the Olympic Park after the games, to drive the regeneration of east London.

What has happened since then? Frankly, it has been an own goal, a dropped baton, a belly flop. The primary legacy aim was to increase participation, but, in virtually every region of this country and in virtually every sport, that has not happened—quite the reverse. It is striking. The figures are down in the north-east, the north-west, the east midlands, the west midlands, the south-east, the

Question accordingly negated.

[Chris Bryant]

south-west and the eastern region. There are 62,100 fewer people participating every week in the north-west, and 72,200 fewer people participating every week in Yorkshire.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the decline actually started before the Olympic games? Is it not possible to pinpoint it to the scrapping of the schools sport partnership, which did such good work in spreading best practice and sports participation among young people in schools?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point and I hope the sports Minister was not booing in disagreement, because she made that point herself on 18 December 2013. I look forward to her joining us in the Lobby later this evening.

This is not just about every region in the country; it is about every sport. Participation is down in non-Olympic sports, including cricket by 73,200 and squash by 79,900. Participation is also down in Olympic sports, including archery by 23,600, badminton by 119,800, basketball by 46,900, football by 121,400 and table tennis, or whiff-whaff, as the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—who bears some responsibility for all this—has often referred to it. Most striking of all, participation in the one sport that is participated in equally by men and women and boys and girls—it is the most popular sport in this country—is down by a massive 818,500. Thirty-three out of 45 funded sports have seen a fall or practically no increase at all in participation since the Olympic and Paralympic games.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): On the schools sport partnership, it is a fact that low sports participation is heavily correlated with deprivation. One of the greatest problems in recent years is the decline in participation in areas of deprivation, which is exactly where the schools sport partnerships were doing such a superb job, including in my own constituency and in parts of London where space and external space are at a premium and where we have to work hard to overcome that.

Chris Bryant: We should rename my hon. Friend Mystic Karen, because that is the exact point I was going to come on to. She is right. It is one of the most depressing factors—[*Interruption.*] I can hear some chuntering from the Government Front Bench. Yes, it is true that trampolining figures went up a little bit, but the problem with trampolining is that you always come back down.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the major drivers of school sports and sports inclusion in areas of deprivation is the local council? Given the excessive cuts to local councils, is it any wonder that sports participation has gone down?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. [*Interruption.*] I think I have managed to hear another little squeak from the sports Minister. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry; I would not want to malign her. Perhaps she will agree with my hon. Friend later in the debate. In 2013, the Minister pointed out that it was a disgrace that so many schools had sold school playing fields

since 2010. Why did they do that? They did it because of the problems that local authorities had. Whichever way we cut the figures, they are a disaster.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way? He is talking rubbish.

Hon. Members: Give way!

Chris Bryant: I have been dealing with the hon. Gentleman since I was at university with him, and I know when to give way and when not to give way. He will just have to wait a little bit longer.

Hon. Members might have thought that the success of the Paralympics would have encouraged more people with limiting disabilities to take part in sport, but one major problem is that the figure for people with limiting disabilities taking part in sport has fallen dramatically, by 171,000.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con) *rose*—

Boris Johnson *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman and then to the former Secretary of State.

Boris Johnson: If the sporting legacy from the Olympic games is as bad as the hon. Gentleman says—by the way, he is completely wrong, because as far as I know, another 1.4 million people are playing sport in this country since 2005—can he explain why, in London since the Olympic games, there has been an increase of 400,000 people playing sport? Is that something to do with the great work done by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) as the commissioner for sport in London?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chris Bryant: I warn Conservative Members who are enjoying a little moment of Borisomics that the truth of the matter is that the hon. Gentleman likes to elide his figures. It sounded as if he was comparing like with like, but of course he was not. He was comparing 2005 with now. It is true the Labour Government dramatically increased the participation in sport from 2005 to 2010, but his lot—his Government—managed to destroy that legacy. He can try to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker, and we will see whether he can recount better statistics.

All hon. Members can perhaps congratulate the new award-winning “This Girl Can” campaign. With such campaigns and with all the talk of improving female participation in sport, we might have thought that the figures for women would have improved, but unfortunately not: 212,000 fewer women take part in sport every week than at the time of the Olympics. That is why we needed that excellent campaign, run by Sport England, to try to fix the Government’s failures.

Mrs Miller: The hon. Gentleman might be being a little selective in his use of statistics. When my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) mentioned the 1.4 million extra people playing sport, he was rightly referring to the time at which the bid was secured. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman rightly refers in the motion to the fact that the Olympic legacy started well before the Olympic games were staged in London.

Chris Bryant: I am sorry, but the former Secretary of State does not seem to understand that she is praising the Labour Government. We had significant success between 2005 and 2010, and I would argue that the success we achieved up to 2012 was significant, before she and her Government managed to get their hands on the situation. The problem is the legacy after the games, which happened entirely on the watch of the Conservatives. I noted earlier in Prime Minister's questions that he kept referring to "the former Government", but the former Government is his Government. The Conservatives can no longer run away from their own record on such matters.

Perhaps the most infuriating aspect of the statistics is what has happened to participation among those on lower incomes. In 2005-06, the year that the right hon. Lady and the hon. Gentleman referred to, when the bid was won, 27.2% of people on the lowest incomes participated in sport. When we left office, that had risen to 27.9%. In the post-Olympic year, 2012-13, which we are using as a baseline in these debates, participation had risen again to 29.3%, but in the most recent statistics, participation has fallen to 25.7%. Who can wonder why those on the lowest incomes are finding it difficult to participate in sport when it is expensive to take part in sport, local authorities are under the cosh financially, and many of the services they have relied on have simply disappeared?

Things are no better in Scotland. The Scottish Government do not keep accurate statistics on sport participation, perhaps for an obvious reason, but people living beside some of Glasgow's most prominent Commonwealth games venues are now playing significantly less sport and taking less exercise than they did before the event last year. In particular, many people have complained that the games felt as though they were intended for posher and better-off parts of Glasgow and Scotland than for the people on the very doorsteps where the games were taking place.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): I had the privilege on Sunday of taking part in the Great Notts bike ride, where there were more cyclists than at any point in the event's history. Surely, the hon. Gentleman would recognise, just by stepping out on to Bridge Street, that the number of cyclists making use of cycle roads in London, courtesy of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), has increased dramatically? Surely, that is a success of the Olympic games and the Great British cycling team?

Chris Bryant: Everybody would like to praise Chris Hoy, Bradley Wiggins and the many others who have led by example and the 46,000 additional people who have taken up cycling, but there are still significant problems that the Government and local authorities need to tackle and that is a small drop in the ocean compared with the overall figures, which have fallen significantly. In Labour-run Wales, by contrast, the figures are considerably better. Some 70% of adults participated in sport or physical recreation in the four weeks before the most recent survey, compared with just 44% in England.

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I really must take issue with hon. Gentleman's comments about Glasgow, particularly since his own party runs the

council there. The price of using local football pitches has quadrupled because of that Labour council. That is why it is an issue—nothing to do with the Scottish Government.

Chris Bryant: Oh dear, the Scottish National party always love to find somebody else to blame. The truth of the matter is that Scotland is run by the SNP, and that 80% of local authority budgets in Scotland are determined by the SNP in Holyrood. When the hon. Gentleman starts attacking Glasgow Council, he needs to start looking into his own backyard.

The coalition Government said they would ensure the development of the Olympic Park after the games, but here there are further legacy worries. So far, the cost of transforming the venue into a stadium ready for football has reached £272 million: £15 million coming from West Ham, £1 million from UK Athletics, £40 million from Newham Council and £25 million from the Government. The overall spend on the venue will now top £700 million for the 54,000 seat arena—considerably more expensive per spectator than the £798 million lavished on the 90,000 capacity Wembley stadium. The project is now over budget by about £35 million, which comes close to the total cost of converting the City of Manchester stadium after the 2002 Commonwealth games. This has the feel, frankly, of a fiasco cooked up somewhere between the Mayor's office, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Treasury, which is why, in the interests of transparency, I urge the Government to publish the full details of West Ham's secret deal as a matter of urgency.

Boris Johnson *rose—*

Chris Bryant: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will agree with me on this matter.

Boris Johnson: I will agree with the hon. Gentleman on that. It was indeed a mess cooked up between the Mayor, the Treasury and DCMS: it was the Labour Mayor, the Treasury under Alistair Darling and Gordon Brown who decided to go ahead with a stadium that was completely unsuitable for the purpose.

Will the hon. Gentleman have the decency to admit this single fact? The economic legacy in east London is absolutely superb and the sporting legacy in London—it was called the London Olympics—is that more people are playing sport after the Olympics than were before.

Chris Bryant: If the people of east London felt that there had been such an enormous success due to his antics in the Mayor's office there would probably have been more people voting Conservative in the east end of London, whereas I note there are quite a lot of Members sitting around me on the Labour Benches representing the east end of London. I note, and the Secretary of State should note, that the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip agreed with my call for the Government to publish all the details of the deal with West Ham.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Education Committee visited east London as part of its inquiry into the Olympic legacy for school sport in 2013, and we warned the Government then of the lack of legacy and the fall in participation in physical activity generally.

[Bill Esterson]

In their response, the Government acknowledged that, yet we have still seen a failure. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is worrying for everyone in this country that the Government chose to ignore the advice they were given by the Committee and their own comments on that Committee's report?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. He, too, is mystic, as that is a point I am coming on to.

There has been this signal failure because, immediately on coming into office in 2010, the coalition abandoned the target on getting more people active. They scrapped the free swimming fund, putting local authorities under real pressure. They sold off school playing fields and they scrapped ring-fenced funding for sports school partnerships, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) mentioned. They abandoned all targets for PE and sport in school. They have had four Secretaries of State in five years, and three sports Ministers all peddling their own preoccupations, rather than laying out a clear 10-year strategy for sports and activity. Their lazy, laissez-faire, hands-off attitude to sports has simply wasted our Olympic legacy.

Frankly, all that is very Conservative. We should remember that Mrs Thatcher did not close only the mines; she closed all the lidos in London as well. It is a fundamental principle of the Tories. How do I know that all this is the fault of the Government? Because the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport told us so herself. She said the other day:

“Government is in part to blame in that we have got a sport strategy that is very much out of date”.

Five years of your Government, seven years of the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip as Mayor—it is all your fault. They have had plenty of warnings, too, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) said. The Education Committee report of 2013 was absolutely explicit:

“There is clear evidence that the ending of the school sport partnerships funding has had a negative impact”.

It continued:

“School sport is too important to rely on occasional efforts at pump-priming”.

Its starkest warning of all was:

“We believe that the opportunity to realise a London 2012 legacy for school sports has not yet been lost”.

It said that in 2013. Well, it has now been lost because that warning was ignored.

The Secretary of State used to chair the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Even that Committee warned last year:

“We are very concerned about the lack of communication and co-operation between Government departments, which we think presents a serious obstacle to the DCMS in its attempts to deliver the Olympic legacy.”

This week, in national school sports week, the Youth Sport Trust has said that we are at a “critical crossroads” where

“action is needed now to modernise the approach to PE and school sport”.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I am sure that the Mayor of London is a lover of statistics and will enjoy this one: 71.2% of adults in Brent would love to do more sporting activity, compared to 55% in the country as a whole. Unfortunately, however, the lack of access and opportunity prevents that from happening. I declare an interest in being the Member of Parliament representing Wembley stadium, where we should have seen a lasting Olympic legacy.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and it is a delight to see her back in her rightful place in this House.

There are further dangers ahead. Let us take swimming, for example. As I said, this is the one sport in which participation among girls and boys is equal. Swimming is the most popular form of activity in this country, with 2.6 million people taking part every week. There are, however, many things that put people off swimming, including communal changing rooms, lack of privacy, tired facilities, never learning to swim in the first place, particularly among poorer families, and simply the cost of using a swimming pool. Every Member will have heard of the problems faced by local authorities in maintaining leisure centres, and many of us might have had to fight for swimming pools to stay open in our own constituencies. In fact, the number of pools is pretty stable, at about 5,000 in England alone. More than half of all local authority pools, as opposed to pools in expensive private members' clubs, were built before 1985 and require significant investment to continue to operate and be attractive to modern swimmers. There are dramatic challenges ahead in respect of just that one sport. We must ensure that more people go swimming.

Stewart McDonald *rose*—

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con) *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I have already taken one intervention from the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart McDonald), and I am sure that he will have an opportunity to speak later, but I have not yet given way to the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman).

Huw Merriman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to interrupt his fantasy. What he is saying is not correct: it does not apply throughout the country. My local authority, Wealden, has redeveloped all its swimming pools with the help of the Government's house building premium,

Chris Bryant: What I am saying is perfectly correct. It comes straight from the Amateur Swimming Association. Local authority swimming pools all over the country face problems because a small majority were built before 1985. They are less attractive facilities, and they therefore require significant investment. Such properties are difficult to maintain.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) says that things have improved in his part of the world, but that proves another point. The Government have slanted funds away from some parts of the country to other parts. In Gateshead, a bowling centre that is a lifeline for hundreds of elderly people will have to close simply because my council has lost 48% of its budget over the last five years.

Chris Bryant: I think that all Members understand the basis of local authority funding, which is that 80% of it comes from Westminster and 20% from council tax and other sources. The problem is that—particularly in deprived areas where many people rely on council services for the elderly, for the protection of children and for their livelihoods and living standards—local authorities are under the cosh, and are finding it very difficult to maintain supposedly non-statutory services such as leisure and libraries. That is undoubtedly having an effect.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): As the hon. Gentleman will know, the latest Sport England data show that, in respect of the last two comparable years, he is quite right: the number of people involved in swimming did fall. However, the number of people involved in athletics, cycling, football, rugby and cricket rose. What analysis has he made of those statistics?

Chris Bryant: I said earlier that the number of people involved in four sports had risen. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman about the football statistic, and I am quite happy to have a row with him about it. The overall point, though, is that fewer people are taking part in sport. We have not seen the dramatic increase for which we all hoped. We hoped that spending significant amounts, and diverting moneys from other lottery good causes, would produce a dramatic legacy, and that all the leadership shown by elite athletes would bear fruit in the form of a healthier nation, but that has not happened.

What are we calling for? First, we are calling for a proper, 10-year sport strategy, with a particular focus on involving more women, on disability sport, and on those in areas of multiple deprivation and with the lowest incomes. I think that the sports Minister agrees with us, because she suggested some of that last week.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I do agree.

Chris Bryant: If I am agreeing with the Minister and she is agreeing with me, this is quite a love-in—and all the more reason to support Labour at the end of the debate.

Secondly, we are calling for a renewed determination to make the premier league divert more of the proceeds of its broadcast rights to grass-roots football, funding coaches, kit and pitches. Football does not belong to those at the top; it belongs to the kids who put up posters in their bedrooms, and to the parents who take them to play soccer every Saturday and Sunday morning and afternoon. It belongs to the grass roots, and more of the money should be going down to them.

Thirdly, we are calling for immediate action to divert money away from dormant betting accounts and unclaimed betting winnings, and towards the grass roots of the 45 funded sports. Fourthly, we are calling for the restoration of two hours a week for sport and physical education at schools. We used to talk about five hours a week; is it too much to ask for two hours? Fifthly, we want the Government to set a proper target, and aim for an increase of 2 million in the number of people who take part in sport. Surely to God, we can get more of our countryfolk engaged in an active lifestyle.

Finally, we are calling on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Health and the Department for Education to present an annual report

on school sport to Parliament, so we can all agree on the facts, which would be brought to the House on a cross-party basis.

Why does all that matter? A more active nation will be a healthier nation, see more people physically able to work, see fewer people succumb to long-term debilitating illnesses and see fewer people die prematurely. Engaging more people in a healthy lifestyle is the best, most effective and most efficient form of healthcare. If we want to tackle ischemic heart disease, diabetes, stroke and many mental health conditions, we have to build a healthier, more active nation. As Sport England put it:

“If a million more people across the country played sport each week, it would save the taxpayer £22.5 billion in health and associated costs.”

Sport is an essential aspect of rehabilitation, improving people’s sense of self-worth and of wellbeing. As the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, under the current Secretary of State’s chairmanship, put it last year:

“It is widely acknowledged that one of the major health issues facing the UK is the decline in physical activity by the population, leading to a rise in obesity and associated conditions.”

So it must surely be a scandal for all of us that we spend more in this country—three times more—on weight loss surgery than we do on the Change4Life health campaign. We should be spending more money on preventing obesity than on surgery to tackle it.

I believe, therefore, that we should lead by example, so I make an offer to the Secretary of State. There will be a London marathon next year. I am quite happy to run, if he is happy to run.

5.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): I thank the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for giving the House this opportunity to celebrate not just the fantastic success of the London Olympics and Paralympics in 2012, but the amazing legacy that this country has enjoyed as a result. It is right that we consider it now: we are just over a year away from the Rio 2016 games, and it is a little more than three years since we hosted the games in London.

There is not a lot in the hon. Gentleman’s motion with which I disagree. It is unfortunate that he has adopted some rather snide language, as that makes it impossible for us to support it, but once we take that out and remove the synthetic outrage that permeated many of his remarks earlier, we will find there is quite a lot of agreement across the House, and that, I hope, will come out. I certainly agree with the start of his speech, when he talked about the enormous success of the 2012 games. Without any question, they gripped the public’s attention and fired imagination right across the UK.

Almost to the surprise and disappointment of some detractors in the press, we managed to construct the facilities on time and within budget, and we then had the superb organisation, for which congratulations are due not just to Lord Coe and Lord Deighton, but to the thousands of people involved in the games, both employees and volunteers. That sent a clear and long overdue message to the world that we can still put on a magnificent event with a degree of friendliness and good spirit, which impressed the whole world and showed that this country is prepared to welcome any visitors to our shores.

[Mr John Whittingdale]

Our athletes were outstandingly successful, coming third in the medals tables for both the Olympic and Paralympic games. One reason for the original success of our bid was that we put the question of legacy at the absolute core of our plans right from the start. I remember going to talk to a Greek Minister about the legacy of the Athens games, when he confessed to us that his main concern had been getting the facilities prepared in time and he had not even thought about what would happen to them afterwards. That was not the case here. We were always clear that legacy was at the heart of our preparation, and we focused in particular on regenerating a particularly disadvantaged area of east London, on our economy and the potential boost to tourism, on volunteering, on the lives and perceptions of disabled people and, yes, on sport, both elite and in terms of participation and healthy living. We have made strong progress on all those five themes.

On the regeneration of east London, as my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has said, we have a secure future for each of the permanent venues on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Nearly 5 million people have visited the park since it reopened two years ago, including hundreds of thousands who have been able to swim in the aquatics centre or ride in the velodrome or on the BMX track. All eight of the permanent venues have their long-term futures secured, and this is the first time a host city has managed to achieve that within a year. In particular, we have secured a long-term future for the Olympic stadium itself—that has not always been the case for previous host cities. I can remember visiting the Olympic stadium in Athens, where grass was growing out of the running track.

In the next two years alone, the Olympic stadium in east London will host the world athletics championships and five matches during the rugby world cup, including the semi-final. It will also become the permanent home to one of the UK's most famous football clubs. In addition, the athletes' village has been converted into housing, with more than 4,500 people already living in this new community. We should also note that those residents will have not only world-class sport on their doorsteps, but world-class culture. The House will be aware that the Government are contributing towards the costs of a new cultural and educational quarter on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park—Olympicopolis. I am delighted that it will provide a new campus for my own university, University College London, as well as a campus for the University of the Arts London, and that already Sadler's Wells and the Victoria and Albert Museum have committed to being a part of it. We are now in discussion with the Smithsonian about it establishing its first permanent museum outside the United States.

Chris Bryant: While the Secretary of State is on the physical legacy elements, will he respond to the request that I and others have made for the full details of the deal with West Ham to be made public, in the interests of transparency?

Mr Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that things such as the terms of the rent are commercially confidential and to reveal them may jeopardise future

negotiations with potential tenants. There are good reasons why doing what he suggests is not possible, but we will of course respond to him and set those out in more detail.

Let me finish my remarks about the physical legacy by saying that the transport links to and from the park have also had a huge impact on that part of London. There has also been an economic legacy more generally. There is no doubt that the games provided a showcase for British business—in construction, in event management and across a number of other sectors. Where other countries have followed suit, in Rio, in Baku and in the Commonwealth games and elsewhere, it has often been the expertise that we have developed in this country that is now winning jobs and orders for this country across the world. The total international trade and investment benefits from the games and games-time activity has already exceeded £14 billion, against an already ambitious target of £11 billion.

The games were also the opportunity to show off the United Kingdom to the world and, as a result, we are on track to deliver tourism targets of an extra 4.7 million visitors, spending £2.3 billion, over a four-year period. An evaluation of the legacy benefits from the games by an independent consortium has estimated that the total economic benefit in terms of UK gross value added will be between £28 billion and £41 billion over the period from 2004 to 2020.

Stewart McDonald: We would get through this debate a lot better if Members on both sides of the House would stop kidding themselves that we have any of these benefits in Scotland. This was a games for London. They were great and I do not seek to take that away, but the only benefit I can remember was when the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) was hanging from a zip wire and all of Scotland laughed. So let us not pretend that these economic benefits came to Scotland, because they did not—they came to London and that is where it ended.

Mr Whittingdale: The economic study I just referred to said that the impact on Scotland was a boost to the gross value added between 2004 and 2020 of between £2.3 billion and £2.75 billion and the creation of between 51,200 and 62,400 jobs in Scotland.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Earlier today, I had the honour of visiting the Association of British Travel Agents' "Travel Matters" conference, where comments were often made about the legacy of the Olympic games, including the 33.4 million in-bound visitors to the UK last year, many of whom also went to Scotland, the significant economic benefit from that and all the tax that was raised from those visits.

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The benefits that we gained from those games have been felt, and are continuing to be felt, right across the United Kingdom.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): We have heard much about one region of England, but Wales missed out on several hundreds of millions of pounds of Barnett consequential funding as well as structural investment and foreign direct investment both

before and after the Olympic and Paralympic games. Will the Secretary of State inform the House what he and his Department will do to right that wrong?

Mr Whittingdale: I regret to say that I do not have the figures for Wales on the economic benefit of the Olympic games, but I have absolutely no doubt that they are of the same order as that which I have already quoted for Scotland, and I would be happy to provide them to the hon. Lady in due course if I can obtain them from the report.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I can tell hon. Members of one economic benefit. There is a brand new half marathon in Swansea, which is now in its second year. That development certainly has a lot to do with the growth in athletics. Just this week, I ran round St James's park in my Eastleigh 10 km T-shirt, trying to get back into running. There is a new all-party group of Members who want to return to running after the campaign. I would certainly like to see Members joining in if they are training for the London marathon. Innovation is really important, as, too, are the financial benefits. In Eastleigh, young women are returning to exercise. They are going to spin classes and bringing their babies with them. Innovation is certainly important.

Mr Whittingdale: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend and I am delighted to hear what she has been doing to increase sporting participation on a personal level. I absolutely agree with her. I am about to come on to the issue of sporting participation in due course. Before I do so, let me touch on one or two other aspects of the legacy, particularly the volunteering legacy, which was one of the most extraordinary achievements.

Chris Bryant: What about the motion?

Mr Whittingdale: The motion is on the legacy of the Olympic games. This is an absolutely critical part—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I have been very lenient with the way the debate has been going, but the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) knows that he must not point—*[Interruption.]* Nor must the other hon. Gentleman to whom he is pointing. Neither of you should be pointing from a sedentary position, especially when the Secretary of State is speaking.

Mr Whittingdale: Let me just point out to the hon. Gentleman that the title of his motion includes the words “2012 Olympics legacy”, so it is relevant to talk about it.

On volunteering, one of the greatest successes of the games were the 70,000 games makers, who gave up their time and enthusiasm to make the games as welcoming as they were. They have left a very real legacy. We have seen games-makers style volunteers at the rugby league world cup, the Tour de France Grand Départ, the Glasgow Commonwealth games and we will see them at the rugby union world cup this autumn. They have also inspired thousands of others to volunteer in their communities.

Mr Nick Hurd (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is extremely telling that the shadow Secretary of State had absolutely nothing to say about volunteering, because he does not want to talk about one of the great success stories of the games and of the legacy. Does my right hon. Friend agree that community-based sports volunteers have a crucial role to play in driving participation in sport? Will he join me in congratulating the independent charity Join In—it was set up by the coalition Government—on recruiting and retaining more than 100,000 volunteers a year since it was set up?

Mr Whittingdale: Absolutely. I join my hon. Friend in welcoming that charity. He is being unduly modest in not taking credit for the part that he played in establishing that initiative. It is the case that volunteering is continuing, and that many, many grassroots sports clubs simply would not be able to survive without the efforts of hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers. Like many Members in this House I suspect, I will be going this weekend to the rugby club in my own constituency to see the NatWest RugbyForce, which is renovating and working on that club. That initiative has been signed up to by more than 650 clubs.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It was my pleasure on Sunday to take part in a 100 km Williams Farm Kitchen cycle ride in Hornsea in my constituency. That follows the Tour de Yorkshire, which followed the Tour de France coming to Yorkshire, and it all follows from the Olympics, where volunteers made such a difference. We see elite athletes all the way down to people at the opposite end of the spectrum, such as myself, riding out on Sunday.

Mr Whittingdale: I am hugely impressed by my hon. Friend's sporting participation, like that of our hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). There has undoubtedly been a great boost to participation in this House, although I will not promise to take up the hon. Member for Rhondda on his kind offer. None the less, I am delighted that so much activity is taking place.

I want to talk briefly about the Paralympics, because they also had a terrific legacy.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Before the Secretary of State moves on from the legacy, what does he have to say about the legacy for lottery-supported charities that are still hurting from the billions of pounds that were diverted from their activities and that are greatly concerned about how this is going to be resolved? What does he have to say to lottery-supported charities that feel they lost out so dramatically because of the London Olympics?

Mr Whittingdale: One of the purposes of the lottery was to support sport in particular, as well as charitable activities, and it seemed to me to be an extremely good use of lottery money to invest in something that has produced such enormous benefit in many different areas. Also, the lottery will benefit from some return, once the sale of the Olympic village has fully gone through.

To return to disabled sport and the Paralympics, one of my greatest moments was to have the opportunity to present flowers to some of the medal winners in the Olympic stadium during the Paralympics. The atmosphere

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in the stadium at that time was quite extraordinary. According to a survey taken the year after, more than half the population felt that the Paralympics had a positive impact on the way they viewed disabled people, and nearly a quarter of a million more disabled people are now playing sport than was the case when we won the bid 10 years ago.

The hon. Member for Rhondda talked about the sporting legacy of the games. At the elite end, we have talked about the huge success of Team GB in the games themselves, but we have gone on from that. We are currently sitting fourth in the medal tables in Baku—I thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who attended the opening ceremony in Baku on behalf of the Government. As many hon. Members know, the England women's football team is now playing in the World cup quarter final this weekend. We wish them every success. We achieved our best ever results at a winter games in Sochi; England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all finished in the top 15 in the Commonwealth games medal table last year; and we are going to Rio next year in a spirit of optimism of even greater success.

The hon. Gentleman addressed the question of participation levels. It is correct that the figures in the recent Active People survey are disappointing. There is no question but that one of the prime aims of the games was to increase participation, and we did achieve that: there was a huge boost to participation after the games. As has already been pointed out, some 1.4 million more people are participating in sport than when we won the bid.

Andrew Gwynne: The Secretary of State mentioned the Rio games next year. Does he see in the fact that they are fast approaching an opportunity to reinvigorate school sport in particular, so that we can get young people active and involved in sport, and fired up for the Rio games?

Mr Whittingdale: I absolutely do. The games in London, and particularly some of the wonderful role models established in many different sports, certainly led to growing enthusiasm among young people, and hopefully the games in Rio next year will have a similar impact. Some of those effects are not picked up in the Active People survey, because young people do not yet come into the statistics.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The Secretary of State touched briefly on women's participation in sport, but there is a key issue, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) referred. We already had a gender gap of 1.8 million, and 200,000 fewer women are taking part in sport, but the only activities that are growing are things like park runs and the 10 km runs hon. Members have mentioned. There is a serious problem when that is the only type of sport that is increasing.

Mr Whittingdale: I agree, which is why the Select Committee that I chaired in the last Parliament carried out an inquiry on women and sport. As the hon. Member for Rhondda mentioned, the barriers to women's participation are varied. A lot have to do with image,

embarrassment, and the nature of the facilities available. It is a complicated picture. That is certainly something that I am keen to see addressed. There are few people more qualified to talk about women's sport than the Minister with responsibility for sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who is a very active participant. This is an issue to which we both attach considerable priority.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Whittingdale: I am conscious that many people want to speak in this debate, but I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley).

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his compelling speech, and his new position. Does he recognise that there is growing cross-party support for outdoor recreation and its important role in physical activity? Does he agree that outdoor recreation should be part of our future strategy for modern sport in the 21st century?

Mr Whittingdale: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. The simple answer to his point is: yes, we entirely agree with him. There is no question but that recreation has a considerable part to play in increasing participation.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): There is a real risk of everyone being a bit negative about the legacy of the Olympics. In my constituency of Gloucester, the Government have rejuvenated the Blackbridge jubilee athletics track. That is making a huge difference in an otherwise slightly deprived ward. Also, funds have gone towards a brand-new Gloucester rowing club, which has some of the best women rowers in the country and is on the Sharpness-to-Gloucester canal. That will make a significant difference. My right hon. Friend should see that as cause for optimism.

Mr Whittingdale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving that example, which is mirrored up and down the country. He is absolutely right that we should not be negative, because we have made a huge amount of progress, and benefits are still flowing from the games. I do not want to speak for much longer, as a lot of people want to speak in the debate.

Graham Stuart *rose*—

Mr Whittingdale: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I want to bring my speech to an end. We share the concerns of the hon. Member for Rhondda about the figures that came out. That is why my hon. Friend the sports Minister has already announced that we will review our sports strategy and look to adopt a fresh approach to seeing what more we can do to increase participation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) said, we should not be negative, so I conclude by quoting the International Olympic Committee president, Thomas Bach:

“Ensuring a positive legacy from the Olympic Games for a host city...is very important...This is why I am delighted to see that our British partners have succeeded in maximising the legacy of London 2012 across a number of different areas...I see that London and Britain have also understood that the Games can be a catalyst for positive long-term economic, social and sustainable legacies.”

That is the true legacy of the games. On that basis, we are not able to support the Opposition's motion.

5.32 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Mòran taing, Mr Deputy Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity to give my maiden speech and hopefully inject notes of calm and good sense in what has been a very robust debate.

I am the first woman to rise to speak in this place representing Edinburgh North and Leith and, I believe, the first woman to represent any part of my constituency in this House. I am pleased to play my small part in changing politics by making the profile of the population of this place more closely match the profile of the population that we serve, and I am absolutely delighted to represent Edinburgh North and Leith. My immediate predecessor was of course Mark Lazarowicz, who represented the constituency for some 14 years and was held in high regard by many of my constituents. I wish him very well in his future endeavours.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you may have heard in recent weeks a succession of Members extolling the virtues of their constituencies and claiming them to be unsurpassed. That can only be because they have not yet visited my constituency. From the elegance of Edinburgh's New Town—completed a couple of centuries ago, but still the new town to us—to the Shore at Leith, which may have been tamed a little in recent years but still loudly proclaims its independence from Edinburgh, despite the treachery of 1920, my constituency embraces variety, and rebellious spirits are cheek by jowl with more douce residents. It hugs the Forth from Seafield to the Birnie rocks at the foot of Granton, and that relationship with the firth and the sea has shaped the place. International trade in and out of Leith for centuries meant that our links were well enough established that when England took the huff with France and banned claret, we imported it in vast quantities and smuggled it into England—keeping the best for ourselves, of course.

The people of my constituency have always been inventive and resilient, and those qualities have served us well over the years, but it seems we will need them afresh now. While Edinburgh North and Leith has areas of affluence and more than its fair share of professionals from the legal and financial worlds, it also has areas of poverty and deprivation, and communities full of people whose life experiences are not comfortable. In my few weeks as an MP and in my role as a councillor before that, I have seen people in desperate situations. They face grinding poverty and their hope has been bulldozed from their lives.

In 1922, James Maxton rose to make his maiden speech here and talked of the people of Glasgow living in poverty, with the equivalent of benefit sanctions forcing children to the parish council to be fed, just as they are now being sent to food banks. A century on, and it seems little has changed. The voices of the Red Clydesiders would still be regarded as revolutionary in here.

The Chancellor recently informed the House that he intends to cut more deeply than he already has—that the austerity orgy would continue. Leaving aside the fact that austerity has never worked, and wherever it has been tried it has caused long-lasting damage, we can perhaps look at the human face of the cuts—the suffering and the misery—and decide that we should decide a different path; that we should choose a different future.

In his maiden speech, Maxton said:

“We have had many lectures on etiquette, manners and conduct from right hon. Gentlemen in all parts of the House, and from the Press of this city, addressed particularly to those of us who come from the West of Scotland. We admit frankly that perhaps on the nicer points of good form we have different ideas from hon. Members on the other side of the House. Our dialect is somewhat different also, and perhaps our mode of dressing is slightly different. But we think it is the very worst form, the very worst taste, that it shows very bad breeding, to kick a man who is in the gutter, or to withdraw a crust from a starving child.”—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1922; Vol. 159, c. 2231-32.]

We have had something similar here in the past few weeks. We on the SNP Benches may not have the delicacies of this House's customs and manners perfected, but we too think it is the very worst form, the very worst taste, and that it shows very bad breeding to kick people who are in the gutter or to withdraw a crust from a starving child.

We might have been entitled perhaps to expect that the loyal Opposition would have had something to say about the crushing weight that austerity is for the poor. We might have expected a party that was built on a promise of creating fairness in society to consider that it had a duty to stand up for those with least. Instead, today we find ourselves with a motion in the name of the interim Leader of the Opposition that talks of the supposed squandering of the London Olympic legacy. Given the amount of infrastructure spending that was denied other areas of the UK, as we have heard, to be focused on London for those games, some of us may be forgiven for asking whether the legacy in question should be thought of as a positive one.

I shall be generous, though, and leave that aside, and say that creating the next generation of athletes, elite and otherwise, and improving the health and wellbeing of our people cannot be done unless there is investment in facilities, in coaching provision, and in society. For a child lacking nourishment is far less likely to perform well at any sport, never mind excel, and a parent queuing up at a food bank is not really in the best position to encourage their children's participation in sport. The same applies to education, health, and life chances. Poverty kills hope, kills opportunity, and smothers ambition. We have to do exactly the opposite.

It seems to me that we stand at a crossroads—a junction of decision—but our duty could not be clearer. We have an obligation to offer hope and ambition. We cannot be the doom-mongers, the nay-sayers, the harpies of hardship. We should be lighting the way to a better future for individuals and communities. A broken society, shackled to a future of despair and trying to hold itself together by its fingertips, is surely too high a price to pay for a marginally improved economic performance now, even if austerity could work. The orgy of cuts must end and rebuilding what has been broken must start. That has to begin with investment in our infrastructure, in our public services and most urgently of all, in our people. No more despair, no more distrust—it is time to invest.

I say to Members on both sides of the House that we have a chance now to make sure that Maxton is not still relevant in another century, and that there is a different way. Come to Scotland. Find a politics that has been rescued by hope, where people are engaged and talking about the future and possibilities. While Members are there, they can take a look at the investment that the

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Scottish Government have made in community facilities through the Cashback for Communities scheme, financed by money recovered from the proceeds of crime. The next generation are being given somewhere to hone their talents, somewhere to get fit and somewhere to respect each other. Come to Scotland and see the difference it makes, and while you are there, come and see Edinburgh North and Leith. It is the best constituency in the country. I will show you around and let the people tell you that they need more than you are offering, and then you can come back here and make a difference.

We Members were not sent here to mark time and hope that we get out the other end unscathed. We were sent here to do a job. The people we represent need more from us than we have given so far. They need hope. The question for each of us in this House is: are we good enough to deliver that hope, to offer it? If people cannot look to Parliament, they will look elsewhere. If we cannot offer hope or its associates, we will be offering exactly the opposite: alienation. Failure to act would be a crime against society, a demonstration that we are incapable of mending that which we have broken.

I appreciate that the election of so many SNP Members must have seemed, to some honourable incumbents, akin to an uprising. I have heard it called “Ajockalypse Now”. We may have ruffled a few feathers since we got here, but I really want to extend a hand of co-operation around this House. Anyone who would like to work with us to address poverty, reverse the effects of austerity, and start building for a future where we can do such things as improve the health and wellbeing of all the nations of the UK through encouraging physical activity, will be more than welcome. This is not a one-time offer, nor is it a deal that ends at midnight; this is an offer that lasts. For those interested in taking society forward, work with us, and by God, we’ll work with you.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): May I just say that, unfortunately, there will be a four-minute limit on speeches?

5.42 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) on a rather challenging maiden speech—perhaps not in the best traditions of the House, but I congratulate her on putting her points over in a forceful way.

Looking at the legacy of the Olympic games is one of the most important things to do. My noble Friend Lord Coe opened the 2012 Olympics by saying:

“London 2012 will inspire a generation”,

and he was right. Our games inspired people not just in the UK, but abroad as well, and we should be very proud of that.

It was the very first “legacy games”, with the legacy, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, built in from the outset. It challenged an outdated, crusty image of a faded Britain and it demonstrated that after a great recession, Britain was open for business, once more thriving and leading the world, not only in sports, but through its Cultural Olympiad, its culture and its arts. It regenerated huge swathes of our capital city and gave us pride in our country.

The success of the London 2012 Olympics for Britain was not a success just for one political party or another, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) might like to imply. It was a success for the whole nation, because it brought our nation together. We presented ourselves to the world with confidence, passion, professionalism and, above all, fun.

I am somewhat surprised at the focus of the Opposition motion. It rightly talks about the importance of the Olympic legacy, yet in his opening statement, the hon. Member for Rhondda talked about very little of that legacy. He talked simply about increasing participation in sport, which, although important, is only one part of the Olympic legacy that he should have covered. He fundamentally missed the true scope of the legacy of the event. He should perhaps put that right later on.

The motion states that the Government “squandered the Olympic legacy it was bequeathed in 2010”, which was some two years before the games were held. In fact, participation in sport has increased by 1.4 million people since the London bid won in 2005. I fear that the shadow Secretary of State is breaking the first rule of his job by trying to score political points off the back of sport. It simply does not work and he should not do it.

I will make three observations in the short time available to me. We should continue to be proud of the success that was London 2012 and should not pull it apart. A lasting legacy was built in from the start and, as we have heard, it has been hailed as a blueprint for future hosts by the International Olympic Committee.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): My right hon. Friend said that to ensure that there is a legacy, it must be built in from the start. Does she therefore agree that the Rugby Football Union was right to appoint a legacy group for the upcoming rugby world cup, which means that the advantages of the tournament will be seen in future years, in exactly the same way as she is describing in respect of the Olympics?

Mrs Miller: I could not have put it better myself. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

There are other parts of the legacy, such as the cultural Olympics, increased participation, and the challenge to the way in which disabled people are viewed, so that people are viewed for what they can do, rather than for what they cannot do. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd) mentioned the importance that was attached to volunteering, which successfully reversed a long-term decline started under a Labour Government, resulting in more people putting themselves forward.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Miller: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will continue because other Members want to speak.

We have touched briefly on women’s sport. The Olympics challenged the views of the media and sponsors on the appeal of women’s sport. About 40% of the UK’s medals were won by women and the audience levels that those events commanded demonstrated the huge, untapped appetite for mainstream coverage of women’s sport. I applaud the BBC and Sky Sports for the work that they are doing, which I am sure they will continue, to put women’s sport at the forefront.

London 2012 put Britain on the world stage and promoted the regeneration of one of the poorest parts of our capital city, but Members are right to say that we need to scrutinise carefully the investment that is being made into increasing participation in sport, because we are putting a huge amount in. We are investing £1 billion in youth and community sport through to 2017 to instil a sporting habit for life. We need to hold the national governing bodies to account for the money they are spending and the work they are doing on our behalf.

5.48 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) on her maiden speech.

I welcome the sports Minister and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to their roles. I hope that the sports Minister will continue in the long tradition of sports Ministers working across the political parties. I also hope that she will try, as many of us have over the years, to get the Department of Health, the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to work together, because together we can solve a lot of problems.

I am sad that we have used the word “squandered” in the motion. If I am honest, I do not think that that is a sensible word to use. This is a difficult issue. A legacy is not something that happens overnight, but something that has to be worked at. All the people who were involved in the Olympics knew that increased participation would not simply happen just because a few people won a few gold medals. That is not how it is done. We have to start from the bottom up.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Lady has a passionate interest in shooting sports. The one sport that was not mentioned by the shadow Secretary of State in his introduction was clay pigeon shooting, in which Peter Wilson won a wonderful gold medal. Does she recognise that fantastic win, and does she feel that more could be done to introduce young people to shooting sports?

Kate Hoey: I am a great supporter of shooting sports and the discipline they bring. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman mentioned that gold medallist, because he comes from an area I know very well in Northern Ireland, and I know that it brought great pleasure to people there.

I want to say a few words about how I think we can get a legacy. I will point to London. As many Members will know—some Opposition Members were not too happy about this—I have been the Mayor’s commissioner for sport. I wanted very much to ensure that the Olympics would leave a legacy for grassroots sport. I genuinely congratulate the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), because when he became Mayor there was no sports unit at the city hall and grassroots sport was not seen as important; there was something going on about the Olympics, but grassroots sport did not really matter. He made sure that we had some ring-fenced money, and with that we were able to work with Sport England, local authorities and the London Marathon Charitable Trust, for example, bringing a co-ordinated approach to try to get London

to speak with one voice, because one of the crucial problems was that London was not speaking with one voice.

As a result of all the money that has gone in—the £20 million, the extra £30 million in additional match funding and the investment in sports facilities, such as our mobile swimming pools, and in different sports right across London—we are the only part of the United Kingdom where participation has increased. However, that alone will not solve the problem. We really need to look at what makes it work. We have to get local authorities to see sport and physical recreation as a priority. I am delighted that Southwark, a Labour borough, has just decided to introduce free swimming, so local authorities can do more if there is the push and the intention to make it happen.

It is very important that we look at our schools. I remind Members that I was the sports Minister when the school sports co-ordinators were introduced. The reality is that it was never meant to be long term; it was meant to raise the standard in schools, so that they themselves could help make sport and physical recreation a really important part of school. I welcome the ring-fenced money—the only money that goes to schools that is ring-fenced, at just over £8,000 for each primary school. In London alone, £15 million is therefore invested in school sport. If those 1,900 primary schools work together, as they have been doing in some areas, we will see a huge amount of good things going on.

Graham Stuart: One of the recommendations of the Education Committee’s report on school sport and the Olympic legacy in the previous Parliament was the need to extend the woefully small amount of training that primary school teachers, in particular, receive in physical education. I wonder whether the hon. Lady would like to comment on that.

Kate Hoey: Training is absolutely crucial, and I used to be a qualified physical education teacher, back when we had physical education colleges that taught it in a much better way than it is taught now. Teaching physical education in our primary schools is important. Money is hugely important, but this is also about people and about motivation, getting people to want to instil in young people an enjoyment of sport early on. That is what we have to work towards.

One of the things we are doing in London that is really crucial relates to major sporting events, which are very important and draw millions of people to London. We have to ensure—the Mayor has made this happen—that no big sporting event comes to London without the governing bodies first having to prove what they will do for grassroots sport and what will be the legacy, so it is not just a case of people coming along, having a wonderful two or three days and then nothing happens.

The thing that I am most proud of in London is that we have finally brought together what would be called the county sports partnerships outside London and the pro-actives in London under something called London Sport—Sport England wanted that to happen as well—so we now have a partnership right across London. Instead of people coming to London and thinking, “We have to go to all these different London boroughs,” we will all be working together to ensure that the money goes a lot further. That is absolutely crucial.

[Kate Hoey]

I do not think that we should be negative. I genuinely think that sport is one of those matters that we should be able to have a mature debate about, rather than just playing ping-pong with statistics. We should be able to work together closely. I suggest that one of the things the Secretary of State might want to do is have a proper, full debate in Government time, so that we do not have to rush through things in three or four minutes. Members could then have a proper discourse and welcome the fact that sport does so much in this country.

5.54 pm

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): This is an important debate, because participation in sport is not simply about improving elite sport or the success of our Olympians and footballers and cricketers at an elite level. It not only improves people's health and wellbeing but all the studies show that it is incredibly important in turning around the life chances of many young people, including those who have been involved in crime or who have fallen out of education. It gives them back structure and confidence, and that is why it is such an important part of the fabric of our society.

Of course, we should be ambitious to increase participation in sport and we should hope to see a boost in that, particularly after the incredible success that was the London Olympic games. We can look at the figures in Sport England's most recent study on sports participation and say that we would like to be doing better. That should be our aspiration. As the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), the shadow Minister, said at the beginning of the debate, in some sports, such as swimming, the figures are down, but in others, such as football and athletics, in the past two comparable years—

Chris Bryant: No, you're wrong.

Damian Collins: No, according to the figures I have seen, participation in football, athletics, cycling, rugby and cricket was up in the last two comparable years.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman mentions football, but does he not think that we have things to learn from other countries? I believe that in Belgium the aim is that any 19 or 20-year-old from across society will have touched the ball in football about 200 million times. That is building quite a high pyramid of talent, as we have seen in the Belgian national team at the moment, from what is being done at the grassroots. We could and should be learning from other countries.

Damian Collins: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says. Last Friday, I was in Folkestone to see the opening of the new 3G football pitch at Cheriton Road. We want to see more investment in such pitches. The Government have provided an additional £8 million for such facilities, but we should see more. I agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda that with all the billions of pounds coming into football we should get more of that money into the grassroots. We all want to see that. In his excellent book, "Bounce", Matthew Syed gives a clear analysis of sports participation. Proximity to good coaches and facilities and the opportunity to engage increase the number of people who will participate

and makes it more likely that we will find elite performers from almost any walk of life. It is a question of getting the combinations right.

Participation, which was mentioned by the Secretary of State, is important. The participation figures, as they are collected by the national sports bodies, are something of a blunt tool. One person who participates in three sports might decide to concentrate on one and spend more time on that one sport than they did on the three, but that is shown as a net drop in participation even though the hours involved in sport might have gone up.

We should be targeting interventions to get people who do no sport at all to start doing something, and we should focus on the most deprived communities, where people do not have access to facilities, coaches or the opportunities to participate. That agenda was set out by the previous Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and I think that it will be an important step forward in how we incentivise investment to get people who play no sport to play some sport.

We should question whether voluntary groups and charities should be able to access some of that funding and whether they are better placed to tackle some of the harder-to-reach places than the national governing bodies. Some of those organisations are supported by some of the national sporting bodies. For example, the Rugby Football Union's HITZ programme has done a fantastic job in supporting young offenders and focusing their lives around sport. Kicks, the Premier League's programme, has done a fantastic job. There have been some excellent studies of its benefit in London in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour. That should be our priority and our focus.

School sport is important, but encouraging people to partake in sport outside school is even more important. There will only be a certain number of hours in the school day, so participation outside school is significant. A lot of good work has been done by the school sports partnerships, but the link between schools and sports clubs in the community is important.

Caroline Nokes: Last Friday, 2,200 children took part in the Hampshire youth games. One of the best things to see was the link with the sports clubs that volunteered and ran the different sports, such as the Trojans club in my constituency, which spent all day running the hockey.

Damian Collins: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. In my constituency, an organisation called the Shepway Sports Trust is independent of the council and the schools. It is supported by funding from the Roger de Haan Charitable Trust, but it seeks funding from other sporting bodies as well. Its primary purpose is to connect schools with sports clubs, to drive up participation in sports outside school, as well as proactively recruiting new coaches. An organisation can have all the facilities in the world, but if it does not have the coaches to lead people through its programmes, they will not get the best out of it. That is the kind of co-ordinated approach that we need to see, with a focus on increasing participation among people who are outside the organisations that qualify for support and those who have otherwise missed out.

We should look at the sports in which participation has increased over the past couple of years, particularly those I mentioned earlier. Has that increase happened because they invest in community facilities or because they link up sport in schools with sport in clubs? What lessons can be learned, and how can we match funding to increase participation?

How can we set about getting funding from other areas of Government activity? Why should not people be able to get Home Office funding for sports programmes set up to deal with antisocial behaviour and crime in the community? Why should not the Justice Department pay for some of the work of programmes such as HITZ, which is turning round the lives of young offenders? Reports reveal incredible statistics, showing that one or two big successes in keeping a young person from reoffending can almost pay for an entire year's programme in the community. Relatively small amounts of money are involved, but the return that we get on the investment in community sport is enormous. That should shape our strategy. I have had a couple of extra minutes as a result of taking interventions, so I shall call it a day now.

6.1 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): It is good to see that the cross-party consensus that won us the Olympics is still alive this afternoon. I have heard a bit of grumbling, but I am not going to grumble about money going into east London for the Olympics because my constituents and I loved the Olympics. Nor will I be grumbling about money going to Glasgow for the Commonwealth games; we loved them as well. I am sure that the Ministers would agree that it was part of the deal, when we all backed those games so unanimously, that areas such as mine that have not had the honour of hosting such events will have higher priority in the coming years, and I look forward to that happening. As we find that we want various things, I hope that the Ministers will be prompting and pushing to ensure that we get them.

I hope that, when the Government re-examine their strategy, they will acknowledge that the increase in pitch prices is a problem that has to be addressed, because it is turning people away from sport. I also hope that they will admit their error on school sports co-ordinators. It is honourable for new Ministers to admit that errors were made by others in the past, and to make changes. That was a serious error, but something can now be done to improve the situation. There has been a tail-off in participation in schools as a result of it.

Since the banking crisis, a lot of families have had a lower income. That means that the poorest in society—the lowest 20% in terms of income—are spending between £2 and £4 per household per week on sport, and they are suffering disproportionately from the lack of access. StreetGames is a charity that I know the new sports Minister has great affection for, and I hope that it will get more resources. It has produced an equity index on volunteering which shows that the brilliance of volunteering disproportionately benefits those in higher-income areas and works against those in the lowest-income areas. So the poorer you are, the less likely you are to benefit from volunteers and the less likely it is that you will participate in sport. One of the key reasons that the BBC needs to retain the major sports events as free to view is that

those on the lowest incomes cannot afford to watch pay-per-view events. They would be still further excluded from major sporting triumphs such as the Olympics if the BBC were to lose those free-to-view events. That is a vital choice for the Department.

UK Sport's gold event series has 70 events over the next six years, and the Government must give more of a push to that. Its pop-up rugby league sessions, in conjunction with the Chorley Panthers, were a great success, as I am sure its pop-up tennis will be, across the country, coinciding with Wimbledon. The shortly-to-emerge Bassetlaw sports village is not there yet, but it is on its way. It will have an athletics track and an all-weather football stadium, putting the resources back where they are needed. When we did it before, with girls' football at Manton miners welfare club, we saw the biggest increase in girls' participation in the football world. Give us the tools and the facilities, and the people will come forward to participate in sport.

Finally, I say to anyone out there who has not participated in sport that the all-party group on mountaineering will take you up to the hills. Anyone can participate—do join us.

6.5 pm

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who spoke so eloquently in her maiden speech.

It is a great honour and privilege to be here as the new Member for Cheadle. Cheadle is a vibrant and beautiful constituency situated in Greater Manchester and on the border with Cheshire. It is a constituency that values communities and volunteering, business and enterprise, parks and sport.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Mark Hunter, who represented Cheadle for 10 years. He will be remembered not only for his party role here as deputy Chief Whip, but for his hard work in the constituency. Like his Liberal Democrat predecessor, Patsy Calton, he used his maiden speech to highlight the need for a major relief road through the constituency. I am delighted to say that, after waiting decades for this vital relief road to Manchester airport, it is now off the drawing board and under construction.

My constituency is made up of a number of villages and small towns. It has a long and interesting history, but before hon. Members become concerned that I may be tempted to narrate it in its entirety, I am aware that my time is limited.

My constituency stretches from Woodsmoor, parts of Hazel Grove and Davenport, on the outskirts of Stockport, right down to Heald Green, Cheadle Hulme and Woodford on the Cheshire border. Indeed, for some of my constituents, their feet may be in Stockport, but their hearts are still in Cheshire.

The settlements of Cheadle and Bramhall date back to Domesday records, and the village of Woodford has a proud history, too. It was formerly the home of aircraft manufacturers Avro, and at its height in the second world war more than 29,000 people were employed at the site and more than 20,000 aircraft were manufactured there, including Lancaster bombers, Vulcans and Nimrods.

[Mary Robinson]

Communities are really important to me, and the Cheadle Civic Society is a great example of community in action. Formed more than 50 years ago, its aims are to encourage higher standards of architecture and planning in the village. Recently, its dedicated members and volunteers invested more than £100,000 in bringing new life to the village green.

Indeed, it is in our parks and clubs that the Olympic legacy is most clearly visible in my area—from the cricket clubs of Cheadle Hulme and Woodford receiving grants for improved facilities, to local cyclists benefiting from the excellent new BMX track in the award-winning Bruntwood park.

Our amateur football clubs are also important. They include well-known teams such as Cheadle Town FC, who last season hosted the Russian under-19 team. We wish the number 19 had been reflected in the score, as Cheadle were unluckily beaten 22-0. However, pride was restored when the home goalie was named man of the match. When asked why he thought the Russian team had won, he said that the under-19s had the wind behind them. How unlucky it was that the wind turned around at half time.

I have a number of aims that I want to achieve for my constituency. For example, there are many small businesses in the area and their enterprise needs to be encouraged.

I am proud to represent Cheadle, where communities value their local parks, sports clubs and the facilities they provide. There is a great spirit of volunteering by people who give freely of their time, which was demonstrated to great effect in the games. As I serve the residents of Cheadle, I will do all I can to support and promote the spirit of volunteering and community.

6.9 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I am proud to follow the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson), who made an excellent speech, speaking eloquently about her constituency, its character, its history and its needs. I am sure she will have a successful Parliament standing up for her constituency. I congratulate her on her speech and on her election to the House.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and not least to pay tribute to Feltham's own Mo Farah, who, in his success in the Olympics and in other competitions since, has shown his commitment to sport and excellence, which continues to inspire many in my constituency, in Britain and throughout the world.

All hon. Members recall the Olympics—the excitement, the expectation and the pride. It was exciting to take part as the Olympic torch travelled around the country. Winning the Olympics was a truly national achievement. This week is national school sports week, which is an opportunity to send a strong message about sport and the importance of young people's participation.

That is why the sports legacy from the Olympics is sad in that participation has declined in almost every region and across a range of sporting disciplines, which has been mentioned consistently in the debate. It is saddening that the school sport partnerships had their

funding cut. I believe that that impacted on the ability of schools to participate in sports in the same way in my constituency.

Last year, I was proud to attend the launch of Motivate Hounslow, an important initiative that shows the need to motivate and encourage people to take part in innovations to bring about greater participation in support. The initiative was launched with Mo Farah and his former PE teacher, Alan Watkinson, who continues to play an important part in sports participation in Hounslow and in my constituency.

In the short time I have, I want to make a couple of points that have been made to me on the lack of a comprehensive strategy. There is a feeling that, in secondary schools, sports provision is in decline. There might be pockets of excellence, but provision is not reaching all areas. Participation has fallen in poorer areas and among those who are more deprived. That voice needs to be heard. We need to hear much more from the Government about how they will ensure that there is a comprehensive and longer-term strategy to encourage participation that takes advantage of our school system. We should ensure that there is a strategy for those aged 11 to 18.

I recognise the work of the Youth Sport Trust, which has published a manifesto for PE and sports. This week, it launched “Class of 2035”, its report on young people's relationship with physical activity, and on the need to think about how the digital revolution can be used to encourage PE and sports participation, and to empower young people to take part in, and responsibility for, their activity levels.

This needs leadership from the top. We need the Government to show that they will take responsibility, so that we see not a decline but an increase in the years ahead.

6.13 pm

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): The debate has improved steadily as it has gone on, and Members on both sides of the House have made sensible points. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) and to the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) for their excellent maiden speeches.

The language in the motion is unfortunate. Most international observers would say that to say Britain has “squandered” the legacy of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games is utterly nonsensical. I think most fair-minded people would say there has never been an Olympic games of modern times that has produced such a substantial legacy of every kind.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): The idea of the legacy having been squandered cannot be true when one takes into account the transport logistics, the amazing Olympic volunteers—who were almost at the level of the absolute hero, Ben Parkinson, the torch carrier—and, thankfully for Twickenham, the Rugby world cup. We are benefiting from those transport logistics and the volunteers. Does my hon. Friend therefore agree that “squandering” is absolute rubbish?

Boris Johnson: I wholeheartedly agree that “squandering” is totally wrong. The reason the International Olympic Committee said that London offers a blueprint to the

rest of the world is that it has been around other post-Olympic cities and seen, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the buddleia sprouting from the athletics tracks and the dustbowl stadiums. It has come to the Olympic park and seen the exact opposite: all seven key venues with a long-term private sector solution and contractor.

Since the park opened only a year ago, 800,000 people have gone to the swimming pool, 600,000 have gone to the VeloPark, 600,000 to the Copper Box, and tens of thousands to the Lea Valley hockey and tennis centres. As Members have pointed out repeatedly, we are about the only Olympic city on record to have solved the problem of what to do with the stadium. We have a long-term future for the stadium, in spite of the catastrophic errors made by the previous Government. There will be not only premiership football, but rock concerts, baseball, rugby and all manner of entertainments. Our park in east London is going to be a centre of sporting excitement for generations to come. The Secretary of State rightly listed a procession of world championships: athletics, rugby, hockey, wheelchair rugby, swimming and so on.

We are succeeding in getting people from the poorest boroughs to play sport and to take part. Some 45,000 people have taken part in the Active People, Active Park project and 26,000 have enjoyed Motivate East, a programme to get disabled people more active in sport. I am absolutely confident, as my friend the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) rightly said, that those numbers will continue to rise. The area is changing out of all recognition.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge the excellent work being done to engage schools and clubs to make sure that more grassroots sport is played by schoolchildren?

Boris Johnson: Absolutely—I acknowledge that completely. I acknowledge, too, the work of the grassroots sports teams. Much of that success flows from the increasing prosperity we are seeing in east London and at the Stratford site.

The village is already complete and occupied, with 4,800 new inhabitants. We have the largest green park in the UK for a century. Some 24,000 homes will be built on the site, many of them low-cost and family homes. That would not have happened without the Olympics. We will have tens of thousands of new jobs as a result of the Olympicopolis project, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State identified and which the Government are rightly funding. Just this very morning—in another capacity, I am happy to say—I was privileged to give planning permission for a new tech hub on Fish Island in Hackney Wick, an absolutely beautiful structure that will echo the Victorian warehouses there and incorporate all kinds of artist studios and tech start-ups. It is inconceivable that that kind of private sector investment would have come to that part of London without the Olympics. That is a phenomenal legacy.

Two university campuses are going to the Stratford site: not just a £270 million new campus for University College London, but a campus for Loughborough University, one of the great sporting universities in the world. Their mission is to help local kids to take up sport. I totally agree with the hon. Member for Vauxhall that taking up sport is not just a symptom of prosperity;

it is a cause of prosperity. That is why she and I have campaigned so hard on this issue. I am proud to say—she is absolutely right—that we have had 400,000 more people doing some kind of sport since 2012 in London, which is a point that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) totally failed to concede. Sporting participation, as well as every other kind of legacy, is up in London.

The London Olympic and Paralympic games of 2012 boosted sport across the city in which they were held. They are transforming east London and the lives of some of the poorest people in our society. As several Members have rightly pointed out, they have left a legacy of volunteering and engagement, which we are continuing to support through Team London, and they have brought untold billions of investment into this country. They projected an image of London around the world that was so attractive and so exciting that, for the third year running, we are going to achieve what we have never before achieved in my lifetime—to be the No. 1 tourist destination in the world, knocking Paris and New York off the No. 1—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. [*Interruption.*] Mr Johnson, you are back in the House and your behaviour should be better than that. We expect more from you. The Mayor of London should do better.

6.20 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): There is little doubt that the 2012 London Olympics inspired people. From the majesty of the opening ceremony featuring Britain's greatest artistic talents through to the astonishing achievements of our athletes and of the world's best sports people, it was impossible not to be inspired by the games, as I was inspired when I went to the Munich Olympics as part of the GB youth team.

I am passionate about sport and the opportunity it gives to our children. Yet the legacy and the ambition of inspiring a generation to be physically active and to get hooked on sport have not been realised. Three conditions need to be met to encourage and enable people to be physically active: inspiration, access and infrastructure. Although there was no lack of inspiration present during and after the Olympics, the 2012 games were held in the early years of Tory austerity against a backcloth of crushing local government budget cuts, a strangulation of budgets within DCMS and the channelling of lottery funding to support the games themselves, so the other two conditions were missed.

Across England, just as young people were being inspired to take up athletics, swimming and gymnastics, local councils were closing the doors on leisure facilities. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were in charge for the 2012 Olympics, but they were also in charge for the unprecedented degradation of sports infrastructure across England, so the consequence of a Tory policy of promoting the Olympic games, but cutting off access to physical activity has contributed to a worsening of public health statistics and the deprivation of opportunities for people to be engaged in sport and physical activity.

How can the people who have suffered hardest through austerity afford pitch fees, court fees, gym fees and equipment hire? How, as a consequence of this

[Christina Rees]

Government's tearing apart of the welfare state, could people on the lowest incomes hope to access childcare in order to attend fitness classes or sports club activities? The lack of a coherent physical activity strategy during and after the Olympics demonstrates how the Government walked away from a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to inspire and activate a generation.

In Wales, during the same period in which the previous UK Government stripped local government bare, the Welsh Labour Government protected council spending. This protected not only social care, in contrast to what happened in England, but sports and leisure centres. Protecting council budgets gave Welsh councils time to transform services and gave time for leisure and sports centres to be turned from making losses in some cases to making a profit that enabled trusts and social enterprises to be formed.

The results of the Welsh Government's continued support for their sports budget resulted in a record medal haul at the Glasgow Commonwealth games. Wales won 36 medals in total—20 bronze, 11 silver and five gold. This was more medals per capita than any other nation. Alongside this, levels of physical activity have increased since the Olympic games. The lesson of this contrasting picture on either side of Offa's dyke is that investing in an event but afterwards cutting away access and infrastructure to the activities promoted by that event will achieve no positive legacy. In Wales, partnerships between the Welsh Government and the national governing bodies has led to a record number of 3G pitches being built, to multi-use leisure centres and learning centres opening in communities and to the location of crèche facilities within sports, leisure and library services.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. It would be very helpful if Members could shave a little bit off their speeches. I am not going to reduce their speaking times, but any help that they can give will help me to be useful, because I want to be able to call everyone who wishes to speak.

6.25 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I shall bear your stricture in mind. Of course I had a great speech to make, but given what you have said and given that some of what I was going to say has already been said more eloquently by others, I shall make just two points.

It was a great privilege for me, nearly 10 years ago, to congratulate the then Secretary of State, Tessa Jowell, on bringing the Olympics to London, and on her assurance that the work to secure a legacy would be done on a cross-party basis. I therefore found it disappointing to see the word "squandered" in the motion. I do not think that any analysis of the regeneration to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred, along with the cultural legacy and the increase in participation that we have seen—notwithstanding some of the more recent falls—would prompt the use of that word. As Lord Coe said, the Olympics lit up the world and inspired a generation.

Let me make a serious comment. Perhaps those who want to use the word "squandered" should consider the legacy itself. There are a couple of points that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) did not make in his speech. First, a legacy is not something that happens two or three years after an event. The legacy of the Olympics will be judged by whether we have champions in 2020, 2024 and 2028, because that is where the grassroots come in. However, the hon. Gentleman was right to say that from 2005 onwards—and, indeed, from 2012 onwards—participation in sport had increased, but since October 2014 the increase has begun to tail off. That information comes from Sport England's campaign for active participation in sport. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman wants to query it, but it is true.

The question that we must ask ourselves is whether we can sustain the legacy, and that is not true only of the Olympics. As many Members will know, I represent one of the greatest constituencies, and it is going to host a little tennis tournament next week. I remember being told time after time in the House that the legacy in that regard was that we were not producing champions, despite the money being spent year on year by the Lawn Tennis Association.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): In the context of participation in tennis, is it not a disgrace that the Labour-run council in my constituency closed the public tennis courts and then put money into private tennis courts that only the most affluent can afford? The Scottish Government are trying to improve access—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Interventions are meant to be short. Members must not just come out with lists. I am sure that the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) has understood the hon. Lady's point. I am trying to save time so that Members who have been waiting all day have an opportunity to speak.

Stephen Hammond: Given your stricture, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will not respond to the hon. Lady's intervention,

My second aim in this short speech was to—well, to get the press release in, obviously. (*Laughter.*) I would have liked to say more about the legacy, but our legacy in Wimbledon is a new floodlit BMX track, which is open, is being used and has a growing membership, and the new beach volleyball courts that have opened in Wimbledon Park, which also has a growing membership. London, in contrast to a number of other places, is experiencing growing participation in sport, and I think that that is part of the Olympic legacy.

6.28 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I want to talk about women's participation in sport. As I said earlier, 212,000 fewer women have participated since 2012. That is a real issue, because there is already a wide gender gap: 1.8 million fewer women than men engage in sport once a week, and 80% of women do not get enough exercise to benefit their health. That is why this is a serious issue, and that is why we should be discussing it.

Even before the recent falls in participation, there were reasons for us to be concerned about the gender gap. Nationally, 40% of men participate in sport every

week compared with 30% of women, but the figures for women are much lower in some parts of the country. It is all very well for Conservative Members to talk about London, but the position is not the same in Greater Manchester, and it is not the same in Salford, where the figures are 20% and 24% respectively. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said, the low participation rates in some parts of the country will lead to diabetes, coronary heart disease and strokes. That is why this is a serious issue.

A number of barriers have been identified, as the Secretary of State said, to increasing female participation in sport, including practical, personal, social and cultural issues, but there are also financial reasons, which my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) laid out so well. I co-chair the all-party group on women's sport and fitness with Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson. One of its three main aims is to investigate the participation of girls and women in sport and to reduce those barriers to participation. Its first meeting is next Tuesday and I urge hon. Members to attend, if they can, and to join if they care about this issue.

I congratulate the new sports Minister on her role. I know she cares about these issues. She was a member of the all-party group in the previous Parliament, and she has said that the Government have an out-of-date sports strategy. She says she is going to rip it up and start again. I hope she does.

The Minister might want to think about a couple of things as she does that. Unequal funding is the key issue running from school sports through to the unequal pay and poor sponsorship levels in elite women's sport. Yesterday was the 43rd birthday of the Title IX legislation in the United States: landmark civil rights law that prohibits gender discrimination in any educational programme or activity that receives federal support. It has been law since 23 June 1972 and is famous for its transformative effects on girls and women's athletics. The US has the highest level of participation of girls in sport in the world, largely due to Title IX bringing in equal funding for girls and women. Figures show that participation has increased by 990% in high schools and by 560% at college level since the law was passed.

In this country, however, we do not have that law. We have very poor media coverage of women's sport and a lack of sponsorship. The Select Committee that the current Secretary of State chaired looked at those issues, but we have to do something about it. The sports strategy must include working with the media to ensure better coverage of women's events.

Finally, on pay and sponsorship, the pay levels of women footballers playing in the women's super league and in international competitions are very low and probably a surprise to many. The majority of centrally contracted players earn about £20,000 from their clubs, but there are players in the super league who are on as little as £50 a week. Those who are tempted to comment on the standard of women's football need to think about that low level of reward. We won the women's rugby world cup with a team who were not even paid professionally; nearly all of them had other jobs. How could any of us train and win at international level if we had other jobs to do?

There are so many other issues we could talk about, and they will, I hope, be explored in other debates; that is a very sound idea. We will definitely explore them at future meetings of the all-party group.

6.32 pm

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to the wonderful maiden speeches that the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) made. My hon. Friend has done tremendous work to enter the House, and I pay tribute to that.

I cannot claim to be an elite athlete, but, along with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), I am proud to represent what I believe is the peak of all-party groups, as co-chair of the all-party group on mountaineering. As we consider the motion before us, we should be concerned about levels of sports participation, but the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) has missed the point and a real opportunity by focusing on, and calling on the Government to boost, participation in traditionally defined sports. That is important, but the real focus should be on getting people physically active—helping them to be less physically inactive. That has to be the focus, but it can be achieved only by looking at a much broader definition of sport, which includes recreation and, in particular, outdoor recreation. It is clearly time to think more broadly.

The sports Minister has been on an heroic journey to climb Cotopaxi in Ecuador, where I know she developed a greater love—maybe that is too strong a word—for the outdoors, but I think that she, like many Members, understands the real importance of outdoor recreation. It leads to improved activity rates. Some 30% of the UK population is inactive. The figure for Scandinavia is only 8%, because people there have a broader sense of getting active outdoors. The “Moving More, Living More” document produced by the Department of Health shows that the costs associated with physical inactivity come to £20 billion, so we should all have an interest in tackling that huge challenge. Clearly, there are also big health and wellbeing benefits to be had, through working with groups such as Age UK Cheshire East or the East Cheshire Ramblers and its 700 members. That is clear to all those who participate. It is clear to all of us who are involved with the outdoors that a vast blue and green gym outside this place is available to nearly all of us, if we just make that extra effort. I should also mention the benefits in another important area: the rural economy. The “Reconomics” report by the Sport and Recreation Alliance shows that outdoor recreation will boost the rural economy by £21 billion.

There is good news, there is a clear opportunity and progress is being made. As I have said, there is clear cross-party support for making further progress in this area. We have had extensive debates in Parliament on this subject, notably on 20 September, when the hon. Member for Ogmores (Huw Irranca-Davies) led an impassioned debate and many others joined in. There is a coalition of interested parties on moving this agenda forward, including the British Mountaineering Council, the Ramblers, the Youth Hostels Association and the Outdoor Industries Association. Last year, before the election, they made six key proposals for the Government to take forward, including measures on access and opportunities for young people. More than anything they wanted a clear focus. They were calling for a long-term strategy for outdoor recreation that is cross-departmental and that sits alongside or, even better, is integrated with the Government's successful sports strategy. It was refreshing to see how the different Departments,

[David Rutley]

from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to the Department of Health and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, are working together in this cause. We have an outstanding sports Minister and I give her every vote of confidence in the work she does. Please remember this broader definition of sport and recreation in that work.

6.36 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Many thanks for allowing me to participate in this debate, Mr Speaker. I do so as a keen sportsman and a true believer in sport as an essential element in building stronger communities, improving public health outcomes and teaching our young people the value of team ethics and fair play. In my younger days, I played rugby for London Welsh at junior level and for my college at university. Clearly, the motivation for doing so was partly that I was doing my constitutional and patriotic duty as a Welshman, but of course it was also based on my love of sport as a crucial feature of Welsh culture and identity. In my constituency, every weekend I see rugby's power to bring our communities together across generations. Of course rugby is just one example of the power of sport as a unifying force for good.

It is against that backdrop that I must express my deepest regret at the failure of the coalition Government to build on the Olympic legacy. The 2012 Olympics created a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve the fitness levels of this country's children and young people, but that opportunity was squandered by the coalition Government when they decided to scrap Labour's school sport partnerships. Those partnerships played a crucial role in enabling primary school children to do competitive sport, and the decision to scrap them has led directly to the proportion of pupils doing two hours of sport a week collapsing from 90% under Labour to 50% under the last Government. Cuts to local authority budgets have also hit leisure centres and playing fields hard. In Wales, the £1.5 billion cut to the block grant has had a deeply damaging effect. In my constituency, the Cymmer community pool is threatened with closure, much to the despair of the local community, who are fighting hard to find a way to keep their pool, which plays a crucial role in community life and public health, open.

This Government must do better than their previous incarnation. The last five years saw a lack of strategy, piecemeal initiatives and announcements, and an absence of joined-up thinking. The coalition Government's sports strategy can best be described as a litany of failure, with some of the lowlights including: scrapping Labour's target for school children to do at least two hours of physical education and sport in school each week; undermining Labour's successful school sport partnership, which was helping more children to do sport; watering down regulations on school playing fields; failing to carry out an audit of sports and recreation facilities available to local communities across the country; and failing to capitalise on the spirit and enthusiasm of the volunteer games makers.

The concerns that I am expressing are not narrow party political points. On the contrary, they are felt by a wide range of stakeholders, including the Olympic gold medallist Darren Campbell, who said back in 2013:

"I have grave concerns that cutting the funding to the School Sport Partnership network will have a hugely negative impact on the sporting opportunities that are available to our young people."

Chris Dunne, headteacher of Langdon Park School in Tower Hamlets, London, described the Government's decision as an

"enormously destructive act, verging on vandalism."

He said that it was a tragedy that sporting opportunities had been cut back dramatically after the games.

The seductive vision was that the £9.3 billion invested in the games would not only hasten the regeneration of a neglected corner of east London and unlock a host of other benefits, but act as a corrective in Whitehall to the attitude of politicians towards sport. No longer would sport be left at the back of the policy queue when it came to funding discussions. Instead, it would be incorporated into policies on fighting obesity, tackling crime, boosting educational achievement and bringing communities together. If we fast forward to 2015, we see that a properly integrated, properly funded, cross-departmental plan for sport and wellbeing remains as frustratingly elusive as ever.

Meanwhile, childhood obesity rates continue to rise, PE in schools continues to decline, provision of facilities remains frustratingly patchy, and participation figures suggest a widening gap between the sporting haves and have nots.

6.41 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Let me make it clear at the outset that our reference in the motion is to sports participation. We bid for the Olympics because we understood all the wider aspects of the success of the Olympics.

We have had a wide-ranging debate with some very interesting speeches. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) on her maiden speech. She questioned whether there was a legacy from the Olympic games for Scotland. If she goes back and checks the figures, she will find that there was a considerable spin-off from the games. But the purpose of this debate is to find out how we can all benefit more widely from the legacy.

We also heard the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson). She spoke very fondly and passionately about her constituency. I am sure that she will be a fine champion of her local residents and constituents in the years to come.

There have been a number of well-informed speeches. The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) spoke about the wider generational issues. I found nothing in her speech with which I disagreed. The Olympic games will continue to benefit people more widely on a whole range of issues that go beyond sport, which is why investing and bidding for these major sporting events is so essential for the country.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): While we are discussing participation, will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to praise those who enable others to participate in sport—those who drive the buses, cut the grass, make the food and drink, and carry the bags week after week, as they have done in rugby clubs up and down my constituency for many, many generations? Do they not also perform a vital role?

Clive Efford: Absolutely, yes. A number of Members, especially the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), and my hon. Friends the Members for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and for Bassetlaw (John Mann), specifically referred to people at the grassroots of sport. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), because it is time that we empowered those people. They are the ones who do the heavy lifting. They make a real difference in our communities. They know where the resources should go to make the biggest difference, and it is time that we had a long-term strategy for sport that empowered those people at local level, allowed them to make decisions about how resources are used and where they are targeted, and gave them oversight of local development plans for sport. When we use the term “sport” we must remember that we are talking about not just sporting activities but physical activities of all kinds. That point was made very well in one of the contributions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) called for a comprehensive, long-term plan for sport. When we talk to people at the grassroots, the one thing they consistently say is that they want an end to the stop-start approach that they get from politicians. In saying that, they criticise us all, not just the current Government. We need what many speakers asked for: a long-term plan for sport, where all of us, in all parts of the House, agree on how we can take things forward and engage with people at the grassroots. It is an unfortunate fact that, in the past, the only consistency has been a consistent run of bad figures on participation since 2012-13.

Our motion focuses on participation. On the back of winning the Olympic bid, participation went up by 1.8 million people from 2005 to 2012, but since then participation figures have been going backwards. It is no good hon. Members saying, “Look at all the figures for transport, regeneration and jobs.” We accept all that—we are not criticising that side of it—but one of the targets for winning the Olympic games was to drive up participation. That worked from 2005 to 2012, on the back of winning the bid, but under this Government’s watch, since 2012, performance has not been good enough.

Boris Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is saying some sensible things, but will he not, in all candour and intellectual honesty, admit that even since the 2012 games, there has been a continuous increase in sporting participation in London?

Clive Efford: I accept that there has been a boost in London, but we are looking at the overall figures. There are underlying issues, which were highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley). The figures for women’s participation are down, as are those for people with disabilities. There are some important issues that we need to address.

In a recent survey by the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association, 70% of local authorities that responded said that they were looking to recover all or part of their costs through fees and charges. In the participation figures, the worst-affected sports tend to be those that rely heavily on local government facilities—sports such as gym exercise, dance, swimming, football and cricket. The impact is bound to be more severe on those who rely on those facilities—people from local

income households. Nearly half a million fewer people participate in sport now than in 2012. It is that form of social exclusion that we should be tackling.

I accept that the sports Minister was in earnest when she said that the figures are not good enough and that the Government have to accept part of the blame. Sport England has said that the figures are disastrous. We can bandy figures back and forth, but we have to accept that what people are looking for is consistency. All they have had consistently so far is bad figures, year after year since 2012. We need to work together on this. I wish the sports Minister all the best in convincing her right hon. and hon. Friends to give sport priority in the future, although I have to say that her predecessors failed woefully. I will be there supporting her all the way if she can convince them that we need a cross-Government, long-term plan for sport that we can all work towards.

We need to empower the people who do the heavy lifting: the coaches, PE teachers, school games organisers, volunteers, people who run the clubs and classes, academics, businesses, local authorities and county sports partnerships. Incidentally, if anyone recognises any of this, it is similar to the points Steve Hilton was making just recently, only I wrote it all down a year ago.

Sport governing bodies have a role to play. They have nothing to fear from being part of a strategy to increase overall participation, as they can then fish in a much bigger pool of talent for the next generation of elite athletes. We need a long-term plan, so that policy does not change every time we have a bad set of figures or the Minister changes. We need to empower the people at the grassroots, let them tailor what goes on in their area to meet local needs and oversee local sports plans, and trust them, because they can do it. Let us put the failures behind us. Let us do what people out there want us to do: trust them, and set out a long-term plan that we can all work towards, so that we get our nation healthy, happy and active.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): This has, on the whole, been an excellent debate, not just because of colleagues’ contributions, which I shall turn to shortly, but because despite the Opposition’s attempt to say otherwise, we have a good story to tell about London 2012 and its legacy.

I will briefly turn to the 13 contributions from the Floor of the House. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) on her excellent maiden speech. I am very fond of Edinburgh, which has much sporting heritage of which to be proud.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), as a former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, brings real expertise and knowledge to the debate. I pay particular tribute to her—and indeed my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant)—for progressing the issue of women in sport; she was right to say that the Olympics started that process.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), who was of course the first female sports Minister—I am merely the third—gave a brilliantly measured speech. I reassure her that there will be a proper cross-departmental approach to the strategy, and I certainly share her passion to increase grassroots sport.

[Tracey Crouch]

My hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) spoke incredibly well. I am hoping that if I say wonderfully nice things about his excellent speech, he will be very kind to me, now that he has been re-elected to the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport.

I know how incredibly passionate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) is about sport. He is a man of great foresight: we spent 21-odd days climbing a volcano for charity, and he lobbied me then on facilities for his constituency, 12 months before I was made a Minister.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) on her maiden speech. I was delighted to hear her story about Cheadle Town football club and its score line. I believe the club was founded as Grasmere Rovers. She should not worry about the 22-nil drubbing; I have been a manager when we have won with a similar score line, but I have also been a player when we have lost with the same score line. Both are equally embarrassing.

The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) made some very interesting comments. She has been in the House for a while now, but I must pay tribute to her late predecessor, Alan Keen, who also served on the Select Committee and was a real advocate for sport. She has picked up his baton wonderfully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) of course made an excellent speech about a legacy that he helped deliver. As Mayor of London, he gave us a memorable games, and he is right to be incredibly proud of all that the Olympics and Paralympics delivered.

The hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) was right to talk about the link between physical activity and health outcomes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) was right to point out the long tail of the participation legacy. Those inspired by London 2012 may not yet be out of primary school. His points were well made.

I have worked incredibly closely with the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) on the issue of women in sport. She raised important issues. There has been progress, but challenges remain, and I look forward to working with her on those.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) is a fantastic advocate for outdoor recreation, but it is his fault that my knees have not yet recovered from Cotopaxi.

Finally, the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnoch) focused on school sport. I assure him that the Government have committed to funding the physical education and sport primary school premium for a further four years—something that Labour has not done. Furthermore, according to an independent assessment, 96% of schools reported improvements in pupils' fitness, and 91% observed an increase in the quality of PE teaching.

If unnecessary attempts at political point-scoring were an Olympic sport, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) would win gold every time. He has done his best to impugn the legacy of London 2012, but the simple truth is that we have a great deal to be proud of, and it is shame that the hitherto consensus has been

shattered. [Interruption.] I will come to participation shortly, but the legacy is more than that. There is the legacy of the park, the village, business, volunteers and the collective knowledge accumulated by those who delivered the games. The park is outstanding, with wonderful venues that are open to the public to enjoy. The Olympic stadium has an exciting and sustainable future. Unlike so many previous host cities, there are no white elephants from London 2012.

Stewart McDonald: Will the Minister give way?

Tracey Crouch: No, because I do not have much time—I am sorry.

The London 2012 games were the perfect showcase for the skills of our people and our businesses, which led to £14.2 billion of trade and investment benefits to the UK. British business has already won £60 million-worth of contracts for the Rio 2016 games, with up to another £100 million to come. About 200 people who worked at London 2012 are helping to deliver the European games in Baku and assisting Rio in its preparations. [Interruption.] If hon. Members will be patient, I will turn to participation shortly. As the Secretary of State said, games maker-style volunteers have become a fixture at major sporting events. London 2012 changed the perception of volunteering, and the nation has embraced it—a direct legacy that appears to have been forgotten by the Opposition.

I now turn to participation. I am happy to have an open and honest debate on this. The fact is that 1.4 million more people playing are sport than in 2005, and sport participation has increased by 300,000 since October 2010. Yet that is not enough—it is as simple as that. London 2012 has, without doubt, inspired many people to get involved in Olympic and Paralympic sports. There has been an increase in the number of people doing athletics, cycling, archery, judo, sailing and many other sports. Let us not forget, though, that inspiration and measurement do not always run concurrently. The girls I met in my local boxing gym are in the ring because of Nicola Adams. They are not measured on any survey because they are under 14. We will have examples like that from all our constituencies.

The strapline of London 2012 was “Inspire a Generation”. The participation results show that our 16 to 25-year-olds are, on the whole, “steady”. That is good, but not good enough. When the last active people survey results were issued a couple of weeks ago, I made it clear that I am not happy with the decline in the number of people participating in sport. However, let us be clear: the last time an all-encompassing sports strategy was drawn up was in 2002, and it has been the template for sport delivery since then.

Clearly, as the Opposition have admitted today, their strategy is not delivering. This Government have been working on the basis of a strategy that was delivered in 2002 and is no longer fit for purpose. So I have ripped up the old strategy, and before the recess I shall publish a consultation on a brand new sport strategy that will reform how we deliver sport in this country. I am sure the Opposition will embrace this opportunity to revive the consensus that helped deliver such a successful games.

We are absolutely committed to continuing to make the most of the opportunities that London 2012 gave us and to make sure that generations to come benefit from

that fantastic summer three years ago. It is unfortunate that through the wording of their motion the Opposition sought to denigrate the legacy of London 2012. For that reason, we shall oppose the motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 250, Noes 309.

Division No. 25]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Anderson, Mr David
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Ms Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harpham, Harry
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald

Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerr, Calum
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Stewart
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 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
 Thompson, Owen
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tom Blenkinsop and
Phil Wilson

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Andrew, Stuart | Ellison, Jane | Jenrick, Robert | Penning, rh Mike |
| Ansell, Caroline | Ellwood, Mr Tobias | Johnson, Boris | Penrose, John |
| Argar, Edward | Elphicke, Charlie | Johnson, Gareth | Percy, Andrew |
| Atkins, Victoria | Eustice, George | Johnson, Joseph | Perry, Claire |
| Bacon, Mr Richard | Evans, Graham | Jones, Andrew | Phillips, Stephen |
| Baker, Mr Steve | Evans, Mr Nigel | Jones, rh Mr David | Philp, Chris |
| Baldwin, Harriett | Evennett, rh Mr David | Jones, Mr Marcus | Pickles, rh Sir Eric |
| Barclay, Stephen | Fabricant, Michael | Kawczynski, Daniel | Pincher, Christopher |
| Baron, Mr John | Fernandes, Suella | Kennedy, Seema | Pow, Rebecca |
| Barwell, Gavin | Field, rh Mark | Kinahan, Danny | Prentis, Victoria |
| Bebb, Guto | Foster, Kevin | Kirby, Simon | Prisk, Mr Mark |
| Bellingham, Mr Henry | Fox, rh Dr Liam | Knight, rh Sir Greg | Pritchard, Mark |
| Benyon, Richard | Francois, rh Mr Mark | Knight, Julian | Pursglove, Tom |
| Beresford, Sir Paul | Frazer, Lucy | Kwarteng, Kwasi | Quin, Jeremy |
| Berry, Jake | Freeman, George | Lancaster, Mark | Quince, Will |
| Berry, James | Freer, Mike | Latham, Pauline | Raab, Mr Dominic |
| Bingham, Andrew | Fuller, Richard | Leadsom, Andrea | Redwood, rh John |
| Blackman, Bob | Fysh, Marcus | Lefroy, Jeremy | Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob |
| Blackwood, Nicola | Garnier, rh Sir Edward | Leslie, Charlotte | Robertson, Mr Laurence |
| Blunt, Crispin | Garnier, Mark | Letwin, rh Mr Oliver | Robinson, Mary |
| Boles, Nick | Gauke, Mr David | Lewis, Brandon | Rosindell, Andrew |
| Bone, Mr Peter | Ghani, Nusrat | Lewis, rh Dr Julian | Rudd, rh Amber |
| Borwick, Victoria | Gibb, Mr Nick | Lidington, rh Mr David | Rutley, David |
| Bottomley, Sir Peter | Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl | Lilley, rh Mr Peter | Sandbach, Antoinette |
| Bradley, Karen | Glen, John | Lopresti, Jack | Scully, Paul |
| Brady, Mr Graham | Goodwill, Mr Robert | Lord, Jonathan | Shannon, Jim |
| Brazier, Mr Julian | Graham, Richard | Loughton, Tim | Sharma, Alok |
| Bridgen, Andrew | Grant, Mrs Helen | Lumley, Karen | Shelbrooke, Alec |
| Brokenshire, rh James | Gray, Mr James | Mackinlay, Craig | Simpson, rh Mr Keith |
| Bruce, Fiona | Grayling, rh Chris | Mackintosh, David | Skidmore, Chris |
| Buckland, Robert | Green, Chris | Main, Mrs Anne | Smith, Chloe |
| Burns, Conor | Green, rh Damian | Mak, Alan | Smith, Henry |
| Burns, rh Sir Simon | Greening, rh Justine | Malthouse, Kit | Smith, Julian |
| Burrowes, Mr David | Grieve, rh Mr Dominic | Mann, Scott | Smith, Royston |
| Burt, rh Alistair | Griffiths, Andrew | Mathias, Dr Tania | Soames, rh Sir Nicholas |
| Cairns, Alun | Gummer, Ben | May, rh Mrs Theresa | Solloway, Amanda |
| Carmichael, Neil | Gyimah, Mr Sam | Maynard, Paul | Soubry, rh Anna |
| Cartlidge, James | Halfon, rh Robert | McCartney, Jason | Spencer, Mark |
| Caulfield, Maria | Hall, Luke | McCartney, Karl | Stephenson, Andrew |
| Chalk, Alex | Hammond, Stephen | McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick | Stevenson, John |
| Chishti, Rehman | Hancock, rh Matthew | McPartland, Stephen | Stewart, Bob |
| Churchill, Jo | Hands, rh Greg | Menzies, Mark | Stewart, Iain |
| Clark, rh Greg | Harper, rh Mr Mark | Mercer, Johnny | Stewart, Rory |
| Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth | Harrington, Richard | Merriman, Huw | Streeter, Mr Gary |
| Cleverly, James | Harris, Rebecca | Metcalfe, Stephen | Stride, Mel |
| Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey | Hart, Simon | Miller, rh Mrs Maria | Stuart, Graham |
| Coffey, Dr Thérèse | Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan | Milling, Amanda | Sturdy, Julian |
| Collins, Damian | Hayes, rh Mr John | Mills, Nigel | Sunak, Rishi |
| Colvile, Oliver | Heald, Sir Oliver | Milton, rh Anne | Swayne, rh Mr Desmond |
| Costa, Alberto | Heapey, James | Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew | Swire, rh Mr Hugo |
| Cox, Mr Geoffrey | Heaton-Harris, Chris | Mordaunt, Penny | Syms, Mr Robert |
| Crouch, Tracey | Heaton-Jones, Peter | Morgan, rh Nicky | Thomas, Derek |
| Davies, Byron | Henderson, Gordon | Morris, Anne Marie | Thrupp, Maggie |
| Davies, Chris | Herbert, rh Nick | Morris, David | Timpson, Edward |
| Davies, Glyn | Hinds, Damian | Morris, James | Tolhurst, Kelly |
| Davies, James | Hoare, Simon | Morton, Wendy | Tomlinson, Justin |
| Davies, Mims | Hollingbery, George | Mowat, David | Tomlinson, Michael |
| Davies, Philip | Hollinrake, Kevin | Mundell, rh David | Tracey, Craig |
| Davis, rh Mr David | Hollobone, Mr Philip | Murray, Mrs Sheryll | Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie |
| Dinenage, Caroline | Holloway, Mr Adam | Murrison, Dr Andrew | Truss, rh Elizabeth |
| Djanogly, Mr Jonathan | Hopkins, Kris | Neill, Robert | Tugendhat, Tom |
| Donelan, Michelle | Howarth, Sir Gerald | Newton, Sarah | Turner, Mr Andrew |
| Dorries, Nadine | Howell, John | Nokes, Caroline | Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew |
| Double, Steve | Howlett, Ben | Norman, Jesse | Vaizey, Mr Edward |
| Dowden, Oliver | Huddleston, Nigel | Nuttall, Mr David | Vara, Mr Shailesh |
| Drax, Richard | Hurd, Mr Nick | Offord, Dr Matthew | Vickers, Martin |
| Drummond, Mrs Flick | Jackson, Mr Stewart | Osborne, rh Mr George | Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa |
| Duncan, rh Sir Alan | James, Margot | Paisley, Ian | Walker, Mr Charles |
| Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain | Javid, rh Sajid | Parish, Neil | Walker, Mr Robin |
| Dunne, Mr Philip | Jayawardena, Mr Ranil | Patel, rh Priti | Wallace, Mr Ben |
| Elliott, Tom | Jenkin, Mr Bernard | Paterson, rh Mr Owen | Warburton, David |
| Ellis, Michael | Jenkyns, Andrea | Pawsey, Mark | 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
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Jackie Doyle-Price and
Guy Opperman

Question accordingly negatived.

Public Health England: Porton Down

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(George Hollingbery.)

7.11 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): The first debate I secured as a Member of Parliament was five years ago on Monday, and it was on the future of the Public Health England site at Porton Down in my constituency. I did not imagine then that the first debate I would secure in the 2015 Parliament would also be on the future of that critical site, but I can think of no issue of greater significance to my constituency.

Porton Down is known across the world for the work that Public Health England and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory do there. It would not be right to open this debate without first paying tribute to all the staff for the work they have done to tackle Ebola in Sierra Leone in recent months. It has been truly humbling to hear the stories of my constituents, who have travelled at great risk and put themselves on the front line in the fight against Ebola. Their expertise has been vital to the people of Sierra Leone, and it is testament to the UK's reputation for excellence in infectious disease research. I welcome the recent decision to award a medal for their commitment and dedication, which I know a number of my constituents will be very pleased to receive.

It is almost seven years since the Department of Health authorised Public Health England, then the Health Protection Agency, to develop an outline business case for the refurbishment of the facilities at Porton Down. That was after the Science and Technology Committee found the category 4 containment laboratory facilities at Porton Down

“to be in need of significant investment given their age”.

It recommended in 2008 that

“the Department of Health consider the redevelopment of the HPA's Porton Down site as a priority”.

Project Chrysalis, the proposal for that multi-million pound redevelopment, was put forward shortly after the Committee's report was published. In January 2010, a former GlaxoSmithKline site where Public Health England could consolidate its assets in one place was proposed as the preferred option, and a business case was put to the Department of Health just six months later. That was rejected—rightly, in my opinion—after scrutiny and further work were commissioned, but not as part of Project Chrysalis. Instead, Public Health England began putting together the case for a single science hub programme, which some might argue was a clear signal of an intention at an early stage to centralise before the business case work had even concluded.

The new outline business case was finalised in July 2014, and recommended that the facilities at Porton, Whitechapel and Colindale should move to a single campus in Harlow. The PHE board asked for a decision to be made by September 2014. I would like to take the opportunity to ask the Minister why, if the outline business case is so rock solid, it has still not been signed off nine months after Public Health England wanted it to be and 11 months after it was submitted.

There are certainly doubts remaining among many of my constituents about the decision, for a number of reasons. First, co-location in Harlow was recommended as, according to Public Health England's officials, it

[John Glen]

“offers the best value to the taxpayer and delivers the lowest cost over the 60 year life of the programme”.

PHE also stated in its publicly disclosed annexe, however, that

“the differences in cost between the options are relatively small”. Professor George Griffin estimated in his review of the single science hub work in 2012 that the difference amounted to 2.6% over 68 years, which I maintain is disputable given the complexities associated with modelling over such a long period. The resultant cost to the taxpayer might well be marginally smaller, but it is important to remember that the costs to my constituents will not be. The fact remains that they are being asked to uproot their lives and transplant to Harlow. For many of them, Salisbury has been their home for years. It is where their children go to school and where their family responsibilities lie.

Increasingly the trend in science is not to co-locate assets on single sites, but to harness the power of technology to work across larger areas. Centralisation remains an approach that the private sector left behind, in many cases a long time ago, in recognition that smaller specialist sites can be more effective. The direction of travel towards greater use of genomics and big data reinforces the argument for smaller entities such as Porton to continue to leverage global partnerships. I was previously told by Public Health England that it favoured the single hub model because of the approach taken at the Francis Crick Institute, but this is not a co-location of one entity’s assets; six distinctly different players all operate across multiple sites themselves and, in many ways, will continue to do so.

Secondly, the unwillingness to grasp the potential opportunities at Porton or fully to engage in a conversation about them is disappointing. Public Health England says that

“the Harlow campus has the potential to become a campus with an international reputation for public health science”.

Porton Down already has an international reputation. It has 250 external partnerships across the world and is supported by \$55 million of investment from the US Government. It already partners more international universities than universities in the UK, eight US Government agencies, five international health bodies and nine global pharmaceutical companies.

Public Health England has not yet articulated publicly precisely how being in Harlow will improve on that. How many new commercial partnerships does it believe will be generated from the site? What will be the impact on Public Health England’s revenue streams? Have those factors even been modelled thoroughly as part of the business case? I have long been concerned that the outline business case focuses too narrowly on Public Health England’s objectives as an organisation and the benefits it allegedly accrues from centralisation, not the wider opportunities for UK life science industries.

Thirdly, centralising in Harlow flies in the face of the Government’s agenda to promote more prosperous regional economies. The Chancellor said:

“The south-west contains some of Britain’s greatest economic strengths. It should be as central to our nation’s future prosperity as any other part of these islands”.

He said that it

“already has a strong reputation for life sciences”,

and even asked the chief scientific adviser and the chief medical officer to

“explore the potential for new proposals for investment in life sciences in the south west”.

In the light of that ongoing work, will the Minister assure me that the chief scientific adviser has been consulted about the single science hub, given its implications for the entire south-west?

I appreciate that not all of Public Health England would move to Harlow, should the business case be approved, and that Porton would retain the manufacturing facilities. I also recognise that Public Health England management have given an assurance that they will not be abandoning those remaining facilities, and that they are meeting representatives of Wiltshire Council on Friday to examine how Public Health England can facilitate the optimal exploitation of opportunities that will derive from a new science park, which this Government have supported, right on its doorstep. However, it is unacceptable to assume that that would be appropriate consolation for the loss of the remaining facilities and capabilities, and I remain concerned that, if the Porton site were cannibalised in that manner, the temptation to examine commercial opportunities for those remaining facilities would be high.

Indeed, I understand from a letter that was recently sent by the Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), to an interested party on 10 June that Public Health England is

“continuing to investigate commercial opportunities for its activities at Porton”.

I have long been an advocate for greater capitalisation on the commercial potential at Porton, but I would like assurances that the vaccine manufacturing facilities will be treated with the respect they deserve and not simply sold off to provide a quick win to allow the Government to balance the equation. This is not just a vaccine factory, and any proposal to maximise its potential needs to recognise its value to the south Wiltshire and regional life science economy.

More importantly, how do these concurrent agendas best serve the interests of my constituents? Can the Minister reassure me that individual Government Departments are not operating on different agendas? It seems to me that any discussions about commercialisation in advance of a decision on the outline business case would be premature and potentially misaligned.

Fourthly, the opportunity to consider the more effective use of existing public sector assets has still not been fully considered. The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, located on the same site, has existing synergies with Public Health England and the two organisations work together closely. DSTL also has category 4 containment facilities which were refurbished relatively recently and are considered to be of the highest standard. Indeed, it has spare capacity in its facilities, and when the size of refurbished labs at the Public Health England site was being discussed, the decision was taken to request a smaller facility on the basis that DSTL would be expected to provide back-up capacity in an emergency. Professor George Griffin also told the Science and Technology Committee in 2008 that

“the Ministry of Defence has a facility at Porton...there is spare capacity there, we know, and we would be able to use that if necessary”.

However, I have been told that there are conceivable emergency scenarios in which DSTL and PHE would need to occupy the entire space at the same time, resulting in a conflict of interest with severe implications for national security. Those scenarios have never been articulated—they may well be considered above my pay grade—but I would ask the Minister to put on record that the DSTL collaboration option has been fully explored with DSTL management and examined independently, and that the security concerns about the laboratories proved irresolvable.

DSTL and PHE have an important collaboration that benefits from their physical proximity. They are treated as the “Porton campus” by the regulator, enabling pathogenic samples to be transferred between the two sites without the need for additional licensing. Both are licensed for animal work, and I understand that PHE manages some of the sensitive resources occasionally used by DSTL. They can currently be safely transported at minimal risk, but a move to Harlow would completely remove that capability.

Fifthly, I again take the opportunity to emphasise that Porton Down is embedded in the Salisbury community. We support its staff and recognise the sensitive nature of the vital work they carry out. Porton’s relatively isolated location makes it an ideal secure site. Harlow remains untested, and rebuilding the relationship and acceptance of the sensitive work that Public Health England does will take valuable time and effort. As many of my constituents tell me, it is simply common sense to keep that work where it is, not move it to a more densely populated suburban area.

Finally, I reiterate that this is not just a conversation about keeping jobs in my constituency; it is a debate about what is best for our life science industry and the partners that depend on Porton’s expertise. I said in my previous Adjournment debate that my primary concern is that the decision is motivated by a desire to tidy up different entities within the PHE organisation on to a single site, when the advantages of co-location are notional, uncosted and unproven. Until I am permitted to see the full business case, my concerns will remain about the logic that is being used.

I appreciate that this is a decision that will have significant implications for our national security and I have always stressed it is imperative that we get it right. However, the Department of Health was informed in 2008 that the category 4 labs at Porton were

“built over 50 years ago and refurbishment and upgrading work is becoming increasingly difficult.”

In my debate five years ago this week, the then Minister with responsibility for public health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Anne Milton), told the House:

“The site is 60 years old, the building structures are in a poor state of repair and the laboratories clearly do not meet modern safety standards, so something must be done.”—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2010; Vol. 512, c. 273.]

I believed her, yet five years later nothing has been done. The facilities are deteriorating and my constituents have lived in the shadow of this decision for five years, not knowing if they will be moving to Harlow, although we have had the positive news of a science park, which will, I hope, open in the next year or so. I will persist in my questioning on this matter, because, frankly, some of my questions have gone unanswered.

When I last met the PHE leadership team in November, I was told by the most senior official that he was the boss and he would decide how any re-examination of Porton’s potential would be evaluated, but I have heard nothing from him for six months. I have a responsibility to my constituents to seek assurance that the decisions that will have an impact on their lives are being made on the basis of rigorous analysis of the facts. I urge the Minister to finally clarify for my constituents, one way or the other, where their future lies. We owe the staff based at Porton Down that much.

7.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) on having secured a hat-trick of debates on the future of Porton Down, which is a very important subject not just for his constituents, but for the whole country, given the work done there on a wide range of public health threats, including the Ebola outbreak in west Africa. I join him in paying tribute to his constituents for their service both in the UK and on the frontline in Sierra Leone. The medals are hugely deserved.

My hon. Friend has been a tireless campaigner for his constituents on this matter and on the creation of Porton science park, which I will turn to later. Through this campaigning he has shown a passion for growth and job creation in his area, and we all admire that.

Scientists have been doing invaluable work at Porton Down since the 1950s. As my hon. Friend has said, in previous debates it has been stressed that the buildings are more than 60 years old and are increasingly becoming unfit for purpose. I know that my hon. Friend agrees with the need to find a solution to the problem—indeed, he devoted his speech to that—to ensure that the vital work can continue. It is important that scientists have the benefit of state of the art facilities that reflect the latest technological advancements, including the shift from Petri dish to big data. So much has happened in recent years and so much change is going on. There is a clear consensus that the status quo is not acceptable and that it will not enable Public Health England to deliver the public health scientific expertise that the Government and the nation require.

My hon. Friend ran through the options. He knows that Public Health England has looked at a number of options to meet the challenge it faces. It has had to consider a wide range of longlisted and shortlisted options, all of which have to demonstrate the best value for money to the taxpayer. The main focus of the options has been on the existing Porton Down and Colindale sites, and the former GlaxoSmithKline facility in Harlow, Essex.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, Public Health England has briefed him and the local MPs, local authorities and other key stakeholders, and has consulted the chief medical officer and chief scientific officer, about the three sites affected and considered in the option appraisal. As my hon. Friend will be aware, PHE’s case is that there are significant benefits from bringing together the range of public health science functions that it manages at disparate sites. I accept that he expressed scepticism about some of the arguments, but PHE believes that creating an integrated national science hub rather than re-providing the same facilities on the same sites would

[Jane Ellison]

be its ideal. For that reason, in the PHE outline business case, the preferred option was to create a public health science hub based at Harlow.

My hon. Friend asked what was included in some aspects of the outline business case. I can confirm that no additional revenues from any relocation have been included, in line with the rules and guidelines of what is and can be included in such cost-benefit analyses. However, it is hoped that new facilities will lead to increased academic and commercial income.

As I have said, it is essential that the proposal taken forward offers the best value for money for the taxpayer while protecting the vital health protection functions carried out by scientists. The scrutiny of the business case has included two external reviews organised by the Major Projects Authority. Both have concluded that the business case properly evaluates the options, including options based at Porton. Since our last debate on this topic last September, the review process has continued and the business case has been through a Major Projects Authority gateway process. I can assure my hon. Friend that that has been and will continue to be a thorough and robust process, and that the outline business case continues to be scrutinised by Ministers at the Department of Health, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office.

As I have said, PHE has considered a wide range of options in the outline business case, including those that would involve remaining at Porton Down. Alternative, third-party proposals have been put forward, including those of the Porton life sciences group, which were kindly forwarded to me and to other Ministers by my hon. Friend. I assure him that the proposals have been carefully considered.

We recognise the need for collaboration between Public Health England and its neighbours at Porton and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, in the interests of national security. PHE is committed to being collaborative, including having discussions about the use of specialist high-containment facilities. However, we need to be clear that, although PHE and DSTL will continue to collaborate closely, PHE needs dedicated high-containment facilities to ensure that it can properly respond to the threat our nation faces. PHE is the employer of the specialists that are registered to handle human health specimens. The DSTL facilities provide additional resilience, but they were built to meet military requirements. In addition PHE's facilities provide resilience to the military if DSTL's facilities are for any reason unavailable. Whatever the final decision, national security, and capabilities for national response, are paramount. It is therefore key for DSTL and all other potential agencies involved in the response to work with PHE to protect public health from current and future threats.

Public Health England has confirmed that it remains committed to the Porton site, even if it is decided to relocate the Porton research functions and staff. That would involve the PHE facilities remaining at Porton consisting of some 300 staff in development and production and regional laboratories. That has continued, with PHE spinning out development and production as a

corporate company called Porton Biopharma Ltd, which is wholly owned by the Secretary of State for Health. That will allow for Porton Biopharma Ltd to take a commercial approach to growing the business. I note my hon. Friend's consistent support for that—he has not spoken against the idea. That allows more people across the world to benefit from the specialist products it manufactures. PHE has briefed my hon. Friend on that work and on maximising the commercial potential of the production facilities at Porton. As he said in his speech, that principle has his support.

The work to increase the commercial potential of the production facilities at Porton will be closely linked to the Porton science park, which I know my hon. Friend has worked hard to bring to his constituency. Porton Biopharma Ltd is next to the new science park and PHE is working closely with Wiltshire County Council on the further opportunities in the life sciences sector that this important development could bring to his constituency.

My hon. Friend rightly focused much of his remarks on the need to support staff in the most appropriate way, and on how unsettling it is for any group of staff to not quite know where their future lies. One third of the posts currently at Porton will remain there, even if research functions and staff are relocated. If those functions are relocated, PHE would work with each member of staff at Porton who is working in a post that would move to Harlow under the new proposals, to support them in decisions about their future. He is absolutely right to make that paramount and I take it very seriously. Some staff may want to relocate to Harlow and others may wish to retire or move to other roles outside PHE. The business case includes support packages for staff that are in line with the Government standard. I hope that gives him some reassurance.

As I have set out, the work conducted at Porton Down is of local, national and international importance. However, there is a consensus that, given the ageing facilities, doing nothing is not an option. PHE has looked at a wide range of possibilities for the future of health protection laboratories in the UK and at the benefits of combining various public health functions. This has led to a preference for the Harlow site at the outline business case stage. Regardless of the final decision, PHE remains committed to the Porton site, as expressed through the commercialisation of its development and production arm. This will be closely linked to the Porton science park. The outline business case has been through, and continues to go through, rigorous, thorough and robust scrutiny before a final decision is reached by Ministers.

I thank my hon. Friend for his continued keen scrutiny of this important issue. I congratulate him once again on securing the debate and on continuing to be such an ardent champion for the interests of Porton as a science centre of excellence and for his constituents and their future.

Question put and agreed to.

7.36 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 24 June 2015

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Science and Research

9.30 am

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered science and research in the UK and regional economies.

I am delighted to do so with you in the Chair, Mr Owen, and I take this opportunity to welcome the new Minister for Universities and Science to his job. I am looking forward to having many engagements with him on issues relating to higher education.

I move this motion as a Member representing a city whose wealth was built on innovation, from Benjamin Huntsman's invention of crucible steel production in the 1740s to Harry Brearley's invention of stainless steel in 1912 to the work today of Sheffield University's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. Science, research and innovation have driven our city's economy, just as they have for the country as a whole.

However, we face a challenge, because a generation ago the UK was one of the most research-intensive economies in the world and now we are one of the least. We have slipped from leading the OECD countries in research and development spend as a percentage of GDP in 1979 to our position now, where we trail behind all our competitors. The US invests 2.8% of its GDP in research; on average, both OECD and EU countries invest 2.4% of their GDP in research; but the UK now spends only 1.7% of its GDP on research. That is less than half the 3.9% of its GDP that is invested by South Korea, which, as a result of that investment, remains a major manufacturing nation.

Where have research and innovation been lost? Most strikingly, they have been lost within the private sector. The old world of R and D was dominated by the big companies—the likes of GEC and ICI—and their loss took out big chunks of our innovative capacity. The obsession with short-term returns for shareholders, which distorts our equity markets, has changed the attitudes of investors. The dynamic of long-term investment for long-term reward that drove the industrial revolution and built our economic strength has gone. Today there are just two UK companies among the top 100 companies around the world for R and D investment.

For some time, the impact of the decline in private sector investment in R and D was masked by the continued public sector investment of successive Governments, but that changed under the coalition, despite the best efforts of David Willetts, who occupied the Minister's job for most of the coalition's time in office and was a real champion of science and universities. As the Campaign for Science and Engineering highlighted in its "Science is Vital" campaign last year, publicly funded research slipped to less than 0.5% of GDP in 2012.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does he agree that the situation is all the more perverse given that for the research investment that is made—particularly significantly through universities—we get more bang for our buck than other countries in citations and innovation, and therefore that if we put in more bucks we would get more bangs?

Paul Blomfield: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention, and he makes a point that I will come back to and reflect on shortly.

The drop in our publicly funded research to 0.5% of GDP takes that research to its lowest point for more than 20 years. The latest figures, published by UNESCO in March, put the UK's publicly funded research at 0.48% of GDP, which is well below the EU average of 0.67%, the OECD average of 0.71% and the G8 average of 0.77%.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. He has dwelt a lot on the percentages and on where the UK stands in the league table, but is that situation solely down to investment and finance? What does he put it down to? What is the difficulty? He said that the UK now has only two companies that are ranked highly in the world for R and D. What is the fundamental problem?

Paul Blomfield: The fundamental problem in relation to private sector investment in R and D is the dominant culture of short-termism in investment. People are looking for quick gains, but what we need to rebalance our economy is the long-term investment that drove economic growth in this country in the first place.

Echoing the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) made, according to a report produced by CaSE last year, "The Economic Significance of the UK Science Base", private sector R and D output rises by 20p per year in perpetuity for every £1 spent by the Government on R and D, so there is a real return on public sector investment and it stimulates the private sector investment that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) referred to by raising the UK's knowledge base.

That is the real challenge, but there are also real opportunities, because as a country we have enormous strengths, above all our universities, which are highly productive. To echo again the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East made, despite representing only 4.1% of the global research community, UK researchers produced 15.9% of the world's most highly cited papers in 2011, the last year for which I have figures available. That puts us at No. 1 in the world in the sector. Crucially—I make this point as a northern MP—at a time when we all share a concern about the regional imbalance of economic growth, universities are one of the few assets we have that are spread evenly across the country, and they are able to generate economic growth in all regions and all nations of the UK.

Clearly, universities draw their investment widely, from several sources, and not just from public funds. They have grown their own investment in R and D by 40% in the past decade and now generate more than £3.4 billion a year. However, public investment levers in

[Paul Blomfield]

other funding, and academics in receipt of research council grants have been shown to be more outward-facing and more engaged in the commercial application of their research.

The strength of that research in our universities attracts foreign investment into the UK, as well as international students. According to a British Council survey of 5,000 18 to 34-year-olds from China, India, Brazil, Germany and the US, the fact that the UK has world-leading academic research was the primary attraction for them to come here and study in our universities. Those international students bring more than £10 billion of economic benefit to the UK, including to our regional economies. I know that in Sheffield alone the net value of our international students, who are approaching 9,000 in number, is £120 million a year. Thousands of jobs depend on that money, and not just in the university sector.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a profound point about the impact that our first-class universities have on regional economic development. However, is he as concerned as I am that more than 90% of non-university research in the UK takes place within the golden triangle of Cambridge, Oxford and London, which means that outside universities, the regions are starved of scientific investment?

Paul Blomfield: I am indeed, and my hon. Friend—a fellow northern MP, albeit on the wrong side of the Pennines—makes an important point.

Graham Stringer: I went to university on the other side.

Paul Blomfield: Indeed—I know that my hon. Friend is proud to be a graduate of Sheffield University. He makes an important point, and we need to be careful that even with the positive developments such as the Francis Crick Institute in London, public investment in research does not get sucked into the golden triangle that he referred to at the expense of universities around the country. As I said a moment ago, the great strength of our university network is its dispersal around the country. We need to ensure that funding for research is spread across the sector and across the country.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York has two excellent universities. The University of York is ranked in the 10 top universities for research, and five of its departments are in the “excellent” category, right at the top of their league. Yet the relationship between jobs and growth in our city and academic achievements in research and development is not being built. Should not the two come together for economic growth across our city?

Paul Blomfield: I was a student in York and am well aware of the strength of the two universities. My hon. Friend is right; linking research with its commercial application is critical. Some progress has been made with the impact approach taken in the sector, although there is more to be done. We considered that issue in the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills during the last Parliament. Although there is more to be

done, we should recognise that a huge amount is already being done to link research and its application. I shall mention a few examples from Sheffield.

We would be foolish to lose our advantage in world-leading research, but it could happen if we do not take care. “The Plan for Growth”, published by the Chancellor and the Minister’s predecessor in December 2014, acknowledged the challenge:

“If we fail to move quickly to secure our position in a globalised world, then it is highly likely that other countries...will do so ahead of us. We not only run the risk of missing out on new opportunities, but also of losing the position of strength that we have today”.

The Government acknowledge that we can and must do more.

Innovation policy now needs to focus on developing industrial and private sector research and development capacity, building on the UK’s strong and well connected science base. It will do that by working with universities. For example, to take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) a moment ago, the University of Sheffield works closely with Rolls-Royce, Boeing and more than 100 supply chain companies. Also in my constituency, Sheffield Hallam University secured Toshiba as the first technology partner in the Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre, designing new products to help promote the integration of exercise into people’s daily lives and address common health issues. Hallam’s new National Centre of Excellence for Food Engineering is supported by more than 40 companies, including Mars and Nestlé UK, to support growth in the food industry through improved manufacturing technology and staff capability.

Across my city, and across the whole university sector, science and research are creating jobs, but we could do more.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): My hon. Friend talks about research in universities, but it starts earlier than that. On Saturday, I was privileged to visit the excellent Hopwood Hall Further Education College in my constituency, including its excellent animal studies facility. Small amounts of research are being done there, which helps students on their path towards university. However, funding for FE colleges is being cut, and I wonder what impact that is having on the availability of fledgling research for those wanting to go to university.

Paul Blomfield: My hon. Friend makes an important point about acknowledging research taking place outside the university sector. I said earlier that foreign investment is driven significantly by countries with strong research capacity and strength, but it is driven equally by countries that commit to the development of skills. The cuts in the adult skills budget that my hon. Friend mentions, and particularly in further education, will weaken our capacity and our potential for economic growth.

We could do much more than is being done in the examples I have given. We could build partnerships in developing infrastructure for low-carbon energy, which we could then export to the world. If we shrink away from such a challenge, China will pay for the new generation of power stations to be built and we will miss out on the opportunity to help shape our own future. We will have little leverage in insisting that some

of the investment is spent on creating jobs in the UK, and we will pay for it through increased electricity bills for decades.

What should we do? I have three suggestions. First, let us stop making things worse. We should recognise the damage done to the UK by the structural shortcomings of our economy. Research and development is a national asset and we must not incentivise companies to do less of it, or make it harder for our universities to transform our economy.

Secondly, we must certainly not threaten the important stream of research funding that comes through our membership of the European Union, because as I am sure the Minister knows—I am sure he will endorse it—the UK does disproportionately well from European Union research funding. In 2013, for example, the last year for which data are available, we won €1.11 billion out of the €9.6 billion allocated under the seventh framework programme, FP7, which was the predecessor of Horizon 2020. Were we to exit the EU, that would clearly be at risk, at enormous cost to our universities and the communities in which they are driving economic growth. Similarly, we must not undermine the flow of talent into our country by the types of measures that we have already seen affecting students or by new restrictions on tier 2 visas. I am sure the Minister agrees with me on that point as well, although whether all his colleagues will is another question.

Thirdly, we should recognise and maintain our strengths. We should build on what we have that is positive and do more of it. The UK catapult centres, where universities and industry work together, are making an important start. At the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre in the Sheffield city region, more than 100 companies partner with university research to win jobs and orders for the UK. Some of them are giant companies, such as Rolls-Royce, and others are the high-tech supply companies that support them.

It is not only the companies that benefit. Research demands skills, and more than 600 young people are now training as advanced apprentices at catapult centres. They are fully funded by companies, as recognised by *Times Higher Education* in its widening participation initiative of the year award. Those people are working in a research environment and have the opportunity to progress to degrees, even MBAs and PhDs, all within a research setting. How was the AMRC in Sheffield built? By universities and industry working together, and through European funding and regional funding under the old regional development areas.

We should invest in other areas too, with a sense of national purpose. Our ageing society will face huge human and social costs as incurable neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's become even more common. Social, technical and medical innovations are urgently needed to deal with this, as the NHS struggles to deliver more with more limited resources. Places like the Sheffield Institute for Translational Neuroscience will make that possible. We know that we need to decarbonise our energy supply, but the existing low-carbon alternatives are just too expensive. Research and innovation will change that.

We also need to build capacity. The Chancellor has talked about our economy needing an "extra gear". That extra gear is research and innovation. We need more capacity in our industry, but it will not happen if

we do not support the research strengths of our universities. Every industry, every city and region needs transformational research to drive the growth and wealth that we all need. In the last Parliament I served on the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, and we highlighted that challenge in our report on business-university collaboration, in which we recommended unanimously—in a cross-party Committee dominated by Government Members—that the Government aim for 3% of GDP to be spent on R and D by 2020. Above all, I would welcome the Minister's response on our Committee's challenge.

We are at a crossroads. The erosion of the UK's capacity to technologically innovate was not inevitable; it was the unintended consequence of a series of choices made over decades. But we can reverse it. If we do not, we will be condemned to continue on our current trajectory of low growth and poor trade performance and will ultimately lose power over our own economic destiny. I urge the Government to recognise the vital contribution of research innovation to the UK, to ensure that we can thrive in a globally competitive environment.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. A number of Members wish to speak, but I will call the Front Benchers, including the Scottish National party spokesperson, from 10.30 am. I will also allow a few minutes for Mr Blomfield to wind up. Mr Byrne had indicated to me that he would be late, and I will allow him to respond from the Front Bench.

9.50 am

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on securing the debate; we have worked together on a number of university and immigration issues. He made slightly disparaging comments about some Government Members' views on immigration, but I suspect that he was not including me among them. We have worked together in particular on the importance of being an outward-looking nation and attracting the brightest and best people. That applies not only to our universities, but to many other areas that are important to research in the corporate world.

The Government correctly aspire to make the UK the best place in the world to run an innovative business or service. Instinctively, we know that to achieve that requires a strong financial sector, a plentiful supply of highly skilled people from across the globe—ideally, of course, with significant numbers of the indigenous population being trained—and progress in creating intellectual property and a thriving science and research community. All those ingredients can be found in London, the part of the country that I represent in the House. The capital's universities have put themselves at the heart of innovation and of the drive to bring finance and business together to commercialise that innovation.

My constituency is home to three of the capital's—indeed, the world's—top universities: Imperial College, King's College London and the London School of Economics. Their relentless rise in the university league tables coincides with our city's seemingly unstoppable growth as a premier destination for global talent, capital and ideas. Just as the metropolis has married financiers

[Mark Field]

with start-ups to create a booming tech sector, our universities have become adept at collaborating with the city's business, philanthropic, government and research communities, and that is beginning to reap huge dividends. I am not suggesting that we should in any way be complacent; I take on board the statistical concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Sheffield Central, who made valid points.

The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) pointed out that there is a golden triangle, which is sadly some way south of the Pennines. The London-Oxford-Cambridge golden triangle has more science and tech workers and faster industry growth than California. In 2007, Imperial College integrated its medical faculty with St Mary's and Hammersmith hospitals. Only eight years on, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust is a globally respected centre for medical research, with patients benefiting from cutting-edge care and academics able to trial state-of-the-art treatments on London's uniquely diverse population.

Imperial is similarly collaborating with Aviva Investors on a new White City campus, Imperial West, to support science start-ups and ensure that the UK benefits commercially from breakthroughs made in its university labs. A problem going back to Victorian times is that we have cutting-edge research, but do not glean the commercial benefits once the research makes its way into general products. We clearly have to get that right. I am not suggesting that there are easy solutions, as this problem goes back 120 years. The Minister might have some bright ideas, but I would not blame him if he felt that this is a work in progress.

The plan for Imperial is that the university will soon be virtually independent of public funding. One of the spin-outs based on the campus, DNA Electronics, is already transforming academic discoveries into serious commercial propositions, offering affordable chip devices that can test for genetic diseases and drug intolerances within minutes.

Amid healthy rivalry between London's top institutions, there are significant partnerships that we should applaud and relish. Imperial, King's College and University College London, for example, have joined forces with the Government and others to build the groundbreaking Francis Crick Institute for biomedical research in King's Cross. Once open, it will complement the arrival of Central Saint Martins in nearby Granary Square.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The right hon. Gentleman refers to the friendly rivalry between universities in his constituency. We need to encourage such rivalry right across the United Kingdom, so that organisations such as Innovate UK can develop and progress. It is in all our interests for the progress he sees in London to be replicated across the entire nation. Does he agree?

Mark Field: I very much agree. Perhaps understandably, there was a certain amount of cynicism when the Chancellor of the Exchequer first talked about the northern powerhouse two years ago—he represents a northern seat, albeit in leafy Cheshire—but it is none the less important. I have battled with a number of colleagues in London on both sides of the divide on the issue. I think that we should

be investing money in High Speed 3 well before we even consider putting money into High Speed 2. There is a strong case for building high-speed rail—indeed, high-speed transport—connections between our regional centres.

We could debate the broader issue of London's dominance. I understand why there is a lot of hostility towards that dominance, but this country has a single global city of 8 million people and a cluster of cities with populations of about 1 million. In an ideal world, we would build another city from scratch with a population of about 3 million to be a global player, to try to counter London's dominance within the UK.

A huge amount of the investment that comes into London, however, would not come to the UK if it did not come to London. It is not a zero-sum game between London and the rest of the UK. More importantly, a huge amount of the construction and contracting work that comes in for London-related projects often goes out to the regions, not only to the Oxfords and Cambridges of this world but to Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and many of the country's second-tier cities—I do not mean that disparagingly—where huge amounts of work can be done.

Graham Stringer: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for being generous with his time. London is my capital city, and he is absolutely right that it has technology and transport attractions that nowhere else in the United Kingdom has. However, London and the golden triangle get a disproportionate amount of scientific funding—not the universities—that could just as easily go into the regions and probably have a greater benefit. The Diamond Light Source was moved from Daresbury in the north-west to Oxford. The Francis Crick Institute, which the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, could just as easily have been placed in Manchester, Sheffield or Newcastle.

Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman makes a point that I am not sure I can necessarily answer. Given his criticisms of Oxford, he might get a kick from directly to his right, from the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith).

Amid the great strides in technology and science, London is also an important centre for leading global research in the social sciences sphere, with the London School of Economics at the forefront. The sheer quality of research undertaken by the LSE is regularly attested by peers to be world leading. In the recent research excellence framework, the LSE was ranked as the top institution in the UK for its proportion of four-star, world-leading research. All that means that the LSE and the nation have extensive global reach, in particular within the public policy and governance sphere, to institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the OECD and World Health Organisation. In the social sciences, however, it is harder to commercialise that work. Without mainly public funding, the LSE could not undertake the high-quality research that underpins its impact and provides the UK with considerable soft power globally.

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, there was much feverish gossip about the pressing need to rebalance the economy away from an over-reliance on banking and finance. That task has been successfully undertaken here in the capital city, with the creative, tech, research and education sectors drawn together in

what I regard as a virtuous circle, which in some cases has helped to spur physical regeneration. I touched on King's Cross, a classic example of that—the Olympic site will be another. That has served only to entrench the dominance of the capital in the wider UK economy and has not addressed that rather more elusive rebalancing act: boosting the regions and other nations of the UK. As a London MP, I recognise that that is important—not least because of the ever-louder klaxon call of hostility towards London, something worrying for the rest of the UK.

The real challenge is how the rest of the UK's universities, innovators and start-ups compete with the London and Oxbridge research powerhouse, and I look forward to hearing the views of other Members on that. One fifth of Government research funding is now claimed by our top three universities—that golden triangle—and the capital city has more than 100,000 square metres of new research facilities in the pipeline. Furthermore, the south-east and east of England and London account for some 52% of the research and development carried out in the UK.

If the Chancellor's northern powerhouse and the broader devolution agenda are to work, he should examine how London's universities have not just integrated academic excellence into the heart of this global city but provided a compelling educational offering to the world through the relentless building of links with the worlds of industry, commerce, Government and finance.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that I will be calling the Front-Bench spokespeople at 10.30 am, and six Members have indicated that they want to speak.

10.1 am

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on securing this debate and on setting out so eloquently the vital role that science plays in his city, across the north of England and in the wider UK economy.

My hon. Friend demonstrated clearly the need for policy that supports an environment in which research can flourish. His concerns are clearly shared by colleagues across the UK, including in Nottingham and the wider east midlands, where they are felt not just by people working in our universities but by businesses large and small, and our local enterprise partnership, D2N2. Everyone recognises the key role that science—the life sciences, in particular—has to play in the future success of our region.

Our local authorities are also keen to promote regeneration and the creation of good jobs, and have identified the potential for science and technology to be leading sectors driving growth in our economy. But local and regional success requires national support, and the UK cannot meet the economic, health, security and environmental challenges facing our society without a Government who champion science and research.

My hon. Friend has already set out how Government investment in science and research creates a virtuous circle, leveraging investment from industry, raising

productivity and creating more high-value jobs. Quite simply, if we want to grow the economy and make the UK globally competitive, investing in science and research is an effective use of public money. Indeed, a failure to commit to future investment will not only break that beneficial cycle, but undermine the UK's competitive advantage and damage our economic outlook. Any Government who were serious about long-term economic planning would not be cutting the science budget, yet, unfortunately, over the past five years that is exactly what has happened.

As my hon. Friend said, the “Science is Vital” campaign has highlighted that freezing the science budget disbursed annually to universities and research institutes in cash terms means that its real value has fallen by around 15% since 2010—a decline that puts the UK firmly at the bottom of the G8 on Government support for science. In the UK, university research makes up a higher proportion of total R and D compared with our competitors. Far from crowding out other investment, that Government support attracts outside funding in; as my hon. Friend said, UK universities themselves have grown their own R and D investment by 40% in the past decade. We also have a very efficient research base, producing a much higher proportion of highly cited publications than might be expected. We punch above our weight.

A 2014 analysis paper by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills recognised, however, that the UK's long-term pattern of under-investment in public and private research and development was holding the UK economy back, and concluded that

“a level of R&D spend consistent with securing future economic success is likely to be closer to the 2.9% average of our comparators. Public sector expenditure may need to rise more sharply in the short-to-medium term, partly to develop the necessary talent and partly to catalyse private sector investment.”

Last December, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee reached a similar conclusion, recommending that the Government aim for a target of 3% of GDP to be spent on R and D by 2020. My first question is: how will the Minister ensure that the UK does not fall further behind or miss out on new opportunities, thereby risking the strengths that we have?

This is not simply an issue of the UK's place in a global race; it is also a local issue—one that matters directly to my own constituency. Nottingham's strength, particularly in life sciences, is long standing and well recognised. We have two world class universities, in the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University, and one of the largest teaching hospitals in Europe. We are proud that BioCity, the largest bio-incubator in the UK, was established there in 2002, as a unique collaboration between our universities and the East Midlands Development Agency. It now sustains over 650 employees working for around 70 companies on its main site, undertaking innovation and turning science into economic propositions.

Those more recent developments build on our heritage. Nottingham has been home to Boots for more than 150 years. Its Lenton headquarters and manufacturing and logistics centres make it one of the largest private sector employers in the city. The development of the Nottingham enterprise zone, which includes the Boots site, provides huge opportunities for future growth, and MediCity, a collaboration between Boots and BioCity

[Lilian Greenwood]

designed to support innovators in consumer healthcare, medical technology, diagnostics and beauty products, is already home to 40 start-up companies. Just last week, the D2N2 local enterprise partnership approved a £6.5 million grant of local growth fund towards a new state-of-the-art life sciences complex being built by Nottingham City Council to expand BioCity and create hundreds of new jobs in the city.

I welcome that and other Government-backed investment in capital infrastructure, but although high-profile announcements sound good and the strategic commitment to new facilities and equipment over the period 2016 to 2021 is welcome, without sufficient resource funding such new facilities will not meet their potential. Nottingham has all the building blocks in place, but adequate Government support for research remains critical. As has already been said, it is a question not only of the total value of research support, but of its regional distribution; my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) made that point forcefully in the debate.

Glenn Crocker, chief executive officer of BioCity, has also highlighted the fact that London and the south and east of England continue to receive a disproportionate share of total investment, both public and private. If the Government are serious about economic rebalancing—that is about not just a northern powerhouse, but the midlands as well—that situation needs to change. I hope that when the Minister responds he will set out how he intends to address the distortion and ensure that Nottingham, which certainly has the people, facilities and strong and viable business propositions, also gets the financial support it requires to build the thriving technology sector to which we aspire.

As an MP without a background in science, I have been fortunate enough to participate in the Royal Society's pairing scheme, and the opportunity to build links with real practitioners has been very valuable. I approached my former pairs for their views before today's debate, and one thing that they expressed was that concern about resource funding. As physics Professor Philip Moriarty succinctly put it:

“There's no point funding bright shiny new pieces of kit if there aren't researchers there to use it”.

I would like to say more about the Medical Research Council Institute of Hearing Research at the University of Nottingham, which I visited last week, its huge contributions and how it operates in a multidisciplinary environment, which is one of the most important aspects of our universities and can be a catalyst for new thinking. People may remember the story that appeared in the press about a 10th-century potion for treating eye infections, which was discovered by an Anglo-Saxon expert from our school of English. It was tested by bio-medics and found to be successful in tackling MRSA, which scientists have been trying to do for some time. The ability to work in a cross-disciplinary way is important.

The importance of blue-skies research should not be forgotten. Peter Mansfield is famous in Nottingham for building the first magnetic resonance imaging scanner, but he started with a physics experiment on solid-liquid interactions and did not anticipate the impact of his

work. Often the impact of work is difficult to predict or quantify, and we must not lose blue-skies research in the drive for value for money.

I have three things to say to the Minister in concluding: first, what commitment is he making to knowledge transfer partnerships? They are among the most important long-running Government growth and innovation initiatives. They celebrate 40 years this year and are valued in my city. Secondly, is he willing to discuss with the Home Office the effect of immigration rules—particularly those on post-study work visas, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central mentioned? At a time when we are particularly conscious of women's role in science and research, and when it has been in the press spotlight—yesterday was National Women in Engineering Day—what do the Government intend to do to ensure that we celebrate the talents of everyone who would like to be involved in science research? There is a persistent gender imbalance.

Finally, I invite the Minister to visit both the universities in my constituency, if he comes to Nottingham. Alternatively, if he and his colleagues find themselves in Ningbo in China or Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, I invite them to visit the extraordinary campuses of the University of Nottingham. More than 11,000 students are studying there for British degrees, and carrying out cutting-edge research, creating a bridge between the UK and Asia.

Several hon. Members rose—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. I am not putting time limits on speeches, but, as I said, I will be calling the Front-Bench speakers at 10.30, so hon. Members can do the maths. There are four hon. Members wanting to speak, including Mr Shannon.

10.11 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I will certainly keep within the time limits. I thank the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) for bringing this topic to the House. My hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) has left the Chamber, but at one stage my party had the second largest number of Members present, and that shows how important the subject is to us in Northern Ireland.

I want to talk about research on health technologies, and disease prevention and cure. The UK is renowned for its research capabilities. The importance of science and research has been recognised by successive Governments that have sought to protect the science budget from significant cuts. That speaks volumes, but many people in the science and research community have said that our spending is mediocre by international standards. That is a fact of life, so how can we work better with private partnerships to make things happen? The impact of science and research is tangible across the regional economies. In Northern Ireland we are lucky enough to be home to fantastic research universities, which are trailblazers for scientific research across the board.

Queen's University Belfast is a pioneer and has made breakthroughs in medical treatments and disease. Its work on improving patient care in the treatment of bowel cancer is one example. It uses the latest state-of-the-art techniques to define the genetic make-up of bowel cancer cells and that will no doubt bring significant advances in diagnosis rates and treatment. There is also

a company in Portadown, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson), which has projects to develop better diagnostic tests for prostate, ovarian and breast cancer. Yesterday's ovarian cancer figures showed that Northern Ireland has the worst recovery rate and life expectancy rate in the UK; 70% of those who get it die within five years. Advances are needed, and they are happening at Queen's University.

Terumo BCT—a blood technology company—has made great contributions domestically and globally to the detection and treatment of disease. Terumo is based in Larne, and 280 skilled people are employed there. In my constituency, TG Eakin manufactures high-quality medical supplies and has made significant contributions to the science, health and research community. In 2005 it launched its own research and development department, and is now successful beyond Comber in my constituency. Its 280 employees are in Comber, Cardiff and the constituency of the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). Those companies make real-life contributions for the long term, to people's lives, wellbeing and health.

I want quickly to talk about schools and the post-16 group, and about the focus on careers advice. What discussions has the Minister had with other Ministers to ensure that such advice encourages young people to look towards science? We need to focus on the science skills necessary to improve the core of a modern British and global economy. Science and research play a significant part in the creation of wealth and jobs, and we need to help prepare young people to exploit the opportunities in the market and to get well paid skilled jobs. That will require us to take into account the role of the secondary sciences, as the Science Council urges us, and not to consider only what are conventionally thought of as the science sectors.

10.15 am

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I will try to speak more quickly than the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on obtaining the debate, which gives me the opportunity to praise the stellar success of science in Oxford, and the enormous benefits it brings to our city, our region and the country. The gross value added of the Oxfordshire local enterprise partnership is the highest in the country outside London. The University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University are crucial to its success, providing many of the projects for the local growth fund, as well as driving Oxfordshire's strategic economic plan, which is entirely innovation-based.

The best thing about science, research and the economy in Oxford, however, is the sheer excitement and ambition of so much of the work being done. I want to give a couple of examples: with the pulling together of big data and advances in molecular biology, and with the work of the Precision Cancer Medicine Institute and the collaboration of 200 interdisciplinary teams from across Oxford University feeding in to that, there is a real chance that Oxford will be in the lead globally in work to personalise cancer treatment properly, and to increase the rate of cure—not just treatment of cancer, but curing it.

Secondly, the Higher Education Innovation Fund set up the Sustainable Vehicle Engineering Centre at Oxford Brookes. That has been used by BMW and all the major

automotive companies in the development of electric vehicles. The university has just launched an innovative new undergraduate degree in business and automotive management, in partnership with BMW. That is university innovation in the lead in a crucial national industry.

That quality and potential in the field of innovation and breakthrough is replicated across the universities, centres and science parks that we are fortunate to have in Oxfordshire. At the annual SET for Britain poster presentations locally and here in Parliament, it is a privilege for me to see that there are always so many stunning and prize-winning entries from young Oxford scientists. Research in Oxford is sustaining thousands of jobs, and is spinning out companies, having been an early pioneer of university spin-outs with Oxford Instruments. That was set up in 1959 and is now a global leader. Many others are treading the same path, and more could do so.

There are three key ways in which Oxford's potential is being held back by the state, which should be helping us. First, shortage of housing supply is driving the price to earnings ratio and rents to the highest in the country outside London. That risks damaging the ability of the science community locally to recruit the brightest and the best, as well as making life hard for all the technicians and others whose teamwork supports the innovators and entrepreneurs. Please will the Government allow us to relax the green belt in a measured way to let Oxford and its science grow.

Secondly, I make a plea, as others have done, to the Government to change their rhetoric and practice on immigration. Many young scientists, in particular, are not on high earnings, and face a hand-to-mouth existence climbing up the research ladder. There is a danger that the earnings thresholds on settlement will discourage talented young scientists and their partners from coming here. Yet the forefront of scientific research is a global labour market and the Government should remember that. An all-party group on migration report earlier this year on UK post-study work opportunities for international students showed good evidence that the abolition of the old post-study work visa has damaged the access of students from many countries—notably India, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—to higher education in the UK. When they do not come here to do science courses, domestic students lose when the courses are closed down. The Government need to change their stance.

The third point is that, as others have said, we need to get the Government to commit to increasing research funding as a proportion of GDP. The previous Government ring-fenced research funding, recognising it as a powerful catalyst for economic competitiveness and recovery. Compared with our global competitors, the UK underinvests in R and D, and we must remember that a much higher proportion is undertaken in universities here than in competing countries. I therefore ask the Government to commit to increasing research funding in general, and in particular in those universities, such as ours in Oxford, that have shown that they can deliver the outcomes that the country needs.

I echo the call from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to seize the opportunity of the forthcoming Budget to commit to increasing research funding and thereby stimulate economic growth.

10.20 am

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I will attempt to speak even faster, Mr Owen.

In the Marx Brothers film “Go West”, the brothers realise that the train that they are embarked on simply does not have enough fuel on board and they spend quite a long time running through the train and smashing up the carriages to get wood to put in the engine in order to get the train to the station. The train gets to the station, but unfortunately it is not a train any more. That is where we are with research and development, particularly higher education R and D, in this country. We are smashing up our own resource to keep the show on the road. It is a very good show. For example, we have 12% of global citations for 1% of the world population. We are home to 29 of the world’s top 200 universities. We are first in the G8 for scientific papers. It is a very good story to tell, but how long will it continue if we continue to invest less than 0.5% of GDP in public R and D, as we have heard is happening? What does the future hold? Will the train get into the station in a clearly recognisable form and be able to get out of the station for future journeys, especially as other countries are stepping up their efforts? China is aiming for a figure of 2.5% for public R and D by 2020. Sweden is developing substantially its R and D spending as a percentage of GDP. In South Korea, the amount for R and D was 2.3 trillion won in 2012. Many countries are going in precisely the opposite direction from us.

This is not a debate about the future in abstract terms. Let me take as an example my university, the University of Southampton, which is one of two universities in the city. Southampton University is not only among the top universities in the country, but makes, as was recently enumerated, an enormous contribution to the gross value added not just nationally—we are talking about £2 billion gross value added and 26,000 jobs—but regionally and locally. Its research has clear outcomes. For example, the fibre-optic research that Southampton did over a period of years has spawned an entire photonics industry in the UK—it is worth £10 billion and has 70,000 employees—and a substantial photonics cluster in Southampton.

Southampton’s SETsquared initiative brings together a number of universities to incubate businesses and spin-offs from the research done at universities. That is now regarded as the prime business incubator involving the university sector in Europe. In the science park, there are 86 companies; 29 are start-ups or spin-offs.

The research and development funding that the university obtains has a real impact in the local community, in the region and nationally. The question is what will happen if that funding tap is turned off in the future. I am not saying that there have not been substantial capital innovations recently. The £200 million centre for advanced materials research, which we have talked about, represents a substantial capital improvement. It is the business of just keeping the whole thing going that we are falling down on in this country.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): On those threats, does my hon. Friend agree that a further danger is any threat to our position within the European Union? In my university, the University of Cambridge, 12% of the research budget comes from the European Union, but

even more important are the collaborative networks with other EU countries, which people tell me are vital. Is that a further threat?

Dr Whitehead: It is a substantial further threat. Indeed, if we shut ourselves away from Europe, we will throw away the advantage that we have in this country from our membership of the EU in terms of our future R and D. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

This is something that we perhaps do not notice happening. It is easy to miss it, and there are not catastrophic consequences from disinvesting in R and D as far as universities and research centres are concerned, but it is potentially catastrophic for the future competitiveness of this country and the future of the sort of arrangements that I have explained exist in Southampton and have an impact in the area, the region and the country as a whole. I urge the Minister to take careful note of this debate and ensure that the investment that should be there for the future is put in place and that commitments are made to ensure that that carries on coming in to support our universities and our research activities, which are so valuable and such a source of potential fuel for this country’s ambitions across the world.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I call the fast-talking Sammy Wilson.

10.27 am

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I thank the hon. Members who cut their speeches short, because like me, they probably had a lot to say. I do not want to go through all the benefits of research and development, because those have been well outlined in previous speeches. All I want to say is that the two universities in Northern Ireland—Queen’s University and the University of Ulster—have an excellent record on research. Indeed, Queen’s is ranked eighth in the United Kingdom for research intensity. That research benefits not only the Northern Ireland economy but almost every individual in the country.

We can look at an example of the benefits here in London. I am talking about the buses, which are cleaner, quieter and more efficient as a result of work that started in the 1990s at Queen’s University and was then transferred to Wrightbus in Ballymena. It has now resulted in new buses running around the streets of London. That has helped Wrightbus become one of the leading technology and engineering companies in Northern Ireland.

Another example concerns food safety. Queen’s University took the lead in that regard. Indeed, Professor Chris Elliott of Queen’s University was asked to set up the taskforce to deal with food safety after the horsemeat scandal, and much of the research that was done at Queen’s now enables laboratories around the world to detect multiple contaminants in food. I could talk about all of that extensively.

However, there are challenges that need to be faced. The first has been mentioned already. The Government need to give a commitment on the amount of money available for research and development. I recognise that the previous Government ring-fenced research and development spending, but a commitment to spending

3% of GDP on research and development, even in times of austerity, would help productivity and growth and have long-term consequences, even though the lead-in period is sometimes quite long, as Queen's University research has shown.

It has been identified that although a lot of research goes on, the link between research in universities and small and medium-sized enterprises in particular has been weak. Some larger companies see the value of devoting resources to research, but some smaller companies do not. That is a big challenge, whether we seek to address it through tax incentives or by encouraging the universities to be more proactive, because productivity and product range need to be increased the most in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Another challenge is EU funding. There are huge opportunities on which we are not capitalising. What can the Government do?

Skills shortages are another issue. Universities are already identifying skills shortages, especially in the teaching of science, technology, engineering, maths and languages, which means that we need to start from primary school and continue through secondary school, and also that we need teacher training. We need to encourage universities to get a cohort with those skills.

The last challenge, which has been mentioned, is immigration. Much of the research at the University of Ulster is undertaken by students from overseas, and some schools would not be viable if we did not have that influx of overseas students. The Government need to think about that when they consider their immigration policy.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I call Mr Roger Mullin to wind up on behalf of the Scottish National party. I welcome him to Parliament.

10.31 am

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and it is a particular pleasure to respond to this debate, secured by the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). I have heard much about his inspiring leadership in the higher education sector.

I start by making a declaration of interest. I am still an honorary professor at the University of Stirling, and in recent times I have undertaken a number of ethical reviews of research proposals into matters such as tobacco. One great strength of UK universities that has not been mentioned in this debate is their approach to ethical research, of which universities throughout the UK can be tremendously proud. Our universities' strength of ambition to conduct high-quality, leading ethical research is increasingly becoming a selling point. In a few days' time I will give advice at the request of the University of Dundee and the University of St Andrews, for which I will be paid the princely sum of nothing—I think that is a fair reflection of the quality of my comments to come.

In another context—it is not exactly a declaration of interest—I wanted to say this at some stage in my parliamentary career and now is an appropriate time. My late brother, Jim, who died not all that long ago, graduated from Glasgow University before emigrating to Canada. He became a leading scientist and, after a

number of years, was chairman of the OECD science and technology committee. I hope he would be pleased that I am speaking in this debate.

Scotland has a remarkable tradition in higher education and research. Even today, 77% of all research by Scottish universities submitted to the research excellence framework is classified as “world-leading” or “internationally excellent,” which is ahead of the UK average. Some 86% of Scottish research is judged as being “outstanding” or having “very considerable” impact, which compares with the UK average of 83.9%. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) talked about impact brilliantly in his three minutes and 57 seconds.

Scottish universities also excel, and have a great tradition, in science. Hon. Members gave many examples from their constituencies, but I will give just one example not from my constituency but from Glasgow University, which ties into the importance of considering these matters not merely in the context of a constituency, of Scotland or of the UK but internationally, too. South Glasgow University Hospital, as well as catering for more than 1,000 patients, hosts a campus of Glasgow University and its world-leading Stratified Medicine Scotland innovation centre, a state-of-the-art clinical research facility for clinical trials. The hospital will also be the future site of the university's Europe-leading imaging centre of excellence. A number of hon. Members have pointed out the fundamental importance of European connections to our universities. I would say that it goes beyond Europe: our global connections in the UK, and in Scotland, are of fundamental importance and are to be treasured.

Scotland's universities are proud of their Scottish roots, but they are equally proud of being outward-looking and highly collaborative within the UK, within Europe and internationally. What might be described as the best of our universities are in a worldwide research ecosystem. Such interchange is important to everyone. Engagement is important to Scottish universities, and they also have something to offer when they engage with others.

In practical terms, we want to see the continuation of the dual support system for research funding in the UK. We want to see more UK-wide and Europe-wide collaboration that underpins excellence in research. Some hon. Members talked about the value of localised competition in small places such as London but, looking more widely, I am pretty sure that many London universities benefit from how they relate with universities in, for example, California, South Africa, Germany and many other parts of the world. The same is true for Scotland and every constituency with a university.

I am slightly surprised that nobody has made significant mention of the Nurse review of UK research councils. The consultation phase closed in April, and Sir Paul Nurse is now considering the evidence. I am pleased to say that the Scottish Government have already arranged to have further consultations with Sir Paul in the coming weeks, as has Universities Scotland. From that review we hope to develop more imaginative approaches to research funding that recognise, for example, the connection to innovation, which others have talked about so eloquently in this debate.

On European research partnerships, the hon. Member for Sheffield Central mentioned the importance of the seventh framework programme for research. It indicates the

[Roger Mullin]

importance of that European connection to Scottish universities that, by the time the programme ended in 2013, Scotland had been awarded €636 million in funding. Scotland has received 11.2% of the UK's European Research Council funding, which is well above our population share. For Scottish universities it is fundamentally important that we have strong and continuing links with the European Union, as well as with others across the globe.

I will conclude with a couple of questions for the Minister, one of which I have not mentioned thus far. The immigration policy pursued by this Government is a barrier to attracting leading research talent from across the world, as some Opposition Members have already mentioned. That is critical. We are particularly concerned in Scotland, and we call for the return of the post-study work visa to enable people who are here to study for higher research-end degrees to continue contributing. It is completely and utterly insane that the Government are discriminating against such people when they have so much to contribute to this country. We ask the Government, in the coming Budget, to address the fears of some of our universities about what may occur. They fear that there will be a squeeze on research funding at a time when, as many Opposition Members have said, we need increased investment in R and D for the benefit of productivity and innovation.

10.39 am

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I apologise for missing the beginning of the debate. I add my congratulations to the Minister; it is good to see him in his place. I am obviously sad that I am not sitting in his place. None the less, if there has to be a Conservative Minister, I am glad that it is him. He is a fully signed up member of the thinking classes, despite what his father has to say, and I am sure he will distinguish himself in his new office.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). It is good to see him back with such an increased majority, which is testament to his extraordinary work in his constituency and in the House over the last Parliament. It is with characteristic speed that he has secured this debate.

We have managed to achieve a degree of consensus on science policy over the past 20 years that has served this country well. We need to preserve and enhance that consensus during this Parliament. However, now is the time to begin making progress on a number of substantial policy issues. In this morning's debate, some of those issues have become clear. As we set about that task, it is important that we keep our eyes on the prize that is there for the taking with science policy over the next decade or two.

Last year was a bumper year for British science, with extraordinary achievements from landing probes on comets to advances in medical science, but, as Sir Paul Nurse said—it is important that we pay tribute to Sir Paul's leadership of the Royal Society—the progress last year represented the fruits of years and years of patient chipping away at the coalface. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian

Greenwood) and others have said this morning, we are in jeopardy of destroying the foundations of the progress that we saw last year unless important policy changes are made.

Over the next 10 years, we could seize the fruits of the very different world taking shape around us. The majority of the world's people now live in cities; the majority will soon be interconnected with the cloud; and the internet of things will bring new networks to bear. We are now able to work together in a completely different way, and of course there is a new premium on us as a world making the right decisions. The decisions that are made over the next five to 10 years will have a critical bearing on whether we succeed in keeping global temperature rises below 2° C. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South spelled out, there is the potential for great progress in medical science and beyond if we make the right decisions over the next few years.

We in this country have a parochial interest in some of those decisions being taken in a correct way, not least because of the impact of science and innovation policy on our lamentable productivity performance. I am glad the Chancellor has now woken up to the crisis in British productivity growth, which is worse today than it was at the end of the 1970s when we used to call it the British disease. What the rest of the G7 now finishes making on a Thursday night takes us until the end of Friday to get done. We will not raise living standards in our country unless we close that yawning 20% productivity gap with the rest of the G7.

Mark Field: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Liam Byrne: I will in a minute.

We have heard three clear policy priorities that I hope the Minister will attend to. The first relates to money. As we have heard this morning, Britain is seeing not growth but substantial decline in its science budget, yet we are at a crossover moment in global science spending. China will probably spend more on science this year than the EU28 put together. By 2019, China will spend more on science than the United States of America. Four of the 10 biggest tech firms in the world are now Asian. Shanghai's results in the programme for international student assessment are well in advance of our PISA results here in the UK. We are now at a crossover point that we perhaps last saw in 1455, when the good jobs in the world were created in the east and the cheap labour jobs were created here in the west. If we are to guard against that, we must make more progress on funding.

The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee was absolutely right to say that the right target for science spending in this country is 3% of GDP. There is a cross-party consensus about that figure in Germany; Korea has already exceeded it; and it is the norm in parts of Scandinavia. What we need to see in the Budget in a couple of weeks' time is the launch of a consultation by the Chancellor on the measures that would most effectively bring in private sector money. Some of those measures would be national policy, but, as we have heard this morning from my hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) and for Nottingham South, some would ensure that science begins to regenerate our cities and towns. This is about not just crowding global spending into the UK but making sure that we

unlock the regenerative power in science throughout the country. I hope that one of the ideas put on the table as part of the consultation will be a radical expansion of university enterprise zones, which are a good idea that is currently confined to only four towns and cities in the UK. We should use university enterprise zones far more radically in the years to come.

Secondly, we need a new consensus on technical education. The Minister's colleague, the Minister for Skills, has said that he is interested in agreeing high-level principles that would guide a technical education system for the future. We go through this crisis decade in, decade out in this country, and we have got to begin making progress. I suggest that the right place to start is by putting a serious submission to the Treasury that calls for the Chancellor to save our further education system. We will not be able to build a world-class technical education system if we kick out its spine, and as Alison Wolf made very clear this morning, that is precisely what is coming. We cannot build a world-class technical education system if we are shutting down further education colleges all over England and closing down adult education. That is a good place to start rebooting our technical education system for the 21st century.

Thirdly, we need changes to our immigration system, which we have heard a lot about this morning. We in Parliament should be calling for the free movement of scientists and students. That is the only way we will be able to make sure that this country is connected to the best brainpower, wherever it happens to be born. I was the author of the first post-study work visa when I was the Minister responsible for immigration. It was not perfect, but it was a lot better than the system that we have today. If we are to ensure that we train and educate the best students for the years to come, we have to look again at how we put in place a much better post-study work visa, and I would be happy to work with the Minister on getting that right.

Finally, I underline the call that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central made for a new consensus in Parliament. Some 350 years ago, two groups of men from different sides of the political spectrum came together at Gresham College, on the site where Tower 42 now stands, in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field). On one side of the divide were the royalists and on the other side were the parliamentarians. At that moment in November 1660 they decided to put aside historic divisions and work together in the interests of science. The Royal Society was born on that afternoon after an astronomy lecture delivered by Sir Christopher Wren. We need such consensus again. If the royalists and parliamentarians could do it in 1660, the Labour party, Conservative party, Scottish National party and others could perhaps make the same move. I hope the Minister will work with us constructively and creatively, and I hope he will take to heart the points that he has heard this morning. Over the days and weeks to come, in the run-up to the Budget, he would do well to read again the excellent opening speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I welcome the Minister to his role. I remind him that the hon. Member for Sheffield Central has two minutes to wind up.

10.48 am

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, on this important subject. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) on prompting discussion on a key aspect of Government policy.

The UK regions are at the heart of the Government's economic strategy. The Government are mindful to ensure that investment should not get sucked into hyper-concentrated areas, such as the golden triangle, at the expense of the excellence that can be found in many other parts of the country. That is a matter to which I have been paying close attention in my first few weeks in my role.

We believe that science and research has a central role in the regions and the Government want the national economic recovery, which has been under way for a number of years, to continue to benefit all parts of our country. Investment in research based in the regions is an absolutely key part to that. The extra gear our economy needs is to be found in R and D capabilities in the universities in our regions as well as in the golden triangle.

UK science is an international success story and a major driver of growth and attractor of inward investment, as hon. Members have mentioned. It is not always recognised that it can make a huge contribution to local and regional economies and to rebalancing the economy, a goal to which the Government are strongly committed.

By way of illustration, I will take a quick regional tour of the investments we have made in recent months, starting from Land's End and going all the way up to John O'Groats, many of which will contribute to our goal of rebalancing the economy. In the south-west, synthetic biology has been assisted by a £14 million investment in a centre for synthetic biology in Bristol. I will detour via London, which, as Members have already mentioned, has well-known strengths and new investments in institutions such as the Francis Crick Institute and the Alan Turing Institute. Just north of London, we have recently invested £12 million in a centre for agricultural informatics and sustainability metrics near Harpenden and work will start there this summer on modelling more efficient food systems.

Further east, we have just invested £44 million in Babraham and £26 million in Norwich in research into agri-tech. In the west midlands, not far from the constituency of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), we have an example of what will help our ambition to make the midlands an engine of growth. As part of the Government's £270 million investment in new quantum technologies, Birmingham University has just secured £35 million towards developing an internationally leading centre of excellence and a quantum technology hub. That is in addition to plans for a new national college for high-speed rail, which the right hon. Gentleman described as a

"once in a generation opportunity to transform our local economy."

The manifesto we published before the general election had a strong commitment to building the northern powerhouse. That is becoming a reality and our investments in centres such as the Hartree Centre and the square kilometre array, the largest scientific experiment in the world, will support that objective. I could add to that

[Joseph Johnson]

list our various investments in graphene such as those at the National Graphene Institute and the Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre.

The hon. Member for Sheffield Central will be impatient for me to cross the Pennines. He will know that, in the Sheffield city region, £10 million has just been invested in a new facility for aerospace and other sectors at the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. In York, we have invested £27 million in a quantum communications hub as part of our national programme.

As we head further north to Scotland, we continue to support Scotland's fine scientific tradition. Just last year, the Chancellor announced a £16 million contribution to a new stratified medicine imaging centre of excellence in Glasgow, which will unite world-leading clinical academic expertise in stroke, cardiovascular disease and brain imaging to aid our understanding and treatment of a range of human diseases. Other examples in Scotland include Edinburgh University's national computing centre, which has benefited from funding for ARCHER, the UK's top supercomputer, which is now being used by 1,000 academics and people in industry.

I turn to issues raised by Members, and by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill in particular. I thank him for his generous welcome; it is a pleasure to be in this relationship to him. I have always enjoyed talking with him and I hope that we can have a productive and cordial relationship in the months ahead.

There is strong cross-party agreement about the role that investment in science and research can play in solving our productivity challenge and the right hon. Gentleman knows that the Government are truly committed to that. Our manifesto is evidence of that: investment in science and research runs through it like words through a stick of rock and it is a personal passion of the Chancellor. Science and research therefore is front and centre of our solution to the productivity puzzle and such investment in our regions will be one of the key ways in which we will try to plug the productivity gap that holds us back.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the 3% target, which has been an ongoing question in public policy debate for some time. As he will know, previous Governments attempted to introduce R and D-related targets without success. An isolated target does not lead to behavioural change in and of itself; it needs to be complemented by additional policy measures. It is not clear that 3% is the optimal target and there is no evidence that it would lead to an optimal level of investment for the UK. Evidence suggests that the UK under-invests compared with other major research economies and that there would be economic benefits from increased investment, but the aim of achieving 3% GDP spend on R and D is set out at EU level and is not a UK target. The investments we make as a country are recognised as being particularly fruitful. We are recognised as being an excellent place in which to innovate and get very high returns on scientific R and D investment.

Mark Field: Without pre-empting the battles that the Minister will no doubt have with the Home Office, the immigration question is close to our hearts. He will appreciate fully that if the brightest and best from across the world come here, they will go back to their

countries as ambassadors for this country for the rest of their lives and often build up businesses with links to us. We lose that at our peril: such links will then go to Canada, the USA and Australia, and the point has been made that, without significant numbers of overseas students, leading postgraduate courses will simply close down, which will be to the detriment of our own indigenous population.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Minister, you have one minute.

Joseph Johnson: That is an important area, and indeed my first speech as Minister was on that subject at the Going Global conference a few weeks ago. I was clear about the positive contribution that international students make. Our postgraduate study options aim to attract the brightest and best, and we welcome any student who can secure a graduate-level job with a graduate salary. We need to clear up misconceptions that have arisen in important countries—India in particular—about our openness; we offer a warm welcome to international students. I note my right hon. Friend's important points.

May I quickly turn to a couple of other points made by Members?

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Very quickly.

Joseph Johnson: The hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) kindly invited me to go to the various universities in Nottingham and I look forward to doing so. I note her points about women in engineering and yesterday I had the great pleasure of being at the Parliamentary Links Day, where I was delighted to see a packed room with so much consensus behind the need for greater diversity. In support of Government investment in Nottingham, I point to recent investment in the synthetic biology research centre. I am sorry that I did not have time to come to other Members' contributions.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. Time waits for no man, not even a Government Minister.

10.58 am

Paul Blomfield: The number of Members present and the quality of the debate reflects the importance the House places on this issue, as well as the need for the Government to get it right. My right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) made a powerful case about the impact of research in Oxford. That is important, because while Oxford is often seen as one of the classic ivory towers, he demonstrated how such research works with business to develop economic growth. Oxford is utterly engaged in driving the local economy, just as other universities are around the country.

I appreciated working with the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) in the previous Parliament on migration and I recognise that he is not alone in his thinking on the Government Benches. Indeed, I think it was three or four years ago that the Minister wrote a powerful piece in the *Financial Times* that explained where the Government were getting their policy wrong on international students and I hope that he will continue to make that case within government.

The hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) and for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) underlined the importance of research across the regions and nations of the UK.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Leaseholders and Housing Association Ballots

11 am

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered leaseholders and housing association ballots.

It is a pleasure to see you presiding over this debate, Mr Owen, and to see the Minister in his place. I and others have had an ongoing, constructive dialogue with him on these matters—on some of them, at least—as will become clear in due course. The title of the debate may be slightly misleading, as I intend to cover leasehold reform as a separate but connected matter to housing association ballots. I have advised the Minister's office of that, and I am sure the Minister has been forewarned about the shape that my contribution will take.

I raised these matters on 6 March, in the dying days of the previous Parliament, and I welcome the opportunity to put them on the ministerial radar early in this Parliament, although I know the Minister is already aware of them—of the leaseholder issues, in particular. I and others are grateful to the Minister and his officials for arranging a meeting on 8 June about leaseholder matters with the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), me and representatives of the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership. The hon. Gentleman has led on these issues for some time, and I am pleased to be assisting his significant efforts. Mr Martin Boyd and Mr Sebastian O'Kelly, campaigning as the LKP, have made much progress in engaging with the Government, securing charitable status and ensuring that millions of leaseholders have a voice and access to an organisation dedicated to advising and assisting them.

I do not want to labour this point, as I know the Minister's officials are examining many of the anomalies and weaknesses that we have identified in the existing legislation on leaseholders, but the matters that concern us include the problems with retirement homes and the issues of commonhold versus leasehold and property ownership. Tribunal procedures are supposed to be relatively informal, but can become expensive if the defending freeholder brings high-powered barristers against local residents who are trying to get redress against problems they have identified.

There is also the issue of unscrupulous freeholders and predatory property management companies. The sector is doing a lot to improve its image and the professionalism of property management services, but there are some predatory organisations that prey on vulnerable people and take a lot of money unfairly. There is the issue of forfeiture, which we have discussed in depth with the Minister. There are also recognition issues. Leaseholders often find it difficult to get their association recognised by their property management company or freeholder because of difficulties in securing numbers, identifying the owners of properties and the like.

We have also talked to the Minister about the different roles and responsibilities of the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice. This policy area has implications for both Departments, so we must look at how well those arrangements are working. I know the Minister is well aware of all those issues, as they were reinforced in our

previous meeting. I acknowledge that he has tasked his officials to examine them and to report back. We look forward to continuing our discussions on those issues in due course. If, however, the Minister has anything new he wishes to add, his comments would be welcomed by all who take an interest in leaseholding. I fully accept that his officials have done a lot of work on this matter, and, given that we have had a recent meeting, there is probably not a lot to report back.

The hon. Member for Worthing West, ably assisted by Ms Katherine O'Riordan, has organised another roundtable discussion on leasehold reform on 9 July, to which the Minister and his officials have been invited. They will be very welcome. Such successful forums, which have been taking place in recent years, allow people to share information and experience on these issues.

On the issue of housing association ballots, the Minister may be less informed about the concerns I raised on 6 March; the Deputy Leader of the House responded to that debate, although I am sure he reported back to the Minister. The Minister's officials will have read *Hansard* and will be aware of the questions I was asking.

As the Minister knows, hundreds of thousands of tenants in recent decades voted in stock transfer ballots to leave local authority control—i.e. to move the management of their properties from the council to a housing association. Thousands—probably tens of thousands—of my constituents are among those who agreed to do that. The driver was that housing associations are able to modernise and refurbish run-down council properties and raise them above the decency threshold for homes because they can raise the finance, while the rules prevent councils and council housing organisations from doing the same. New kitchens, bathrooms, windows, central heating and security measures were installed. Many of the schemes, including a number in my constituency, were very successful, although not all were.

A number of issues arose. Some are ongoing, such as the quality of work and the materials used, the fact that some people have been overcharged for the work, and transparency. There were recently two contradictory reports on the schemes: the *Evening Standard* reported on bribery and corruption at a housing association in Hackney, while *Inside Housing* reported on a positive contract in Brighton that created hundreds of apprenticeships and new jobs. There are different experiences of schemes in different parts of the country. A number of other issues were raised, including the costs and service charges and the appeals procedures. Many tenants were able to resolve such issues with the assistance of their registered social landlord. The Government changed the regulations to level the playing field, in terms of transparency, accounting and information, but not all the concerns were addressed.

In a few cases, the offer promised by some housing associations to entice council tenants to vote for the stock transfer were never fulfilled. In such cases, tenants were powerless to have their complaints resolved. After they have voted to hand over their property to the new landlords, there was and is no mechanism to vote to sack the housing association for poor performance.

Such a sanction exists for the regulators—the Homes and Communities Agency and the housing ombudsman, following complaints of failures, can order mergers and takeovers of failing housing associations, but residents

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

are powerless. Incidentally, leaseholders who exercised their right to buy their council property are powerless and voiceless, as they have no vote when the estates in which they live are transferred unless the local housing associations included them in the consultations, as good registered social landlords did. The Government have introduced a welcome cap on charges, which is a positive change.

My main question to the Minister is about the rights of housing association tenants and whether they should be empowered to sack poorly performing housing associations. Leaseholders in the private sector, despite the anomalies in the recognition procedure, are entitled to a ballot if their property management company lets them down, and they can vote to award their contract to a new company. If it is good enough for the private sector, why cannot it work in the public sector? It is an essential element of consumer protection that customers who are disappointed with a purchase are able to ask for redress, return the goods, seek compensation or purchase alternative products elsewhere, but those who live in housing association properties cannot. I was going to say “social housing”, but of course council tenants can switch initially by stock transfer ballot, which I mentioned. They have an initial choice, but then are locked in; having transferred, they have no further rights.

Obviously, the Minister will publish his housing Bill in this Session; I am not sure when, but he might be able to indicate the timing, even generally. Just as an aside, but an important aside for many of us, I should say that there are real concerns, which have been expressed publicly, about aspects of the Bill, such as the sale of housing association properties under the Government proposals and the economics of whether there will be like-for-like replacement. That issue has been raised by a number of people.

The second anomaly, for me and others in Tower Hamlets, is that of requiring higher-value council properties to be sold. Both those elements will have a huge negative impact on Tower Hamlets; as an inner London borough, all our property is very expensive. However, the three, four and five-bedroom properties, which are absolutely essential for the kind of community we have, are particularly expensive properties. If they go from the social housing stock, that will create major difficulties for local people.

In conclusion, and to go back to my main question about tenants getting control of their estates, may I ask the Minister whether he would be prepared to consider an amendment to his Bill to allow housing association tenants, with all the appropriate safeguards that would be required, to vote to transfer the management of their properties from one housing association to another, or to return to arm’s length management organisation or council housing control?

This is a big issue for many thousands of my constituents. As I say, I have raised it before and it has got quite a bit of interest, because it would be a brand new right for housing association tenants. Clearly, the Government have housing associations in their sight for reforms, and I am eager to hear whether the Minister is interested in this one. I am very grateful for the opportunity to raise these matters and I look forward to the Minister’s response.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I call the Minister to reply, and I welcome him back to his place.

11.12 am

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): Thank you, Mr Owen, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for my first appearance in Westminster Hall in this Parliament. I appreciate your comments.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on securing this debate. Both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) work very hard to raise issues for leaseholders and tenants generally; the hon. Gentleman’s particular interest is issues that affect the residents of Tower Hamlets. It is to both their credits that they continue to represent their constituents’ and the wider interests of people across the leaseholder sector. I am keen for us to find some common ground and a way forward, and I appreciated the chance to meet them both a couple of weeks ago; the hon. Gentleman referred to that meeting.

I know that the hon. Gentleman in particular has looked to explore the possibility of creating a new power that, as he outlined, would allow tenants of an underperforming housing association effectively to sack their association. I will express my specific views on that matter in a few moments, but I will say now that we would like to find a solution to the concerns that have been raised within the current framework of powers. That is achievable.

It is, of course, important that tenants are protected and sufficient safeguards are in place. The Localism Act 2011 gave tenants and their representatives the power to hold landlords to account. It enabled recognised tenant panels to play an important role in resolving complaints at a local level, and that was an important development. As the hon. Gentleman outlined, some of the changes have recently led to a big step forward, and we feel that that is right.

Landlord and tenant issues are often local issues. Clearly, the range and seriousness of those issues can vary, and it is right—absolutely right—that tenants are offered a level of protection at the national level as well. However, I am firmly of the view that, where possible, the issues themselves should be sorted out locally using the framework that we have put in place.

If it is clear that complaints cannot be resolved locally, obviously they can be referred by tenants to the housing ombudsman. When the ombudsman finds in favour of a complainant, they can order the landlord to pay compensation or take other steps to provide redress. Furthermore, it is open to the ombudsman or tenants to raise concerns directly with the regulator.

We would not want tenants to jump directly to the ombudsman; as I said, our view is that the vast majority of these issues can and should be resolved locally. The Homes and Communities Agency has a regulatory function, but it does not have the responsibility or power to mediate in or resolve individual cases. However, it will investigate where there is evidence of a breach of regulatory standards, and—in relation to landlord and tenant issues—serious harm. In extreme cases, it has far-reaching powers to intervene where there is evidence of serious mismanagement.

It may be helpful to give the House examples and outline the kinds of approaches that the regulator takes when issues are raised that it judges to be serious. I provide them to demonstrate how seriously the regulator takes its role. In February this year, it was found that a provider broke consumer standards owing to the poor quality of emergency repairs for many tenants over a very long period. A regulatory notice was published, representing the first time that such a finding had been made for widespread service failure. In April, the case took a further step forward when it was found that the underlying cause of the emergency repairs issues was a failure of corporate governance. As a result, the provider in question is now focusing on addressing the issues, and rightly so.

If non-compliance is not addressed, the regulator has statutory duties to intervene formally, which could lead to interventions in the management structure of a particular provider. It is right that the powers available to the regulator should be used only as a last resort. I provide that information to reassure the hon. Gentleman, and others who may read the debate in *Hansard*, that where issues are serious the regulator can and will take appropriate action.

Having outlined the current approach and the potential impact on housing associations, I want to spend a moment outlining some of the wider options available to housing association tenants themselves. Although it would not be legally possible for tenants to be given the right to sack their housing association, they have other routes to explore that would hand them a much greater degree of control.

Housing association leaseholders in blocks of flats have the right to manage. That enables a group of leaseholders to take over the management functions of their properties. The hon. Gentleman may draw a parallel with his proposals for tenants to have the power to sack their association. One area on which we might slightly disagree is my view that the power of right to manage is enough. The substantial, important difference between the approaches is that under right to manage the properties would still be owned by the housing association, which is different from the ability to manage them and ensure that repairs are done properly. I do not think it possible to draw a complete comparison in the way he outlined today and in previous debates. Leaseholders can also buy the freehold of their blocks of flats—known as enfranchisement—subject to certain criteria. Doing so would give them even greater financial and legal interest.

We have set out a clear policy ambition, which the hon. Gentleman outlined, to give housing association tenants the right to buy their homes to match the social housing opportunities in council housing at the moment and to ensure that everyone in social housing has the same right to buy. Tempting as his invitation to outline the details of the Bill this morning is, he will appreciate that I must ask him to bear with me until we publish the Bill and outline the details behind it in due course. I am hopeful that after the Bill receives Royal Assent, housing association tenants will be able to take the opportunity to move into home ownership.

I will touch on a couple of other points that the hon. Gentleman raised. He asked how the policy would be implemented, as did other hon. Members in an Opposition day debate in the main Chamber a couple of weeks ago. I will be very clear: as we have said all along, there must

be one-for-one replacement. I am pleased that the reinvigorated scheme has one-for-one replacement; I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will excuse me for highlighting that we have seen the numbers move from one in 170 under the previous Labour Government to one for one under the reinvigorated scheme. Councils have three years to provide the replacement. If they have not done so by the end of those three years—although the indications at the moment make me confident that they will—the money, with interest, comes back to the HCA, which will provide the homes. It will be one for one.

I must stress our view that a new power to allow tenants of an underperforming housing association to sack their housing association is, with the framework already in place plus what we are looking at with the housing Bill, unnecessary and unworkable. A solution to the concerns raised must be achieved within the current framework. The hon. Gentleman has tempted me to accept an early amendment to a Bill that we have not yet published; I am sure we will discuss his idea later in the year when the Bill is introduced. My officials and I will happily liaise with him on that, but as tempting as his pitch was—and it is probably the first I have had so far—I suspect that we are on a slightly different page.

I hope that the outline I have given has been useful. I again congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this issue to the attention of the House so early in the Parliament; he has made sure that the concerns and thoughts of leaseholders have been aired. I am keen to ensure that tenants know how to resolve their local concerns and that they fully understand and appreciate the powers and opportunities they have. I have to make it clear—the hon. Gentleman will already know this—that I cannot intervene in such matters personally, but I recommend that hon. Members and residents involved in such situations write directly to the regulator if they feel that any regulatory standards are, unfortunately, not being met.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I am grateful to the Minister. Under the new procedures in Westminster Hall, the Member who brought the debate has a right to reply, should he wish to.

11.21 am

Jim Fitzpatrick: I thank the Minister for the information he has given, which I am sure we will look at very closely. I know that my local authority, Tower Hamlets Council, is closely engaged in this process. I am not sure whether local councils have a role to play, but because the affected tenants are residents in the borough the council has a moral, if not legal, obligation to engage, and I know it is looking to speak directly to certain housing associations.

I note what the Minister had to say about the Bill. We will look at tabling an amendment in due course and would be grateful if he would consider it at the appropriate time. As he said, we are having ongoing discussions, which will continue, and I look forward to future meetings in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

11.22 am

Sitting suspended.

Superfast Broadband

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

[*Relevant documents: Sixth report from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2013-14, Rural Communities, HC 602, and the Government response, HC 764; Seventh Report from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2014-15, Rural broadband and digital-only services, HC 834, and the Government response, HC 1149.*]

2.30 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered superfast broadband roll-out.

Members who had the pleasure of being at Prime Minister's questions earlier today will no doubt think that we have already considered superfast broadband roll-out, because it was by far the most popular subject for Members to ask the Prime Minister questions about.

What we are discussing today is by far the most important infrastructure programme that we will consider in our lifetime. There has been much discussion of new train lines. In fact, during the past five years the progress we have made on superfast broadband roll-out has been immense, and I will begin by covering some of the progress that we have made in the last few years.

I intentionally asked for this House to consider superfast broadband roll-out rather than simply the rural broadband programme, because we must acknowledge that there are serious problems in cities as well as in rural areas. Geographically, the rural broadband programme remains an enormous task, because it covers something like 40% of the area of the country, but I ask that we also consider today the huge numbers of people in cities who often have very slow connections.

Back in 2010, shortly after the formation of the coalition Government, the then Culture Secretary announced that we would have the best broadband in Europe by 2015. As a journalist covering that, I remember being convinced that if we were to have that, we would have it only by fiddling the figures. In fact, it turns out that, measured against comparable nations such as Germany and France, Britain has indeed made incredible progress. More to the point, we have by far the most competitive marketplace in broadband, so our constituents pay a good price for the service that they get receive.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Public Accounts Committee has looked at this issue in detail, and I warn the Minister that we will no doubt look at it again. The hon. Gentleman talked about there being good competition, but does he agree that there are technology companies based in my constituency and around the country that would like to break into this market but find that there are barriers, partly because of how the rural broadband programme was rolled out? Does he also agree that the Minister needs to look seriously at the issue again?

Matt Warman: I am delighted to hear that the PAC is interested in considering the issue again; I know that the Minister will agree with me on that. Of course, it is

important that we are genuinely technology-neutral when it comes to establishing the best way of getting from 90% coverage to 95% and 100%.

That brings me to my second point, which is about where we are now and where we will be within the next five years or so, so that we can get from 95% coverage to 99%, and then perhaps up to 100%. I should begin by saying that in my own county of Lincolnshire, BT's roll-out is not only ahead of schedule but £7 million under budget. I may not be the only person who expresses a view on BT in this debate, but I should say that there are some examples of areas where it has delivered the programme that it was asked to deliver. However, I suggest that where we have a challenge is when it comes to delivering the next stage of that roll-out.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue, but I am concerned that what we are talking about is "up to 95%" and not "past 95%". In other words, we are asking for something that will possibly be delivered, but it will probably not be delivered in quite a lot of constituencies.

Matt Warman: I agree, and it is interesting to note that the target that we will have in Lincolnshire is 86%, which is obviously some way below 95%. In Herefordshire, I believe that the target that people will end up with is something like 40% superfast coverage, so various rural counties have big issues.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): My hon. Friend and I have the pleasure of representing the east of Lincolnshire, which stretches from the sweeping coastline across to the rich agricultural fens and the rolling hills of the Wolds. The only cloud in the sky is the fact that BT tells me—with some pride, it seems—that overall coverage in Louth and Horncastle is 22%. Can we please remember that when we talk about 95% coverage, that figure is very much an aspiration in Louth and Horncastle?

Matt Warman: I am delighted that my hon. Friend reminds me of the variation in BT's performance even within Lincolnshire, and it is crucial that we discuss that type of variation today.

The next point to consider is that when we are talking about moving from 95% coverage to 99%, BT is by no means the only game in town. In other parts of the country, contracts have already been signed with companies such as Gigaclear, and I hope that Members who ask themselves how their own counties can get the best out of BT will look at those other contractors, which have been able to remind BT that there are other options available, because their existence sometimes seems to produce a marked improvement in BT's performance.

The other issue affecting our move from 95% to 99% coverage remains the provision of 4G and subsequently 5G; I think it is the first time that they have been mentioned in this debate. Many Members have applied to speak in the debate, and the two questions that I would like them to ask themselves are, "How do we get the best out of the contracts that we have already?" and "How do we apply maximum pressure to best fund the roll-out, which will be expensive but more than worth while, to go from 95% to 99%?" I contend that a big part of that movement from 95% coverage to 99% should be not only fibre broadband but 4G and 5G, and there is also a place for satellite broadband.

I have a final point to make, which is that BT's relationship with BT Openreach is currently being considered. I know that there is a range of views in the House about BT and Openreach. I urge only that the competition authorities seriously consider whether the best interests of the consumer are being served by BT's current relationship with Openreach. I look forward to other people expressing different views during the debate.

I will close by saying that when we talk endlessly about the vital importance of infrastructure, it is often roads and railways that we emphasise, but when I talk to constituents it is almost always broadband that comes up as the most important infrastructure project for them, and they would like to see faster speeds, including in their own houses.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): At the risk of turning this into a Lincolnshire-only debate—important and desirable as that would be—I must say that my hon. Friend is making a great case for the fact that, as we all know and as is shown by the number of attendees in this debate, broadband is now absolutely essential. At a parish council meeting last night, a parish councillor who is a constituent of mine told one of my district councillors that her children want to move from Wilsford to Sleaford, because there is better broadband in Sleaford. They have to link to the school computer for their homework, and they cannot get that link.

Does my hon. Friend agree that this issue is so important now because we simply cannot conduct our lives, and everything that we have to do to interact with Government and everybody else, without access to good broadband? That is why it is so important, not only in urban constituencies but in rural constituencies; indeed, it is particularly important for rural Britain.

Matt Warman: My hon. and learned Friend pre-empted my final point. Superfast broadband is important not simply because it allows our constituents to watch all the stuff that is associated with broadband—all the entertainment from the BBC and all the gaming that we hear so much about—but because it allows the business of government to become so much more efficient, whether telehealth or rural farm payments.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I should like to fire a non-Lincolnshire shot. My hon. Friend has talked about the infrastructure. As one gets to London and Surrey, where there have been enormous efforts, it is other infrastructure—railways, roads and so on—that causes the difficulty. Has he noted that the BT contracts seem to be selective or blind-eyed, so that when it becomes difficult the company works around such infrastructure and we are left with islands and pockets, which should have been prevented in the contracts?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend raises an excellent point. We must, when we consider how state aid works, go to the areas that need the help, rather than subsidise a commercial roll-out that would take place none the less. The construction of such contracts is crucial, as is councils having the expertise to ensure that they get the best out of those contracts. I know that a number of colleagues want to mention that.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I should like to press him on urban “not spots”. Often, the most isolated areas actually have good broadband coverage where the commercial contracts have worked, but little bits are left, often in residential areas, and we cannot even get the commercial firms to be transparent about where those areas are, let alone do what is necessary. Does he agree that a lot more transparency and co-ordination is needed between operators, and often with local authorities?

Matt Warman: I agree. I hope that the House will look forward a couple of months, when more detailed maps of phase 2 roll-outs will allow us to look into phase 3. That will give constituents some clarity, which we so urgently need, so that we can say to people, “We know that superfast broadband is finally coming to your area, but it won't be here for another two or three years”, or however long. That will at least allow some communities to make up their own minds about whether they would like to put their own money into helping to jump the queue, or whether they are content with the wait.

The lack of clarity has been damaging. Our postbags are full because people often tell us that an update on a website saying, for example, “Your cabinet will be upgraded within the next three months”, has remained the same for the past six months or longer. That is deeply unhelpful to us, to our councils that are trying to oversee the process and to BT itself. We should acknowledge that sometimes the companies have been their own worst enemies.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. It is always interesting when a journalist comes into the House and speaks with authority on a subject, which does not always happen.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned state aid, and there is an important point to be made in that regard. A big concern expressed by many of BT's competitors is that, given that every contract was won by one player, there is no clear, transparent evidence that state aid was not used to advance BT's original intentions rather than meet the real needs of the country.

Matt Warman: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case for transparency, which is a key point. Many hon. Members have questioned, outside this debate, whether the process that we undertook with Broadband Delivery UK would necessarily be the way we went if we ran it again, or indeed if it is the way we should go when we think about further phases. That is also an important part of the debate, but the most important factor is that we should not allow our foot to be taken off the gas. We should not allow anyone to think for a moment that we are not all committed, on a cross-party basis, to getting Britain from 95% coverage to 99% and beyond, in the best possible way for both the taxpayer and our constituents.

Finally before I allow many others hon. Members to speak, I add that what we have achieved over the past five years is remarkable. The risk is that in looking at the final 5% we will not only fail to close the gap between 95% and 99% but leave tiny “not spots” that will effectively be ruled out of serious coverage forever because they

[Matt Warman]

are not part of a co-ordinated, serious national programme. I hope that a serious case is made in this debate for acknowledging all that BT has done in trying to make its best practice standard practice across the country, and for its continued ongoing investment in the programme. I also hope that a serious case is made for no community being left behind.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next Member to speak, I have some guidance. There are 26 Members who have put in to speak today and just over 70 minutes to allocate to them. I know that Members will be mindful of each other, given that three Front-Bench spokesmen will speak later, in the final 30 minutes.

In addition, interventions should be short. Be mindful of the fact that, if you intervene more than once, you may slip down the list. I am not sure, but you may. I thank Mr Phillips, who has withdrawn his name having made an intervention, allowing other Members a little bit more time—notwithstanding his Lincolnshire roots.

2.46 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman). He talked about rural issues not being the main issue, and I accept that. However, there is a double whammy for people on the periphery of a rural area. It is a great place to live, but businesses complain that it is not a great place to do business. I speak on behalf of businesses, including tourism, and on behalf of many others.

We are not a semi-detached area. I believe Ynys Môn is the heart of the British Isles. It is very close to Ireland and to England, and south of Scotland, so it is the centre of the British Isles. Business is in many ways London-centric, and Cardiff-centric in Wales, so we do feel left out.

I welcome the Government's making progress, which has been mentioned, but I am afraid it is not sufficient in areas on the periphery of the United Kingdom.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman mentioned peripheral areas. The Faroe Islands, between Scotland and Iceland, are a peripheral area in Europe. Each and every house in the Faroe Islands has got wired broadband: that is a choice their Government made and it has happened. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that if we made such choices, we too could achieve that. In the meantime, 4G surely has a huge part to play in the inevitable "not spots" continuing to exist in the UK, although not in the Faroe Islands.

Albert Owen: The hon. Gentleman makes the case well. The Faroe Islands is a great example. I have learnt something today. Where there is the political will, there is a way of doing it. In the 21st century, it should be a necessity for rural areas, not a luxury.

The Minister has highlighted some good working practices in previous debates. The Welsh Assembly has a good working relationship with the UK Government and the European Union in delivering superfast broadband in Wales. That has been working well, to an extent.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Albert Owen: I will give way for the last time, because so many hon. Members want to speak.

Guto Bebb: Given how the relationship between the Welsh Government and BT has worked in Wales, is the hon. Gentleman proud that Wales has nine of the 20 worst performing constituencies in the entire country? Those constituencies have no broadband connectivity whatever, despite the fact that the Welsh Government levered in more than 50% of additional funding from Europe.

Albert Owen: If I have the opportunity, I will come to some of the figures comparing the nations and areas within Wales, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, there are some poor performing areas in Wales, as there are in the rest of the United Kingdom. He is a close neighbour of mine and there are issues with the roll-out in his constituency, but I want to concentrate on the second-class service in peripheral areas, not only in broadband, but in mobile connectivity.

Broadband connectivity is essential for competition, enterprise and accessing public services. Limited and slow access to broadband in peripheral areas is against the Government's policy of increasing online public service resources. They say we need that, but farmers in my area are always complaining that they have difficulty submitting their tax returns online, for example. The Government are encouraging them to do their tax online, but there are connectivity problems and I am sure that people are getting fined as a consequence of being late.

We have a great example. We heard about the Faroe Islands, but in the 20th century throughout the United Kingdom, in the whole of Great Britain and Ireland, the Post Office was able to deliver the same quality of phone line to every house, regardless of its location. The Minister will be pleased to hear that I am not advocating full renationalisation of all telecoms systems, but I am boldly making the point—[*Interruption.*] I know that the Minister is laughing at the first part of that, but he should not laugh at this: the market is letting areas of the United Kingdom down. That is why the debate is so important. We want to see the one nation that we all hear about—we are all agreed on it and we all use that terminology—but the United Kingdom is becoming two nations when it comes to telecommunications. The market is not working for parts of Britain.

The Minister has been in his post for some time, and I welcome him back to it, so he has heard the arguments, but I want to hear something different in his reply—I want to hear some answers. I do not want to hear him blame the devolved Administrations or local authority partnerships. I want to hear what the Government will do to close down black spots, which are not "not spots"; they are black spots, because they have little or no fast mobile or broadband coverage. Let us remember that peripheral areas pay more for their petrol, diesel, utilities, gas and electricity. They pay more for goods in many ways, and the wages are often lower than in other parts of the United Kingdom.

I was on the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change and, when talking about smart meters, I questioned the companies that have been delivering them on behalf

of the Government. We have been discussing 95% coverage and, similarly, I can guess where the 5% of “not spots” will be from day one; they will be in peripheral areas. Smart meters are not in the Minister’s brief, but generally we should be starting pilot schemes in some of the rural and peripheral areas, then rolling out from there, rather than doing what the companies want and basing schemes on the number of people living in an area.

These are not left-wing or liberal views; they are the views of many ordinary constituents of mine, as well as of the Countryside Alliance, which has lobbied me, the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales. The Minister should take note of not only what we are saying here on behalf of our constituents, but what such groups are saying collectively. They are making the case to improve commerce in their area.

The previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), talked tough with the mobile and broadband companies but failed to deliver. To be absolutely frank, he let them off the hook in the previous Parliament, and I do not see much improvement in speed and access. Goalposts are being moved by the Government. The former Economic Secretary was good at giving us updates in the House, but all he did was delay and push 2015 back to 2016 and then 2017. The mobile phone companies in particular are now repeating that mantra.

I realise that we are short of time, but slow speeds need to be improved quickly. To help the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) with some of the figures, parts of Wales are behind, with an average of 60% superfast broadband, including the large conurbations. Northern Ireland does exceptionally well, with 94% superfast broadband, so it can be delivered to peripheral areas where there is political will, and the Northern Ireland Assembly has proved that. England has 80% superfast broadband and Scotland has some 64%. We need to ensure superfast broadband throughout the UK quickly. I want to see BT and the Welsh Government working with the UK Government and the European Union to ensure that we have the funds to make that happen.

Many of the cabinets and exchanges in my constituency have the facility and the infrastructure, but we are talking about the last mile—although when it comes to rural areas, it is not one mile but many, and that is the problem. Many commercial companies do not see the value in rolling out from the cabinets and exchanges to households and businesses in my constituency. I speak for many people in peripheral and rural areas when I say that we need superfast broadband as a matter of urgency. We want the 21st-century access to goods that everyone else in the large towns and cities of the United Kingdom has.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I cannot comment on the content of the speech, but I can observe that it was nine minutes long, which I hope can be avoided in the next speech.

2.56 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) for securing the debate.

Lincolnshire is a hilly part of the world, but it is probably not quite as hilly as Devon. In the Blackdown hills, which are part of my constituency, we have huge problems in getting broadband. We talk about 95% broadband being delivered to the country, but we are bordering on 50% in my constituency and most of the Blackdown hills are not getting any broadband at all, with many villages being left out.

There is also a lack of transparency. The confidentiality clause in the last contract let by Devon and Somerset has led to huge problems. In the new contract that Devon and Somerset are being asked to sign, BT is asking for an extra £35 million and three more years to deliver the broadband, most of which should have been delivered by 2016. What sort of deal is that, I ask the Minister? It is no sort of deal whatever. We are being held to ransom for the simple reason that the waiving of the state aid rules only lasts to the end of this month, in a few days’ time. BT is holding a gun to the head of Devon and Somerset and saying, “If you don’t sign, you’ll be outside of the state aid rules. What will happen then?” That is absolutely wrong.

BT is a very good company, but it is dominant in the marketplace. It is delivering good broadband in many parts of the country, but in others it is simply not delivering. What are we doing as a Government—what is the Minister doing—to stop that happening? I have every confidence in the Minister, who I have had many meetings with, but I want action—not warm words—to ensure that BT delivers.

All our constituents are being put at a disadvantage, and many farms and businesses will probably not get broadband until 2020 or beyond. In the 2020 election campaign, do hon. Members from any party in the House want to go around the villages that do not have any broadband and face the consequences? That is the reality, because all the time BT is rolling the programme further back—not further forward—and that is the real issue. I want a clear indication from the Minister that, if we are to have a dominant BT in the marketplace—which I have no problem with—I expect the Government and Ministers to ensure that a deal that can be signed is brought to Devon and Somerset.

The other issue for the Government is that Devon and Somerset have had some £100 million of taxpayers’ money from council and Government taxes for this; if BT does not deliver, the Government cannot deliver the 95% target by 2020, because of the size of the scheme—it is as simple as that. If Devon and Somerset are prepared to sign another contract with BT, I ask again that BT honour its commitments, deliver the broadband it has already said it will and put in the contributions it said it would make—we have yet to see the colour of BT’s money, which does not bode well.

My final point is that Dartmoor and Exmoor have a new arrangement with a company that is delivering the scheme by wi-fi; that seems to be getting under way very quickly. BT has said it has looked at new technologies, but is still rolling out fibre-optic cables and cabinets. If a place is a long way from the cabinet, broadband costs a fortune and may not even be put in. Why is BT not using new technologies? I would like the Minister to answer that.

3 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I too congratulate the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) on securing this debate.

I will be brief, as the main themes have been well aired already. I want to raise specifically with the Minister the issue of two areas in my constituency that are currently being appallingly served by BT, Askham and Kirkby-in-Furness. I have been deluged by email complaints from constituents who have just about managed to get internet access to send them to me in advance of the debate, because they knew I intended to speak today.

The situation in Askham concerns a particular cabinet. It is the sort of case that will be familiar to many hon. Members present—indeed, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness gave a good account of the way in which BT seems to shift the goalposts. People in Askham were promised a cabinet. They were then given the excuse that the road around the cabinet site was eroded; if the Minister wants to come and look at the cabinet—I am sure that will be high up on his to-do list at the start of the new Parliament—he will see that that excuse is a nonsense. They were then given a second excuse, namely that there was no land on which the new cabinet could be sited that was not private. But anyone looking at the site would see that those excuses do not hold water. Hundreds of people in Askham are tearing their hair out.

The situation is similar in Kirkby. The service is going significantly backwards and BT has not given a date by which it will be fixed. I do not like having to name and shame a company for poor service, but I am afraid that is what we have to do in Parliament, given BT's intransigence on this.

Mr MacNeil: Might it be a solution in future to have a specific fund for cabinets? Once the network is laid out, the problem will be getting cabinets that can be spurs off from the network to local communities.

John Woodcock: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting suggestion and one that the Minister may want to consider. But as far as I am concerned—and as far as my constituents are concerned—a promise was made by Government to deliver superfast broadband and another was made by BT to facilitate that, and we should hold both to account, whether or not a separate fund for cabinets is created.

I do not like having to raise this issue in Parliament, but we are going to keep banging on about this to BT until it fixes the issue. I hope the Minister will be able to give us some reassurance that the Government will intervene, if necessary, to sort the problem out.

3.4 pm

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) on securing the debate. I suspect he will not speak to such a full Chamber for much of his first term in Parliament. The attendance today reflects the importance attached to this issue by all hon. Members.

It may not have escaped my hon. Friend's notice that I do not have the most rural of constituencies, but there are also significant issues with superfast broadband in

urban areas. The hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) is well aware of that, as it is something we addressed in the last Parliament.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I believe that I know what the right hon. Gentleman is going to say. In advance of his speech, may I say that, despite the fact that he sits on the Government side of the Chamber, I am likely to agree with everything he says on behalf of my constituents in Islington South and, in particular, Tech City?

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. Before the right hon. Gentleman continues, I will just remind the hon. Lady that she has only just arrived in the Chamber, so did not hear my earlier comments about the number of interventions and their brevity. I hope next time she will arrive a little earlier in order to hear the Chair's remarks.

Emily Thornberry: I hope that my intervention was short enough, Mr Pritchard.

Mark Field: London councils will have a chance to have their say as well. I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words. She tempts me to start a different speech—there are various things I should love to say today if she is going to be agreeing with every word.

One of the most significant delays in connecting a business or resident to broadband infrastructure, even in the heart of London, is the time taken to negotiate the legal permissions that are needed to allow that infrastructure to cross the public highway or to take it into a building. That is particularly the case in built-up areas. It can take some 18 months for the parties to conclude those negotiations; the usual period is about eight months. During that time, of course, a broadband provider will not be able to supply the building.

To speed up the entire process, the City of London corporation is leading a group of central London boroughs—including Islington and Hackney—known as Central London Forward in a project to produce a standardised agreement for permission to install broadband infrastructure. I am pleased to say that Westminster City Council, my other local authority, is also a main leader on the project. The City and Westminster councils have invited all the key players to participate, from broadband providers through the great estates in the west end to major developers across London.

The product of all that activity will be a standardised agreement known as a wayleave, which all parties will be able to use as a template for their negotiations. I have no doubt that such a standardised agreement will speed up connections to broadband infrastructure, because parties will not have to start their negotiations from scratch. The Minister has played a leading role in the process, and I thank him for helping to contact the key parties and for championing activities to improve broadband connectivity.

Although the Minister can happily say that Greater London compares favourably with other world cities, with an overall 88% level of coverage, that figure is not reflected in what is the economic heart of the capital, and indeed the country. It is not just my constituents who are missing out but the entire UK economy, and he will appreciate just how important it is that digital infrastructure in central London does not fall behind that of rival global cities.

Locally, BT's approach seems to be based on a belief that there is insufficient demand to invest further. I share some of the concerns that have already been raised about that. As well as the more distant rural parts of this United Kingdom, large swathes of urban areas—with important small and medium-sized enterprises—are poorly served, and are restricted to woefully outdated copper broadband. In addition, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) said, the European Commission is preventing the Government from subsidising the rollout of superfast broadband in inner cities and beyond. Perversely, that means that remote villages sometimes have better broadband connections than those available in my constituency, which contains the political, business, cultural and technological heart of the UK.

There has been a significant market failure. I may not express this quite as robustly as it was put earlier, but I will be interested to learn what the Minister is doing to address the problem. I accept that it requires co-operation with internet service providers, Ofcom and the European Commission, but it is time we stepped up to the plate. Although I hope we will not have such a well-attended debate in future, simply because I hope many of the problems will have been solved, I look forward to hearing the contributions of hon. Members from both sides of the House today. It is beholden on the Minister to recognise that this is a very real problem, not just for outlying rural areas but for the heart of our cities.

3.9 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard.

I am here today—I am sure it is the same for many other hon. Members—because access to decent broadband is extremely important both to individuals and to businesses in my constituency. As has already been said, more and more business transactions are now taking place online. In rural areas such as my constituency in Cumbria, banks are closing branches, making broadband more important as a way for people to be able access banking. Children and students are also encouraged to use online learning resources, which can be difficult. There is talk about getting access to doctors through Skype in Cumbria, but of course we cannot do that without decent broadband. I could go on.

Connecting Cumbria is managing the roll-out of superfast broadband in Cumbria. It has delivered phase 1 successfully, but we are moving on to phase 2 and, I hope, phase 3. The difficult geography of Cumbria makes that extremely challenging. I hope that the Government will continue to treat roll-out in rural areas as a priority for funding. The mere fact that outlying areas are considered hard to reach should not mean that they are left behind.

I declare a personal interest, as I live in a rural part of Cumbria with a diabolical broadband speed. I often struggle to open emails, and give up. The problem is not just speed but consistency. It is hugely frustrating when a broadband connection keeps dropping in and out. I avoid doing my banking online at home, because I worry about the security issues if the connection drops out when I am logged in at my bank. Most days I have to jog up and down the stairs a few times, because the router is upstairs and I have to switch it on and off to try to get connected. It drives me mad.

I fully understand the frustrations of the constituents with similar problems who have got in touch with me about broadband—very many of them, despite the fact that I have not been an MP very long. A particular bugbear is the fact that many services and companies are switching to online access only. Will the Minister consider whether rural communities' access to reliable broadband can be assessed before the decision is made to switch a service to online access only?

I have some recent relevant personal experience with the Rural Payments Agency. Last year we completed our forms on paper, but this year my husband and I were told we had to do it online. We had the most ridiculous Saturday afternoon trying to do that. Not only did it mean battling with the poor internet speed but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), mentioned, our mobile signal is not good, and we were told to input a text code into the system. I was running around the garden with the phone trying to get the code, so I could shout it to my husband before the five minutes were up and he could input it. That is absurd. It is a ridiculous way to carry on.

I welcome the roll-out of superfast broadband, which is incredibly important to my constituency. Rural areas, as well as the more urban ones that have been described today, must not be disadvantaged. The Government must not assume that there is decent access when they make services online only. As the roll-out continues, will they please take connectivity into account?

3.13 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) on securing the debate. It is pretty clear from the large attendance that the issue features strongly in our mailbags and inboxes—when people can email us at all.

It would be incredibly easy to knock BT as effectively a monopoly supplier, but that would be too easy a goal. I represent a rural seat, and I am very grateful for the way senior BT executives have made themselves available to come here for meetings to discuss the future and the service. Only 43% of North Dorset is covered by superfast broadband. That might seem to be the Elysian fields to some hon. Members, but in my judgment 43% is not particularly good. I would like the Minister today to consider three key points. One is the huge amount of irritation caused by descoping, which is totally bogus in my opinion. I do not think that the contractor—in this case BT—should be allowed to descope areas that it has previously included in its submissions. I am thinking of Durweston and Stourpaine, which are the Blandford 8 cabinet box number in my constituency, and Motcombe and Bourton, which are served by Shaftesbury 15 and 16. Those have suddenly been dropped out, because they appeared either too difficult or too expensive. The rules should not have allowed the possibility for such areas, and indeed many others, to be dropped out of the scope of the contract.

Third parties are also, as I understand it, holding up delivery. I understand that some problems have arisen with regard to wayleaves from the Forestry Commission and in particular, in my constituency, the Crown Estate. If the Minister could use his good offices to bring pressure on to those and other executive agencies of the Crown that would be enormously helpful.

[Simon Hoare]

We also know, I think, that BT was incredibly heavy-handed in the bidding process. I know from my previous experience as a councillor in Oxfordshire that there was quite a lot of arm twisting by BT at the county council to go totally with BT—otherwise it would not play ball—even though others were trying to come in and fill the gaps. I am sad to say that was also the experience in North Dorset where a community-led initiative, Trailway, wanted to fill the gap; but BT told Dorset County Council clearly that if it supported the group or gave it any cause for hope, it would walk away from delivery for the whole county. In what, to use the old term, we might call the big society, such community and rural groups, which are well known for their self-sufficiency, resource and ingenuity, are exactly the people we should champion.

That is done and we are where we are, but I ask the Minister to consider putting on pressure in any further discussions and negotiations with BT, so that where it has decided not to fill in the gap, black hole or whatever we care to call it, it must be able to provide all the relevant data and information to community groups and other providers, such as Wessex Internet in my constituency, who want to fill the gap.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Does my hon. Friend and neighbour agree that the issue is one of the most important for Dorset infrastructure, along with road and rail? It relates to the whole of Dorset—east Dorset, Purbeck and Poole, and we are making the argument for businesses, tourists and residents alike.

Simon Hoare: Prescience about what we might say in our speeches is not restricted to the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), because my hon. Friend takes me neatly on to my next point. It is worth while reminding a large company such as BT—and I have little or no doubt that it will be listening to the debate with keen interest—that such microbusinesses have the future of microbusinesses in their hands.

However, it is not just a question of business. Other hon. Members have talked about the importance of broadband connection to schools and colleges. There is a primary school in my constituency, Spetisbury, that has no access to broadband at all, and none in sight. Other hon. Members have spoken about the problems for agriculture. Farmers are increasingly asked to make submissions online, but there are swathes of the Blackmore vale where people might as well try to write on vellum with a quill, for the speed they can manage on the internet. In North Dorset we often call it the superfast bridle path.

Businesses such as Goldhill Organics, an online business in my constituency, and an award-winning maze designer in Durweston, are all significantly held back from growth and the creation of jobs—from bringing people back to paying tax and getting them off the dole queue. That is all fundamentally constrained by an inability to get access in a rapid and reliable way to what I think we would all now agree is effectively a basic utility.

Tourism and events in a rural area are absolutely key. I am thinking of pubs with letting rooms, such as the Talbot in my own village of Iwerne Minster. Again,

they are held back from growing their business and seeing a return on their investment. BT has done much and is to be congratulated. We are leading in the European league table, but please let us not sacrifice the 5%; please let us not forget the rural areas. In closing, I press again the three key points that I made to the Minister in opening.

3.20 pm

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) on initiating this very important debate. You will be relieved to hear, Mr Pritchard, that my carefully crafted, 10-minute speech will be jettisoned and my comments compacted into two or three minutes, I hope.

First, it would be churlish not to acknowledge the great progress that has been made. An additional 2.5 million homes and businesses were linked up to superfast broadband as of May. However, there has been much talk of the last 5% and peripheral areas, and I want to talk about the peripheral area that I represent. My comments will be very much in the spirit of those from the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), who talked about his experiences there.

Ceredigion ranks 646th out of the 650 constituencies for internet speed. Superfast broadband is available to 12% of my constituency, ranking it 639th out of the 650. When we reflect on phase 3 of the roll-out, I would like to know from the Minister what timetable we are now operating, because like other hon. Members, I have many impatient businesses and householders in my constituency. The Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which I have to say after the great speech earlier is now in the incredibly safe hands of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish)—I say that as a former coalition Member, but I genuinely mean it—said in February that it wanted a timescale for the final roll-out of phase 3, and we anticipate a response from the Minister on that. I would also be interested to find out the outcome of the research and trials that have been taking place as part of phase 3. This is about the necessity of those new technologies to get to the scattered communities that make up the bulk of my constituency.

The critical issue for me is businesses and the development of a rural economy. Reliable internet access has been identified by 94% of small businesses as essential. Ofcom recently called for lower prices for high-speed business lines, which will be welcome news to many of my constituents—at least, the few of them who can access high speed—but of course the technology needs to be available in the first place. Many of my local businesses genuinely struggle. Two weeks ago, the Gomer Press, a historic printing firm and a growing business in Llandysul in the south of Ceredigion, approached me with its genuine concerns that the speeds that it is receiving with BT are harming its business, as it struggles to receive the files that are necessary in order to undertake the printing work required of it.

The hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) talked about tourism. That is a growing sector in west Wales. I commend to the Minister the Conrah hotel in my constituency, which is a good, four-star hotel. If he

comes to west Wales, he should come to that hotel. Its owner, Mr Hughes, tells me that although his broadband is provided by BT, the service is so shockingly bad that most of his clientele are reluctant to come back because of the inadequate broadband. We are letting down key businesses in rural, peripheral areas—key businesses that have a huge impact.

Let me reflect on some other issues. Our constituents are increasingly required to undertake business online. A constituent wrote to me last week about the new Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency regulations for a digital counterpart driving licence. How can that be possible in an area where people will not be able to access the digital component? Other hon. Members have mentioned the members of the farming community who come to us with genuine concerns that they cannot undertake what is required of them, such as the reporting of cattle movements to the British Cattle Movement Service, online completion of single farm payment forms and the checking of market prices. Those are just some of the problems that farmers face. In addition, small businesses have to undertake electronic verification of VAT returns. One constituent was required to register his tax returns and he was fined because he was unable to do so. We managed to get the money back for him. He was told that he could register a paper submission. But when the note came back, the farmer was also told that next time he should go down to the local library, where there would be a broadband connection, to register his tax returns. I would challenge any Member of the House to go to one of the marts in my constituency and tell a farmer to go and register his tax returns online—they would get a spirited response.

This is a matter of necessity and of urgency. I am following your stipulation about time, Mr Pritchard, but we need some immediate action on the matter.

3.25 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Before making my remarks, I must declare an interest. My husband is director of policy at the broadband provider Sky.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) on securing the debate so soon after becoming a Member. Broadband is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity. For my local small businesses, for my farming community and for local families at home, access to the internet and all that it has to offer is a core requirement of day-to-day life. However, in many places—particularly in rural areas, such as my constituency of Wealden—people have to contend with a limited choice of service providers, slow speeds, regular service blackouts and general unreliability. My Wealden constituents should not have to put up with that in 2015.

I have received a number of complaints from constituents about their broadband services, and they demonstrate how lives can be blighted by broadband difficulties. I will share just two examples. A local mum who runs her own business contacted me about a service blackout that left her without an internet connection for 19 days. Can you imagine, Mr Pritchard, trying to run a business without the internet for 19 days?

However, the problem will not be solved by a roll-out of superfast broadband in the short term, because the problem is with the access network—something that is taken for granted by those pining for an upgrade to the

superfast network, but that some of my constituents can only dream of. Any superfast roll-out cannot be at the expense of investment in the access network.

Another constituent, whose house is connected to the Ripe exchange, which is not currently enabled for fibre service, is in the dark over any possible upgrade. BT's website shows that his area is in line for one within six months, but that notice has been on the website for 12 months already. My constituent has not been given a provisional timetable by BT, BDUK or the local council detailing when the negotiations will be brought to a conclusion, never mind when any upgrade may finally happen. BT and BDUK must become much more transparent.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I commend to my hon. Friend North Lincolnshire Council, which has done an amazing job of ensuring that at every step of the way residents know what happens. As a result, take-up is way in excess of what was expected. That is in stark contrast to my other local council, the East Riding of Yorkshire, where communication with the public has been woeful at times. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This can be done, if local authorities and BT have the desire to do it—and it should be done, so that residents know when they will get their upgrade.

Nusrat Ghani: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that example.

Beyond the impact on businesses, there is an impact on older people. I am pleased to be the new co-chair of the all-party group for ageing and older people. Addressing ageing and loneliness is a priority of mine. The speed at which technology is changing is frightening for the best of us, but for older people it can be truly isolating. Ensuring that they have access to the internet is not just an economic or technological issue, but a social care issue. We cannot let anyone be left behind or left out.

This and the previous Government have taken encouraging steps with respect to broadband provision. The £1.7 billion being invested is welcome, as is the fact that, according to the Countryside Alliance, 90% of premises will be connected by early 2016. My concern is that the other 10% should not be left behind and that during the roll-out of superfast broadband, the responsibility to deliver basic broadband to those who fall beyond the limits of the BDUK project should not be overlooked.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): My hon. Friend and I are constituency neighbours, sharing a border as we do. Given that 15% of our local residents are self-employed and more than half of them work for small firms, does she agree that this is even more of an issue for us in East Sussex and that it is important that the Government get it right?

Nusrat Ghani: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Most—90%—of my local businesses employ fewer than 10 people, and they tend to be run out of people's own homes, so having rural broadband, whether the speed is slow or fast, is absolutely imperative. I thank my hon. Friend.

The Government predict that, by 2017, 95% of premises will benefit from speeds of more than 24 megabits; some of my constituents are asking for just 2 megabits,

[Nusrat Ghani]

and they are not even getting that. The broadband connection voucher scheme, which allows businesses a grant of up to £3,000 for better and faster broadband, is also welcome, but it does not help my constituents one little bit; it is, for the moment, limited to businesses located within a certain distance of the 50 cities currently benefiting from the scheme. I hope the Government will consider expanding the scheme's horizons and work to support other businesses.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. I now have to call the Front-Bench spokespeople.

3.30 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) for securing this fascinating debate on an issue that affects everyone in this Chamber—we must ensure that we have effective broadband. I am particularly drawn to the comments of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) about the difficulties he faces in his rural constituency, which I share in Ross, Skye and Lochaber.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) spoke about 4G and 5G filling the gaps where we cannot get fibre broadband, which is one of the big problems in rural areas. We do not even get a 2G signal in large parts of my Eddisbury constituency. That option is simply not available because of the failure of the mobile companies to act in concert.

Ian Blackford: I agree with the hon. Lady. When we talk about the kinds of solutions that we need to deliver in rural areas, we cannot consider broadband in isolation. We also need to consider the opportunities that mobile telephony would provide. She is right that it is not only the failure of broadband; it is also the failure of mobile connectivity. I met members of my business community in Lochaber and Fort William last week, and they add weight to that. There are four significant employers. Marine Harvest, for example, is a fish farming business that has great difficulty in connecting at any level with its fish farms around the constituency, which adds costs to the business. The same is true of Ferguson, a transport company, which has the additional cost of having to buy satellite phones so that it can connect with its drivers. That is the kind of cost of being in more disadvantaged parts of the country that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn was talking about. We need cross-party work. There will be opportunities when 5G is introduced in 2016, and we need to ensure that there is a competitive advantage for rural areas by ensuring that rural communities are at the front of the queue, not at the back.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is talking about other methods and technologies, and many villages have asked me whether BT will consider fibre to the remote node options, which can join small groups of, say, 30 properties to a smaller cabinet.

That method is being trialled, but BT will not put it into practice. I ask the Minister whether we can try some other methods.

Ian Blackford: I was going to come on to that, because there is clearly an issue, particularly in rural areas, with the distances from cabinets, which result in the degradation of broadband speeds. We talk about the delivery of superfast broadband, but the reality is that it is not superfast, so nodes, satellites and other such things must be considered in rural areas if we are determined to get it right.

Time is marching on, so I will omit many of the remarks that I was going to make. John Swinney, a colleague of mine in the Scottish Parliament, wrote to the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy in March 2015 calling for the introduction of a universal service obligation for broadband that would ensure that everyone in Scotland, and elsewhere in the UK, can access affordable high-speed broadband. The UK currently has a telecoms universal service obligation, which entitles every property in the UK to a telephone line, but it contains no meaningful provision for broadband, which it should. A broadband universal service obligation, working alongside significant Scottish Government investment, would help to address the digital divide and ensure that everyone in Scotland can access broadband services, regardless of where they live.

All, regardless of location, deserve to benefit from the opportunities of connectivity. A recent report by the Boston Consulting Group stated that internet-related activity in the UK accounted for 8.3% of GDP in 2010, and it forecasts that that will increase to 12.4% by 2016. Data traffic is exploding worldwide, growing at a compound rate of 23%. To be able to compete, it is clear that our connectivity infrastructure has to be fit for purpose. Many UK cities such as Peterborough, York and Coventry, and Aberdeen and Edinburgh in Scotland, are seeing the development of fibre rings that will deliver speeds of up to 1 gigabit. The leader of Peterborough City Council stated that the development is the most important event in Peterborough since the arrival of the railway. I tend to agree, and I welcome the opportunity of superfast broadband from which businesses and consumers will benefit in those cities, but it raises the challenge of ensuring that we deliver appropriate connectivity in rural areas.

My SNP colleagues from rural constituencies and I are looking forward to working with hon. Members from other parties who face the same challenges as we do. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's report on rural broadband and digital-only services, which was published in January 2015, graphically pointed to the challenges and opportunities to be met. The last sentence of the summary states:

“It is vital that the last premises in the UK to have access to basic and superfast broadband are treated just as well as the first premises and are not left behind or forgotten.”

There are particular challenges with the incumbent technology of fibre to the cabinet, in which the ultimate connection is by copper wire, and consequently we have the degradation of broadband speeds. As the report states:

“The fact that Fibre to the Cabinet is not a suitable solution in every circumstance or every community means that alternative solutions, such as wider satellite coverage or Fibre to the Remote

Node, are necessary. Alternative solutions are required not only to ensure that the current commitments of basic and superfast broadband are met but also to ensure that the infrastructure being deployed is future proof and able to meet demands for increasing broadband speeds.”

It is in that context that the plans for next-generation capabilities, particularly 5G, are critical. We need to debate how effective mobile coverage in rural areas, and technologies such as 5G, could allow us to deliver efficient and effective broadband capabilities. The opportunities that the connected cities will have mean that the Government have to consider how we create competitive opportunities in rural areas. My party and I welcome many of the improvements.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that inviting other technology providers is an option, albeit one that could prejudice access to Government money by showing that there is no market failure? That would leave a legacy of high costs for individuals in the provision of broadband.

Ian Blackford: That is a reasonable point. In the context of what we did in highland, rural and urban areas of Scotland, we suffered from the fact that there was no potential provider other than BT. We need to ensure that there are people who can provide such services at the right cost, whether in Scotland or in the rest of the UK.

In conclusion, my party and I welcome many of the improvements that are being delivered today in both urban and rural areas of the UK. However, more has to be done so that everyone can share in the opportunities that superfast broadband can deliver.

3.37 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): As you know, Mr Pritchard, some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them. I have never quite worked out which it is with you. *[Interruption.]* I missed that, I am glad to say.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. I think the shadow Minister has said enough. I call the Minister—*[Laughter.]* No, I’m kidding.

Chris Bryant: Fortunately, Mr Pritchard, you cannot call a Division in this Chamber, so we cannot put that to the test.

It is a great delight to take part in this debate, and it is also a great delight to see the Chamber so full, which is unusual. The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) has chosen the right subject, on which I congratulate him. I look forward to hearing a great deal more from him. I hope he will be a little less opaque about BT and Openreach in future. He is no longer a journalist, and he is allowed to say what he thinks, even if Whips are listening in. An awful lot of Members now have significant concerns and will be carefully watching Ofcom’s inquiry into the roll-out and the relationship between BT and Openreach. We want to ensure fair and open competition, but we do not want to dismantle a company for the sake of some kind of prejudice.

The hon. Gentleman referred to this being the most important infrastructure roll-out in his lifetime. I hope he will have a long and fruitful life, and who knows

what the future may bring? In my constituency, the roll-out of mobile has been complicated and difficult. I know, because when I wrote a letter demanding that Tony Blair stand down as Prime Minister, fortunately I had no mobile coverage in my house, so no journalists were able to get me for at least four days.

The point has been well made by many hon. Members that peripheral economies come in many different shapes and sizes. All too often, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) has said, the infrastructure problems with broadband also relate to physical access, roads, buses, transport and everything else. *[Interruption.]* I cannot hear what the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) is saying.

Hon. Members: Devolved.

Chris Bryant: I am not sure what devolution has to do with this particular issue. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy wants to make a contribution, I am sure he might catch your eye later, Mr Pritchard, if I sit down. *[Laughter.]*

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn made several points and said that the market is not working. Many hon. Members have rightly expressed concern about how we have assessed state aid and market failure. I am not sure that it has really delivered the significant outcomes that we would all like to have been achieved for the significant amount of money that the Government have put in.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) gave what I can only describe as a Julius Caesar speech, as its basic tenor was, “I come to bury Vaizey, not to praise him”. He made his points better than I can, so I will not make them again.

Throughout the previous Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) consistently made points about how his constituents are affected, and he was absolutely right to do so. It is good that he can now get emails on the matter, even if many in his constituency still find it difficult to get superfast broadband.

The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field)—I note that most constituencies have two names in them; few are as concise as Rhondda, unlike the Member for Rhondda—made the important point that the issue is not only about rural constituencies. Some of the most intractable problems relate to cities. For instance, all the cabling on the south bank of the Thames runs in and out of the side of the river, which makes for very difficult contention ratios along long copper wires. That has still not been resolved in many cases, so he is absolutely right.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: We want to hear from the Minister fairly soon, so I am tempted to try to stop sooner—oh, all right, the hon. Gentleman is very beguiling.

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman is characteristically generous and courteous in giving way. Some hon. Members have rightly ensured that urban broadband has not been neglected in this debate. Nevertheless, does he agree that it is vital to retain a focus and determination

[Edward Argar]

to prioritise coverage in villages such as Seagrave and Thrussington in my constituency and in rural “not spots”?

Chris Bryant: Since the Rhondda is often described as semi-rural or semi-urban, I am happy to agree with the hon. Gentleman and—sitting next to him—the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster, which is having one’s cake and eating it. However, the points are well made. In the end, universality is what we are trying to achieve, which is what we are not achieving as yet.

The hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) made a worrying point about BT’s aggressive bidding process. I hope that BT will have heard it. I am sure it will: there is probably someone from BT sitting in the Public Gallery, or watching on TV or via broadband. Who knows—perhaps they have superfast. But the hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to talk about filling in the gap.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) has one of the worst sets of problems of all 646 constituencies. His points are well made and I hope the Minister will be able to answer them. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) is a new colleague who, like many others, is already raising matters of significant concern to her constituents. I am sure she will continue to do so, and we hope to hear from the Minister on them. The hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) made important points about the access network. Since we politicians are not necessarily experts in every aspect of technology, we sometimes get focused on broadband speeds to the detriment of some of the other aspects of competition that also affect the subject.

I was slightly nervous about an SNP Member sitting behind me—at my back, as it were—the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). I kept thinking of Andrew Marvell and “always at my back I hear the SNP horribly near”. However, the hon. Gentleman made some important points. If he can act as my PPS, that will be very helpful in these debates.

We all agree on the centrality of superfast broadband. That is absolutely clear. For home entertainment, many people now watch television via broadband, including—ironically enough, since much of this is being funded out of the licence fee—the BBC iPlayer. Also, children might be upstairs watching television programmes, playing audio-visual games on tablets, using Spotify and so on. The NHS relies on broadband not only for the booking of appointments, but for passing notes from doctors to hospitals and for the examination of X-rays, often in other parts of the world. Schools and children being able to do their homework have already been referred to. Of course, increasingly, the Department for Work and Pensions wants to move to a model where everything is done on the internet, which will require superfast broadband and reliable connections.

The creative industries now represent one in 12 jobs in this country. We can add value and guarantee our economic future by supporting our creative industries. Superfast broadband with speeds of at least 24 megabits per second, and I suspect considerably more in future, is going to be important to our economic future. It is in a sense a utility as important and as essential as electricity.

We all agree that some significant progress has been made, but the symbolic fact that so many Members from all political parties are here on behalf of our constituents is an indication to the Minister that not enough progress has been made. Phase one and phase two of the project aims to get to 95% of all premises by 2017. I originally thought that it would be the beginning of 2017. Since the Government had originally said it would be by May 2015, that was a legitimate expectation, but the Government are now talking about the end of 2017 for that target to be met.

The hon. Member for Eddisbury referred to the fact that some people still cannot even get the 2 megabits per second. That is a dramatic problem for people running the most basic of businesses that have to relate to the wider world, because everybody has at least a website and some means of getting in touch with a business online.

Our original target of 2012 has not been met, and the Government bear a measure of responsibility for that. I noticed earlier that the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness referred to Prime Minister’s questions. I have heard the Prime Minister referring to the mobile infrastructure project many times. Some £150 million is devoted to it. It is meant to get to 60,000 properties, but, so far, it has got to just 1% of those in three years. so I think that the hands-off approach has not been suitable.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. The Standing Orders for Westminster Hall debates have changed. If Members have not seen them, I encourage them to read them. Matt Warman is entitled to wind up the debate, subject to the Minister allowing time.

3.48 pm

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I say that to all the chairmen, but in your case I really mean it. You have your own experience of the broadband roll-out programme, because your Labour council refused to take part in the phase 1 programme; having seen how successful phase 1 has been, it has now, I gather, set up to take part in phase 2. That is down explicitly to the actions of the brilliant Conservative MPs in the area, who persuaded the Labour council to come on board the programme and connect 8,000 premises that otherwise would not have been connected.

I do not know whether to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) on securing this debate, but I should thank him for bringing so many hon. Friends and colleagues here to support me this afternoon on a complex and difficult programme. I certainly thank him for the email he circulated earlier today:

“You may be interested to know that in my own county of Lincolnshire, BT’s rollout is ahead of schedule and well under budget.”

I think that that is true in many areas.

I shall give a brief history of time on behalf of my hon. Friends. Everyone knows that when we came into government, we found that the previous Labour Government did not have a plan to help get broadband out. They talked about a 2 megabit commitment for the end of 2012, but they had not put anything in place for

that. My right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), when he was Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, rightly decided that we had to push further and go for superfast broadband from the get-go. He knew full well that, if we had rolled out 2 megabits, I might have been able to stand up in this Chamber and say that we had achieved that, but all hon. Members would be screaming for superfast broadband. He made the right decision.

We set out that phase 1 would cover 90% of UK premises and on many occasions I had to appear in front of the right hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), the then Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, following various National Audit Office reports, and hear that we would not make that target. Indeed, I recall that some journalists in the sector thought that the target was too stretching and could not be achieved. However, lo and behold, by the end of 2015—or early-2016 at the latest—we will have reached it. In fact, we will shortly announce that we will have exceeded 3 million premises, as the figures are increasing by 40,000 premises a week.

This is a complex engineering job that does not involve simply turning up at a doorstep and flicking a switch. An expensive cabinet, which needs power, needs to be put in and then it needs fibre run from it back to the exchange. All of that requires highways, planning and power.

Meg Hillier: The Minister will also be aware that the Public Accounts Committee called for local government and BT to make further information available—including, critically, information about the speed of service. Is he content that his Government have done that?

Mr Vaizey: If someone goes to gosuperfast, a website provided by the Government, they can type in their postcode and find out whether they have access to BT Openreach, which gives access to Sky, TalkTalk and other over-the-top providers—or, indeed, access to Virgin Media. It is important to remember that this is an engineering project and some of the tasks achieved, such as getting fibre to the Scilly Isles, rank among the most complex engineering phases.

I will not go through every single speech—they were all brilliant, but there were a lot of them. Let me take two quick examples. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) talked about the need for rural areas to come first, but his area is a classic example for why the scheme matters. Precisely no premises in his constituency were due to get commercial superfast broadband from BT or any of the rivals who often say that they could do the job better because such investment was not economic. However, 93% of his constituents will get superfast broadband under the scheme, including those—*[Interruption.]* That is what is being delivered under the scheme. This is what we are up against: when superfast broadband is delivered to Opposition Members, they do not want to give us any credit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) spoke with great passion and asked what I was doing to help him. This morning I had another meeting with BDUK to discuss getting the contract signed for connecting Devon and Somerset and I have such meetings all the time to get local authorities together with BT. We have already provided £110 million for Devon and Somerset. We have passed 143,000 premises and we are due to pass 300,000.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I recognise the huge improvements that have been made and the manifesto commitment to roll out ultrafast broadband to premises as soon as possible. However, are we being ambitious enough? Australia will be delivering 100 megabit broadband to 93% of premises by 2021, Finland will deliver that by 2015 and South Korea will deliver 1 gigabit by 2017. According to a London School of Economics report, the Government's investment—

Mr Vaizey: I have got my hon. Friend's point; I am running out of time. We are being ambitious enough for him because we support him. That is why 100% of Torbay will get superfast broadband under our scheme—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, I got the wrong name—I heard the Chairman give the wrong name!

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): Before the Minister completes his comments, I should say that there has been a lot of talk about roll-out but not so much about take-up. Will he refer to the fact that, in parts of Wales, take-up of this fantastic scheme is still in the low-20s? Everyone seems to think that that is someone else's problem, so will he clear that up?

Mr Vaizey: I will. Take-up is extremely important and the good thing is that take-up brings money back into the scheme. For example, the money set aside to get superfast broadband to Cornwall was due to get coverage to 80%, but because of high levels of take-up we have reached 95%.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake)—I got his constituency spectacularly wrong; I hope he will forgive me—mentioned other jurisdictions. He will be pleased to know that the previous Australian Government lost the election because their broadband plan was so poor. If he believes that those Australian plans will happen, he will have to think again. They are busily trying to revise their programme because it was far too expensive and due to deliver far too late.

All my hon. Friends will have the note from the Library that puts us first in almost every category in terms of the big five in the EU. Analysis published today by Enders Analysis again puts us top on access to speeds of 30 megabits. We are beating the Germans, the French, the Italians and the Spanish on that as well as on average internet connection speed. Because that scheme has been so successful, we have gone on to phase 2, which is 95% coverage. That is also why we have signed almost every single contract apart from Devon and Somerset, which I hope we will sign on Friday. We can then get on to start planning how we will get to 95%.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): The Minister said that the cabinets were expensive. The European Commission's report by Oxera, which evaluates the UK scheme, has a chart on page 4.5 that should say how expensive the cabinets are, but unfortunately that page is blank—it has been edited out. I happen to have got hold of that chart and it looks like cabinets are a lot cheaper than BT said. In particular, when Olivia Garfield, the former head of BT Openreach, said in "Strike Up Broadband" on 13 December 2013 that cabinets cost £100,000, she was, to use a technical term, talking crap, was she not?

Mr Vaizey: I do not know whether that is a technical term. I do know, however, that in my hon. Friend's constituency some 33,000 premises will be delivered superfast broadband thanks to the plan. He will also know that both the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have validated the scheme for value for money. No contractor pays BT until the work is done and BT presents invoices, and the scheme is audited regularly.

Phase 2 is going ahead. Phase 3 is about no one being left behind, which is the theme of the debate. The key point about that last 5% is that we do not know how much it will cost. Back of an envelope costings can run into billions, but we need a proper figure. That is why we have launched the pilots, some of which are already delivering broadband connections to people all over the country. Better still, they give us an idea of the kinds of technologies we can use to get to that 5%. That will include suppliers other than BT and other technologies that BT and others are using, such as wireless and satellite.

Hon. Members have talked about businesses. We do not want to leave businesses behind. That is why we have launched our successful business voucher superfast broadband scheme. This morning, we announced that that scheme has delivered vouchers to 25,000 small businesses in cities up and down the country. Better still, there is now more competition in the market. Virgin Media announced £3 billion of investment because of the success of our scheme. TalkTalk announced a 1 gigabit offer in York and it will roll that out to other cities. BT has invested £3 billion of its own money and let us not forget that we have the fastest 4G roll-out and take-up anywhere in the world.

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): Will the Minister clarify the timing of phase 3 for the final 5%?

Mr Vaizey: We hope to set out our proposals on phase 3 later this year. We are working on a series of proposals that we will look at in some detail and hopefully we will present those and take them forward. However, this is obviously a complex issue. Let us not forget that we are talking about the most difficult and expensive-to-reach premises. However, we do want to reach them; that is why we will carry out the scheme.

This is an unequivocal success story. I look forward to coming together again with all my hon. Friends and other hon. Members when we announce that we have reached the 3 million milestone. That may be in the summer recess, so I will invite them all to join me at a suitable seaside resort to make that announcement and release some balloons. Otherwise, they may want to put out press releases in their constituencies that tell their constituents how hugely successful the scheme is.

However, I do not want to be flippant or facetious. We have not forgotten those who need broadband. The tone of the debate was absolutely right. We are at a critical point where the engineering scheme we are rolling out is meeting the almost universal demand from our constituents for broadband. As a constituency MP, I know that those who get broadband under the scheme do not always say "thank you"—

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Free Childcare and Nursery Providers

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered free childcare provision and nursery providers.

It is a privilege—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to interrupt. Could Members leave the Chamber quietly, please?

Julian Sturdy: It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship for what I think is the first time, Mr Bone, and to have secured this debate.

As was made clear in the Queen's Speech, the Government are introducing measures to help working people by increasing the provision of free childcare. The announcement was welcomed by many people up and down the country and in my constituency, and it provides us with a great opportunity to launch a full review of childcare funding.

I secured a debate in this Chamber on nursery funding back in 2013, in which I explained that one of the main reasons for the continuing rise in childcare costs is the fact that nursery providers have to cross-subsidise the free entitlement funding provided by the Government. I stated that although the Government are the biggest procurer of nursery places, they are the worst culprits when it comes to paying for the places they procure. I am sorry to say that little has changed since then. For years, free provision has been subsidised by providers and parents due to a lack of adequate funding.

Doubling provision should benefit parents in my constituency and across the country. However, there is a danger that not implementing the change properly will lead to a more expensive system and more expensive childcare from the outset. The free hours could ultimately harm the very people the policy is supposed to help.

The Government have promised to include in the Childcare Bill a proposal to double free provision for three and four-year-olds in England. The current allowance is 570 hours of free early education or childcare a year, which works out at 15 hours a week for 38 weeks. It is thought that up to 600,000 families could benefit from the doubling of the provision and save as much as £5,000 a year. The change is due to come into force in September 2017, although there will be pilots in September 2016.

I have two children of my own, so I am fully aware of how expensive childcare can be. The cost of childcare is one of the biggest barriers that the UK's 2 million single parents face to finding and staying in work. I therefore want to make it clear that I welcome and support the policy. At the same time, however, I want to offer a word of caution about the policy's implementation and the impact it could have on nursery providers.

Since the announcement in the Queen's Speech, I have been approached by several owners of nurseries in my constituency, who have all been keen to get clarity about exactly what the policy will mean for their businesses. Among them were the owners of Station House children's day nursery in Dunnington and of Polly Anna's nursery in Haxby. Both providers see the benefits of such a

policy, but they agree that providers will be able to offer the increased number of hours only if the funding covers the cost of provision. In many areas, it currently does not.

Over the past few years, I have had the privilege of visiting a number of nurseries in my constituency—Little Green Rascals near Elvington, Sunshine day nursery in Huntington, Tiddlywinks in Osbaldwick, Quackers in Copmanthorpe and Polly Anna's nursery in Haxby, to name but a few. Having met the owners of those nurseries and kept in contact with them over various funding issues, it is clear to me that they do a tremendous job. Nurseries carry out an essential service for parents and families, not just in my constituency but across the country. However, that essential service is increasingly under threat as a direct result of the funding issues.

As we all know, parents in the UK receive help with their childcare through free early education. In England, the central Government allocate money to local authorities through the early years block of the dedicated school grant, with an estimated total spend of £2.2 million a year. However, there is a great disparity across the country in how much is spent on childcare by individual local authorities. Therein lies the problem. The National Audit Office found that free entitlement varied from £2.78 to £5.18 an hour, and that the national average was £3.95. My constituency receives only £3.38 an hour from City of York Council. The sad truth is that funding for the 15 hours a week of free provision falls well short of the actual cost. To be precise, the shortfall is about £800 a child, which results in nurseries running at a loss for those 15 hours. They therefore have to subsidise that loss through the price of childcare outside the free entitlement hours.

Following my previous debate, which centred on those issues, I secured a meeting with the former Minister to raise my concerns face to face, alongside a group of local nursery providers from York. The Government have been aware of the problem for some time. The Minister has been proactive in his discussions with nursery providers, and has met providers from my constituency. Some positive news is starting to come out, including the announcement that my hon. Friend the Minister will oversee a funding review of the entitlement, which is due to start in the next few weeks.

I warmly welcome the Minister's commitment to raising the hourly funding rates paid to providers for places. However, the review is being undertaken at a time when costs to nursery providers are set to increase further, with pension auto-enrolment responsibilities coming in for many small and medium-sized nurseries. The pressure increases when the payment for funded hours is delayed. More than 40% of local authorities are paying more than a month after the start of term, although, as we all know, the law requires them to pay within 30 days.

I am acutely aware that the burden of business rates and VAT is continuing to push up the cost of childcare, which constrains the ability of nurseries to offer more places. The average annual business rate paid by nurseries is almost £16,000, which is why I welcomed the intervention of the Department for Communities and Local Government. In January, it wrote to all English local authorities to ask them to consider granting business rate relief to childcare providers. Local authorities have had that power since the Localism Act 2011 came into force, and the Government will fund 50% of any discretionary relief schemes that councils introduce.

Following the DCLG's announcement, I wrote to my local authority, City of York Council, to ask it to consider granting business rate relief to childcare providers in the area. Sadly, it refused. Interestingly, when the chief executive addressed the National Day Nurseries Association conference earlier this month, she reported that she had written to every local authority in England on the issue, but had been told that none would be implementing business rate relief for nurseries, which I find extremely disappointing.

Although there are political differences over childcare policy, there is broad support for the current approach of both supply-side and demand-side subsidies. However, compared with many other developed countries, the public funding of childcare in the UK is complicated to say the least. It is complex and expensive to administer for Governments and complex for providers and parents. I therefore believe that the policy to double free provision for three and four-year-olds provides a perfect opportunity to launch a full review of childcare funding and set in place the changes that will ensure simplicity, progressive levels of support, quality—that is absolutely key in this field—and accessibility.

Take-up of the current 15 hours of free provision for three to four-year-olds is at 96%, but it is much lower for two-year-olds. That is because some providers have opted out because they believe that the hourly funding rate is not financially sustainable. Many nurseries operate complex cross-subsidy mechanisms, and they rely on working parents of three and four-year-old children to purchase extra hours on top of their existing 15 hours of free provision. As I have made clear throughout the debate, I have sympathy with providers regarding underfunding. I hope that the upcoming funding review led by my hon. Friend the Minister will bring meaningful reform.

Only quality provision helps narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. The owner of Polly Anna's nursery in Haxby in my constituency told me that when he first opened his nursery in the early 1990s, only doctors and accountants could use it; it was unusual for women to go back to work. Now we have flexible working, and free childcare has opened up day care to a whole range of families. Doubling free provision will only add to that trend, but it can be successful only if it goes hand in hand with a full review of childcare funding.

As I have mentioned, money is allocated to local authorities through the dedicated schools grant. For three and four-year-olds, the rate per pupil is largely determined by historical precedent; it is not based on the actual characteristics and needs of the children. Early years funding should be brought more closely in line with schools funding, whereby money is allocated on the basis of a larger number of criteria, which include pupil numbers, deprivation and attainment levels to name a few. That would ensure that funding matched children's needs and the cost to providers of providing early education. In addition, we could consider a national formula with two rates—one for London and one for the rest of England—similar to the funding formula for two-year-olds, which is fairer and more transparent. Local authorities receive a flat hourly rate per child of £4.85, supplemented by an area cost adjustment in places where wages are higher. That would be a much clearer funding system and would help to streamline the number of complex formulas in place.

[Julian Sturdy]

Overall, although childcare represents a significant outlay to parents, it is important to remember that by its very nature it will always be expensive. It is not fair to suggest that high childcare costs are simply the result of providers charging high fees to hard-pressed parents. The reality is more complex. Childcare should never be provided on the cheap, and we must ensure that measures to make it more affordable do not compromise its quality. For me, that is crucial. Although successive Governments have increased help with childcare costs, parents in Britain still spend a higher proportion of their income on childcare than parents in most other developed countries. On top of that, some childcare providers struggle to break even. All of that is indicative of a childcare system that is not working.

I view the proposals to double free childcare provision as an opportunity to fix these long-standing problems once and for all. We have a chance to make a real change to help not only nursery providers but parents who use such facilities, and I hope the Government will grasp it with both hands. I am encouraged by what I have heard from the Minister in our previous conversations on the issue.

4.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) for the opportunity to have this debate. It is timely in the light of the Government's commitment to double the amount of free childcare available for working families. Like him, I am a father; I have a 14-month-old who goes to nursery, so I experience the childcare market from the point of view of a parent, not just a politician sitting in Westminster making decisions about the sector.

My hon. Friend dwelt on the challenges that the nursery sector faces, but I would like to counter that: the childcare market is much broader than the nursery sector. The vast majority of places are provided by private, voluntary and independent providers. We also have childminders and school nurseries, but the bulk of the formal childcare that the Department is concerned with is provided by those three sectors. When we talk about the market and the challenges it faces, it is important to recognise how broad the market is and the different types of services offered. For example, childminders offer childcare in a domestic setting, whereas nurseries are more of an organisation and children are taken to them. Each provides slightly different challenges to and opportunities for parents.

For many families with young children, childcare is not an issue, but the issue. Many parents want to go back to work or work more hours, but find that the cost of childcare makes doing so unaffordable. The Government want to reward hard-working families by reducing their childcare bill. That said, policies are not just about the parents; we also recognise that childcare is about the child. A lot of development happens in the early years, so the quality of childcare provision is as important as making childcare available. That brings me to the key challenge we face in the sector: how do we make childcare affordable, ensure sufficient quality and ensure that it is available in the form that parents want? Every parent knows that the childcare needs of parents are not consistently the same across the board.

In responding to my hon. Friend, I will take the opportunity to make general points about our childcare policy. I am proud of our record to date. We are the first to fund 15 hours of free childcare for all three and four-year-olds as well as 40% of two-year-olds. We legislated to introduce tax-free childcare; the 1.8 million families who want to buy additional hours can get up to £2,000 off per child per year. It is important that the policy applies to children from age nought to 17, in the case of children with disabilities. Tax-free childcare can help parents not only with childcare in the early years, but with wrap-around care, whether that is breakfast or after-school clubs. We have also increased the child element of tax credits and introduced shared parental leave.

We need to do more to ensure that we are enabling families to make the choices that are best for their circumstances. In doing so, it is worth recognising, as my hon. Friend implied throughout his speech, that in many cases it is businesses that are delivering these services for parents, so we need to ensure that the funding is sustainable. That is why we have talked about implementing the funding rate for the new 15 hours in a way that is not only fair but sustainable, to ensure—crucially—that children have the best start in life, with affordable, safe and high-quality childcare.

More broadly, our businesses and economy depend on working parents, who themselves depend on access to high-quality childcare. However, what the childcare and early years survey tells us is that 22% of working parents have found it difficult or very difficult to pay for childcare; for lone working parents, the figure rises to 38%, so there is a lot more that can be done.

The conundrum is that the Government already invest £5 billion per annum to support parents with childcare. How can we be in a situation where we are spending that money and yet some parents still say that they find the cost of childcare to be too high? The Childcare Bill will take the support that parents can get further, delivering on our manifesto commitment to support children at every stage of their life.

We will extend the current entitlement of 570 hours for all three and four-year-olds, and I am happy to report that the take-up of the existing entitlement in York is already higher than the average take-up. With the new entitlement, working families will receive more childcare support than ever. It will guarantee them about 1,140 hours of free childcare, worth more than £5,000 a year per child.

I will make a comment about the funding rate, which is a key part of my hon. Friend's speech was about. Yes, we need to look at the funding rate for the first 15 hours as well as for the second 15 hours, and I hear the complaints that nursery providers have made. However, it is worth making it very clear that the impact of the funding rate on a business is as a result of a number of factors and not just the rate itself, although it is important. For example, whether or not the local authority top-slices the funding that goes from central Government to providers determines whether providers receive more or less than the rate that central Government determine. Also, the flexibility that local authorities allow providers to deliver their 15 hours is important, because if local authorities are quite inflexible in the scope for providers to allocate the 15 hours in a way that works best for their business, that will invariably impact on the profitability

of providers. Thirdly, the business model decisions that operators make impact on how far that money can go. When we consider the sustainability of this model, we need to look at all of those things in the round, as well as obviously focusing on the funding rate available.

To support the market beyond the funding rate, I worked with the Department for Communities and Local Government in the last Parliament, urging local authorities both to work with childcare providers and to ensure that charitable and non-profit providers benefit from the business rate relief that they are entitled to. Any nurseries that are registered charities will already benefit from rate relief. The smallest providers, including childminders, benefit from small business rate relief, although any further relief would require local authority discretionary relief.

I heard what my hon. Friend said about local authorities granting or not granting that relief. I intend to continue to work with the National Day Nurseries Association to find ways to ensure that the necessary action is taken to help reduce the cost of provision for childcare providers. I understand where he is coming from and I will take action, as he suggests.

Having said that, I counter the idea that somehow the childcare day market is not thriving; in fact, I would say that the opposite is true. The childcare day market for children aged from zero to five is vibrant and thriving. In 2013-14, it was estimated at £4.9 billion, which means it is about a third larger than it was a decade ago. The number of places in the sector has gone up by 12%, and roughly 230,000 places were created between 2009 and 2015. We recognise the challenges that exist, but those are signs of a sector that is rising to those challenges.

To help the sector meet those challenges we are listening to its input. I have announced a review on the cost of providing childcare and it is now under way, with more than 300 responses in the first 24 hours or so. Clearly, the sector is aware of and engaging with the call for evidence. The review will report in the autumn and I encourage providers in York and throughout the country to respond.

As my hon. Friend pointed out and as I touched on earlier, the issue is not only about the funding rate, but about payment practices. I have heard that from all sorts of providers, including some of the largest ones in the sector, so we will be looking at that. The average paid to local authorities by central Government is about £4.51 per hour for three and four-year-olds; that is in excess of what he said providers in his York constituency are receiving. In fact, that rate is higher than the one in the Family and Childcare Trust survey, which showed that an average nursery is charged £4.47 per hour for children aged two and over. That is an indication of why we need to look at what is happening between the rate

set by central Government and the rate received by providers. Why does it differ so much between local authorities and between types of provider? That is not to say that we do not accept the need to look at the overall level of the rate, but we need to look at the other aspects as well.

My hon. Friend touched on the funding formula, but the funding system for three and four-year-olds includes historical inconsistencies that result in large variations in funding distribution between local authorities. There are also variations in the amount of funding passed on by local authorities to providers, as I said. In the previous Parliament, we started to look seriously at such problems to create greater transparency for parents and providers. We now publish an annual benchmarking tool that lists every council's funding and how much it passes on to different providers. That should help parents and providers to have informed conversations with councils, but should also hold them to account. I am confident that if we look at all such things seriously, the extended entitlement will provide an opportunity for existing providers to expand and for new providers to enter the market, giving parents choice and helping to build our economy.

The market is healthy and growing. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be interested to know that in York 4Children has developed a fantastic childcare hub with a blended childcare offer, where schools and private, voluntary and independent providers are working together to provide high-quality childcare. That is one example of innovation in the sector that can be used to boost capacity, higher quality and flexibility for parents. Generally, to be able to deliver for parents in a cost-effective way we need more of such innovation, rather than having a sector that operates in silos.

My hon. Friend talked about nursery provision. Many maintained nursery schools deliver the highest quality early education, often in disadvantaged areas where it can make the greatest difference. I fully support such schools, because they are delivering high quality. We will ensure that they, as well as private and voluntary providers, can continue to thrive.

I am also proud to say that the quality of providers continues to improve. In York, 91% of early years settings are rated as good or outstanding, compared with 80% nationally. That is an encouraging statistic. Additionally, 64% of children in York achieved a good level of development in the early years foundation stage profile, compared with 60% nationally in 2014. The Government's childcare policy will have a direct and significant impact on the lives of children and families throughout the country. It is right that it should be subject to the most thorough scrutiny, such as that from my hon. Friend this afternoon.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

National Breastfeeding Week

4.30 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered National Breastfeeding Week.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone, and to be lucky enough to have secured this debate during National Breastfeeding Week. I welcome Members in the Chamber and those who are breastfeeding as they watch our proceedings online.

Members well versed in social media might have noted that some great breastfeeding stories are circulating on Twitter under #celebratebreastfeeding—

4.30 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.44 pm

On resuming—

Alison Thewliss: As I was saying before the Division, celebrating breastfeeding is the theme of this National Breastfeeding Week, and there is much to celebrate about that remarkable human act. Although completely natural, breastfeeding is also a skill that mothers and babies must learn together, and is not without its difficulties. I acknowledge that some women cannot breastfeed and others choose not to, and in holding this debate I do not seek in any way to judge them—those bottle feeding also require assistance and advice.

I will talk briefly about my experience of breastfeeding and why I am so committed to promoting it, before touching on its health and societal benefits. The UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world, and lags far behind comparable nations in the OECD. There is a lot we can do to improve the experience of families in our constituencies.

I have breastfed both of my children, and despite being in this place from Monday to Thursday have managed to persevere in feeding my one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Kirsty. She is not here today as a visual aid but in fact is in nursery in Glasgow, so my determination has been at some personal discomfort. When I had my son I was a local councillor in Glasgow and took the view that I could not take the time off work for maternity leave, so I combined my role with being a mum. During the past five years I have fed my children while fully participating in meetings of Glasgow City Council, and have been made very welcome in doing so by my colleagues. That the right to feed is enshrined in law in Scotland has been a real reassurance to me, and whether I have been feeding in a café, waiting for a bus, or in the stand at Hampden—I have been lucky in securing the backing of the tartan army for giving the wee man his tea at the game—I have been made welcome.

My colleague and good friend Aileen Campbell MSP, Scotland's Minister for Children and Young People, has taken her own children, Angus and Crawford, into the Scottish Parliament Chamber; her youngest was with her during a stage 3 debate just the other week. Aileen and I are lucky, as not many mothers can do that at their work. I understand from speaking to colleagues that doing something similar in this place would be frowned upon. I seek to gently challenge that. We should take a lead and seek to be creative in how we support women to continue breastfeeding in all workplaces once they return from maternity leave.

It is 10 years since the historic Breastfeeding etc. (Scotland) Act 2005 put on the statute book the right to breastfeed in public places in Scotland. It is:

“An Act of the Scottish Parliament to make it an offence to prevent or stop a person in charge of a child who is otherwise permitted to be in a public place or licensed premises from feeding milk to that child in that place or on those premises; to make provision in relation to the promotion of breastfeeding; and for connected purposes.”

That important piece of legislation was a Member's Bill proposed by the Labour MSP Elaine Smith. I pay tribute to her today for the work she did to make it possible for so many women in Scotland to breastfeed secure in the knowledge that no one has the right to stop them.

There are now greater rights in England and Wales, afforded by the Equality Act 2010, under which discriminating against a woman because she was feeding a child became unlawful. That is significant, and I commend all who made it happen. We far too often see tabloid tales of mothers being shamed for the simple act of feeding a hungry child. That is completely unacceptable, and every such story destroys women's confidence; they need to hear from their elected representatives that breastfeeding is welcomed and that they are supported.

Getting the right support is absolutely crucial. Without that and without information, establishing breastfeeding can be incredibly difficult. As I said, breastfeeding is natural, but it is not easy. Without the assistance of the breastfeeding counsellors at the Princess Royal maternity hospital in Glasgow, who sat with me through the tears and the pain, I may have given up myself. Not all women will have experience of breastfeeding within their families or peer groups. Good public health information must be there to counter the ever-present adverts for bottles and formula milk, as well as perceptions and prejudices.

I recall that, at an event in Glasgow, Councillor Jim Coleman told me how women in some parts of the city were made to feel that breastfeeding was evidence that someone could not afford to buy formula. We know that runs absolutely counter to all wisdom on the benefits of breastfeeding, but those kinds of old wives' tales persist and must be challenged by people in those communities.

Since this debate was announced, I have been contacted by various individuals and by organisations including the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of Midwives, the Breastfeeding Network, the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative, the UNICEF “Baby Friendly” initiative and the National Infant Feeding Network. I am grateful for the extensive briefings they have provided.

The organisations all reinforced the need for support. Their evidence demonstrates that women start breastfeeding, and initiation rates have risen from 62% in 1990 to 81% in 2010. But the drop-off rates are staggering: only 17% are still exclusively breastfeeding at three months, 12% at four months and 1% at six months. There are also huge variations across social class; other factors include deprivation, maternal education, age and ethnicity.

Scotland is lagging behind, and the Scottish Government are putting strategies in place to tackle that; they also held a summit on breastfeeding in February. Recent figures from the “Growing Up in Scotland” cohort survey found that breastfeeding was strongly associated with multiple socioeconomic factors. For example, 60% of degree-educated mothers exclusively breastfed to six weeks or more, compared with 18% of those with standard grades;

53% of mothers living in the least deprived areas breastfed exclusively to six weeks, compared with only 21% in the most deprived areas; and 45% of mothers in their 30s and 41% of those aged 40 or older at their child's birth exclusively breastfed to six weeks or more, compared with 35% of mothers in their 20s and only 12% of teenage mothers.

Members will be aware that breastfeeding is good for maternal and infant health. Benefits to children from breastfeeding include reduced gastrointestinal, respiratory, urinary tract and ear infections, lower incidence of allergies and a reduced likelihood of developing obesity. For women who choose to breastfeed there are lower risks associated with breast and ovarian cancer, less chance of hip fractures and osteoporosis in later life, and the added benefit that it helps with getting back to their pre-baby weight.

UNICEF has done excellent work in documenting the savings that could be made to public health services through breastfeeding and its benefits, and I commend its document "Preventing disease and saving resources" to the House. "The 1001 Critical Days" is a manifesto that is also well worth a read.

Increasing breastfeeding rates in areas of multiple deprivation has a clear multiplier effect. James P. Grant, who was executive director of UNICEF from 1980 to 1995, said:

"Breastfeeding is a natural safety net against the worst effects of poverty...exclusive breastfeeding goes a long way towards cancelling out the health difference between being born into poverty or being born into affluence. It is almost as if breastfeeding takes the infant out of poverty for those few vital months in order to give the child a fairer start in life and compensate for the injustices of the world into which it was born."

Those are striking words, and it is to areas of multiple deprivation that I believe resources should be targeted, but most certainly not in a heavy-handed way. Instead, local networks, existing organisations and women themselves need to be given the skills and knowledge to spread the word among their peers and to challenge the old wives' tales I spoke about. They must work across the whole experience of pregnancy and parenthood. Public Health England found in March 2015 that the most effective strategies for promoting breastfeeding were among smaller local peer support groups. There is a lot of excellent information online, from KellyMom to Mumsnet, but there remains a digital divide, and at times of crisis having a local network to fall back on is hugely valuable.

That kind of work is often facilitated by the voluntary sector, and we need to ensure that that is maintained even in these straitened financial times. I understand that the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) will refer to a local case, and I have I have been contacted by mothers in Lambeth and Southwark who discovered that funding for their work would be cut. They have been hugely successful in increasing breastfeeding rates in their area. Such projects should be treated as exemplars, and their good practice should be taken on board.

In my contact with several organisations, there have been a couple of broader asks that it would be neglectful of me not to mention. The first is that there should be financial support for the National Infant Feeding Network, which I understand had its funding cut in 2014. The funding

that was cut was a meagre £30,000, which went a very long way to organising and supporting a network of 600 infant feeding specialists. They are responsible in turn for the education and support of some 70,000 health professionals across England who reach 650,000 mothers and babies every year. That is crucial, for the reasons I mentioned. Breastfeeding mothers really need support, especially in the early days.

Secondly, the Department of Health should continue to strive for the implementation of UNICEF "Baby Friendly" standards in maternity, community and neonatal services. In the UK the percentage of services with full "Baby Friendly" accreditation are 49% of maternity services; 51% of health visiting services; 37% of university midwifery courses; and 9% of health visiting courses. It is important that those professionals should all have the skills to enable them to pass on information to the women they help.

The percentage of births taking place in fully "Baby Friendly"-accredited hospitals stands at 44% in England, a wonderful 84% in Scotland, an even better 92% in Northern Ireland, and 60% in Wales. The impact of services being "Baby Friendly"-accredited is that mothers get consistent advice and support throughout their pregnancy and in the early months after the birth. It is not just about hospitals, but about embedding good practice across the range of provision. That means that there should not be any kind of postcode lottery, so that women and families can feel confident about breastfeeding.

Thirdly, I implore the UK Government to reinstate the national infant feeding survey across the UK. The main basis for the statistics I have given to demonstrate the need for more support today is that five-yearly study, which I understand has been on the go since 1970. It fits into the World Health Organisation's global strategy for infant and young child feeding, which recommends that Governments carry out a survey to track rates and target support effectively. Without the data, we lose touch of where we stand in the world and what work we need to do. The Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments have all committed to keep it going, and I urge the Minister also to commit to it, to complete the statistics for the whole UK.

Fourthly, I seek the Minister's advice on where the UK currently sits with regard to full implementation of the international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes, which was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1981. I support calls by groups such as Baby Milk Action for the UK Government to play their part in protecting the public from aggressive and damaging marketing by the formula industry.

My final plea is a personal one. I have come into this place as a breastfeeding mother, which has been hard for me, even in this position of relative privilege. I ask for the consideration of all parents in this place—Members, staff and visitors—and of how we can make it easier for them. I ask colleagues to consider what they can do in their own constituencies to celebrate and support breastfeeding in this and every week of the year. Could our local cafés be more welcoming? Are our own offices a safe space for nursing mothers? Could we encourage investment in support services in our areas, and do we know where they are so that we can send them recommendations? We all have a role to play in encouraging the uptake of this most basic human need.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): It might help the hon. Lady to know that I will come back to her for a few minutes once the winding-up speeches are finished.

4.56 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) for securing this important debate.

I breastfed my two children, who are now aged nine and six. I was fortunate because that experience was relatively straightforward, but it was not without issues or a need for support. A few days after having my first baby, I remember experiencing toothache and wondering, in my slightly dazed state as a new mother, how toothache could possibly be a post-natal complication. I then realised that I had given myself toothache from clamping my teeth so hard because of the pain every time my baby fed. Those first few days were difficult and painful, and there were tears, but once I had mastered it, it was a hugely rewarding experience. My second baby could not tolerate cow's milk, which made the transition to any type of formula very difficult, but I was glad to continue breastfeeding her for much longer because it benefited her health enormously. The health benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and babies are well established and proven, as rehearsed by the hon. Lady.

I want to highlight a pressing issue in my constituency: the potential loss of the breastfeeding cafés that operate in Sure Start centres in my constituency, in Streatham and in Camberwell and Peckham. Those cafés, which are resourced by experienced midwives from King's College hospital, are a vital resource for new nursing mothers. They are under threat because the support from King's College hospital is going to be withdrawn, due to the midwives who staff the cafés being needed on the labour wards. The hospital is otherwise unable to recruit to a series of vacancies in its midwifery department.

This is a grave situation. The breastfeeding cafés operate in Sure Start centre locations where many mothers are deprived, successfully extending the reach to those areas and increasing breastfeeding rates there. The benefits of addressing nutritional disadvantages, helping those babies to be healthier and getting them off to a good start in life are vital. I am concerned that a shortage of midwives elsewhere in the health service is putting those breastfeeding cafés at risk. I will certainly raise the issue with King's College hospital when I meet staff there on Friday, and I will talk to the local authorities in Lambeth and Southwark about whether there is any way that those vital services could be continued.

I call on the Minister to help us in that endeavour and to help make additional resources available, so that experienced midwives can continue to staff breastfeeding cafés in my constituency and beyond. Extending breastfeeding to deprived communities in particular will save the health service money in the long term, so resourcing this service is money spent positively and spent well.

4.59 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I want to speak particularly about the asks that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss)—I want to say Councillor Thewliss—mentioned.

My situation is similar to my hon. Friend's. My children are not that different in age to hers and I was also a councillor when I had both my children. I was

lucky to be able to go back to work so quickly and to take my children with me. That worked well for us in terms of breastfeeding.

My second child was an absolute dream to feed. She was wonderful and knew what she was doing from day one. She was just a dream come true. However, it was still painful at times. Even in the most ideal circumstances, breastfeeding is not plain sailing all the way. My first child was a nightmare to feed. We had a horrendous time. Nearly all the things that can go wrong with breastfeeding went wrong. My son was re-admitted to hospital at five days because he was not gaining weight, so for a while we had to pump exclusively and then he was weaned back on to breastfeeding.

The support networks and breastfeeding cafés, which hon. Members have mentioned, are so important. There are proven statistical outcomes from breastfeeding cafés and people having physical support. I am not sure whether hon. Members are clear about how the outcomes are achieved. My hon. Friend mentioned the huge online support network, including Mumsnet and Facebook groups. Those places are good and people can get a huge amount of information from others there, but that does not compare with having somebody physically present who knows what they are talking about. In those early days, when people do not know what they are doing, and when their baby does not know what they are doing, they need somebody there to help and show them what they are doing wrong, or what they are doing right, and to explain it. It is not something that can be learned from a video on the internet, because every mum and every baby is a different shape and every baby reacts differently. Somebody must be physically there, and they must have huge experience and know what they are talking about.

A three-day training session on breastfeeding does not, in many cases, equip a midwife or health visitor with adequate means to provide mums with all the support they need. Those people also need experience behind them: they need to see many babies breastfeeding and speak to lots of people before advising in all cases.

In terms of the support available, the Government in Scotland and the Government here—Governments all over the place—need to think about the voluntary organisations providing support. People who have been through breastfeeding and experienced the problems—and those seeking support—are getting involved in the La Leche League and with NCT breastfeeding support, for example, to help people. When I was being shown what I was doing wrong, those were the people I found most helpful, because they knew what they were talking about. Training systems are a great idea, but we need to make sure that voluntary groups and breastfeeding cafés, which have experienced staff, are kept going. If we lose that experience, we cannot get it back. We need to keep these groups going to keep up the breastfeeding rates.

There is a postcode lottery in terms of support. People without a local support group near them have either to travel a long way to get to a group or rely on the internet. That is not ideal.

The World Health Organisation guidelines suggest breastfeeding exclusively up to six months and that breastfeeding onwards to two years or beyond is desirable, advised and good for children and mothers. This is not widely known in the UK: people even get funny looks

when breastfeeding a child over six months. People do not understand that that is actually good and has health benefits.

I breastfed my children for a total of three years—adding them both together—so I had that experience of breastfeeding a child who is running around. That is totally shocking for so many people and it should not be, because World Health Organisation guidelines and statistics suggest that there are health benefits from breastfeeding. There is a job of work for all of us to normalise breastfeeding and to explain it to people. If people say, “What are you doing?”, we should explain to them, “This is right. This is not in any way unnatural. This is totally the right thing to do and has benefits for everybody.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central mentioned formula milk and the way it is advertised and classified. I spoke to some of my online friends who have been involved in supporting people with breastfeeding, and one of their biggest concerns, and one of the things that makes them most angry, is the advertising of follow-on milk. Follow-on milk is allowed to be advertised because it is not aimed at mothers with babies, and the adverts for follow-on milk have very small babies who are obviously just six months old. That is the way that the companies can get round the rules, because they are not advertising to mothers with a baby who is under six months; they are advertising to mothers with babies who are older than six months. Before the ban on advertising baby milk was introduced, there was no such thing as follow-on milk; the companies have just invented it so that they can still advertise. That is a concern.

We should have formula, and women who choose to formula-feed—or women who end up formula-feeding not by choice—need to have options in terms of formula. But formula should not be pushed at every opportunity by the companies, and we should not allow them to do so. We should try to avoid that situation.

The last thing I wanted to mention was the pressure to breastfeed. It is very positive that we are promoting and encouraging breastfeeding, but there is a fine line; some women feel that they cannot give up breastfeeding in the very early days without experiencing a huge amount of negativity. Breastfeeding is hard for some women at the moment, particularly when the support is not there nationally.

I have heard of women who have said that not being able to breastfeed caused them to have post-natal depression. The issue was the expectation—that they felt they had to breastfeed, but nobody was there to support them. What they wanted was somebody to show them what to do and to help them, and not having that help is costing the Government and the devolved Administrations through the outcomes for those babies, as they are more likely to cost the NHS more in later life; through the outcomes for the mothers; and through the outcomes for some mothers who really struggle with having to give up breastfeeding, and end up in the mental health system as a result. That really concerns some of my friends and some of the other people I have spoken to about the issue.

5.8 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Bone, for chairing this debate this afternoon. I also thank the hon. Member

for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) for securing this important debate, and other Members for their excellent contributions.

We need to keep our focus on this issue, and I am very pleased that all the Members who have spoken so far share my passion for extolling the virtues of breastfeeding. I am also pleased to note that the Minister present today is the Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences, who I respect hugely. Although at first I thought it was rather strange that breastfeeding came under his brief, I am now sure that it is simply the case that the issue is so important to the Government, and crosses so many departmental boundaries, that they settled on him, and it was not just a case of Ministers perhaps playing “pass the parcel” with this important debate. As I say, I am very pleased to see that he is here to respond to it.

I will start my remarks by putting my cards firmly on the table—for me, wherever possible breast is best. I breastfed both my children, as all the Members who have spoken so far breastfed their children, and I am evangelical about the merits of breastfeeding.

As other Members have said, and shared, breastfeeding sometimes hurts at first—although not for everyone—and that is why the right support is vital, to help women and encourage them to carry on breastfeeding. Having someone physically there really makes the difference, especially when a woman has a baby like my son, who did not like to open his mouth very wide when latching on. If he could get away with it, he would just suck on the nipple until it was red raw, and obviously he then got no milk. If nobody had told me that that is not how it is supposed to happen, I would have given up immediately. Support is vital. As with my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), my second child—my daughter—could not tolerate cows’ milk. Fortunately, I was able to carry on feeding her to about 16 months, but feeding a toddler in public draws lots of frowns, and eventually I succumbed. We went on to soya milk, and even now she does not really like milk.

We have a fabulous support network in the north-east called Bosom Buddies, which helps, supports and encourages new mums as they get to grips with breastfeeding during the early days. The network provides much-needed guidance and advice for mothers who may otherwise be unsure about even starting to breastfeed. Those services are replicated in various parts of the country, and many are in Sure Start centres. I have had the great pleasure of visiting many breastfeeding support groups in those centres, and I have seen their great work. I would love every new mother across the UK to have access to such services, because that support makes a huge difference, as we have all attested today. Sadly, as we have seen across the country in recent years, Sure Start centres are closing. More than 700 have closed since 2010, which limits the amount of support that mothers can get. What assessment have the Government made of the number of support services that have been lost as a result of the closure of more than 700 Sure Start centres?

National Breastfeeding Week is a brilliant idea, and over the years it has successfully highlighted, across the world, the importance of breastfeeding. I fully endorse and support the campaign, and I hope this debate will go some way towards making even more people aware of the virtues of breastfeeding. As we have heard, numerous studies have shown breastfeeding to be the healthiest way to feed a baby. Not only does breastfeeding

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

provide essential nutrients and sustenance, it also greatly reduces the risk of a baby developing health problems such as gastroenteritis, asthma, diabetes and obesity. Furthermore, breastfeeding helps to protect women from breast and ovarian cancer. The World Health Organisation is unequivocal that, if possible, babies should be totally breastfed until they are at least six months old. On top of all that, there is the additional bonus that breast milk from source is always at the right temperature for babies, with no bottles needing to be sterilised. Best of all, it is 100% free. Breastfeeding is cheap; it is good for babies; it comes highly recommended; and, by preventing illnesses, it keeps babies safe while saving millions of pounds from stretched NHS budgets. Put simply, what is not to like?

Unfortunately, despite all of the positives that other Members and I have outlined today, certain obstacles remain for mothers who are looking to breastfeed their children. One such obstacle comes when mothers return to work after maternity leave. Breastfeeding mothers face a heightened sense of anxiety when they return to work from maternity leave, as they have the additional worry of how their baby will be fed in their absence. The hon. Member for Glasgow Central and other hon. Members spoke of their personal experience. Women may have to raise with their employer the issues of expressing and storing breast milk and fitting in feeds around their work and lunch hour. If they harbour fears that their employer lacks an understanding of, or concern about, such accommodations, it may delay their return to work, or stop their return altogether. Alternatively, such fears may make women give up breastfeeding sooner than they had planned.

Maternity discrimination, such as prohibiting mothers from breastfeeding in cafés or restaurants, is now against the law under the Equality Act 2010, but the Act does not apply in the workplace. Mothers can be told not to express milk or be denied breastfeeding breaks. Employers do not have to provide facilities for breast milk to be expressed or stored. Good employers provide such facilities, but they do not have to do so. I can tell hon. Members, as the Health and Safety Executive already has, that toilets are no place for expressing milk or breastfeeding. We all want parents to get back to work if they wish to do so. I hope the Government understand that breastfeeding responsibilities are holding mothers back from returning to work, and I hope the Minister will assure us that he is looking into ways to address that issue.

Over the past few years, we have seen that women in general are finding it harder at work. There were more unemployed women over the past five years than at any time under the previous Labour Government, and real wages for women have fallen year on year since 2010. There has also been a dramatic fall in sexual discrimination and pregnancy discrimination cases made against employers since women were priced out of justice when expensive tribunal fees were introduced. Figures comparing the years before and after the introduction of those fees show a truly staggering 91% fall in sex discrimination cases and a 46% fall in pregnancy discrimination cases. Such dramatic falls are utterly unacceptable in a country that wants to treat women with respect in the workplace. A Labour Government would have scrapped those unfair barriers to justice. I would love to hear the Minister say that his Government will reverse that unfair policy.

Alongside the structural issues affecting breastfeeding, there is a growing cultural obstacle that prevents new mums from breastfeeding their children. It is particularly striking, as we have heard, in working-class communities. The Department for Health figures show that in Brighton almost 70% of new mothers were partially or totally breastfeeding at six to eight weeks—that is relatively early to be taking a measure, given that the recommendation is that children should be breastfed for up to six months, but we can use it as a comparison—while in Hartlepool and south Tyneside the figure falls to 19.3% and 22.6% respectively.

In some communities today, there seems to be an anti-breastfeeding culture among young mothers, which we need to challenge and reverse. National Breastfeeding Week and this debate are great ways of starting to do that. Breastfeeding must be seen as normal and natural, and new mothers should feel utterly comfortable doing it. We need to focus on the areas and communities in which new mums do not even consider starting to breastfeed because it seems so strange or even repulsive to them. Government support is required. Role models must come forward to extol the virtues of breastfeeding and we need more mums on TV—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members may laugh. We need mums in our soaps and even on “The Only Way is Essex”, breastfeeding naturally and happily. We rarely see breastfeeding, and if we do it is usually by mums such as us—middle class, professional, older mums—which reinforces the image in some young mums’ minds that breastfeeding is something for a certain type of people, not for them and their friends.

We need to work to reverse that image and let new mums and young mums know that breastfeeding is not only good for their health and that of their babies, but it has immediate benefits, such as helping them lose their pregnancy weight much faster, as the hon. Member for Glasgow Central said. I was never as slim as when I was breastfeeding my children. If I could have carried on breastfeeding, I would, because the weight really drops off. It also means not having to get cold in the middle of the night making up bottles, and it helps mums to bond in such a special way with their babies, which cannot be imagined until it has been experienced.

Come on, TV producers, soap writers, celebrities and “TOWIE” stars watching this debate—get to it. Get breastfeeding on TV and get mums seeing it. I want mums to feel comfortable in public—even in Claridge’s, for goodness’ sake. We need to show that it is totally normal, natural and acceptable, and that those who have a problem with it simply need to get over it.

I once again thank the hon. Member for Glasgow Central for securing this important debate and for all she has said and done on this issue in the short time she has been in this House. I thank the other hon. Members for coming along and making their expert contributions. I have rarely heard such strong and powerful arguments for the benefits of breastfeeding and I thank every hon. Member who came to speak here today. I am sure that with such powerful advocacy from hon. Members and from groups and organisations throughout the country, National Breastfeeding Week will be a huge success in raising even greater awareness among parents.

I hope that the Government will listen to the concerns about women getting back into work after having a baby and will address the specific issues that affect them to ensure that that transition is best for both the mother

and her baby. We all want to see the best outcomes for all parties, but only by taking action to help can we see progress. Simply hoping for the best will not be enough, so for the sake of babies, their mums and our society in general, let us hope for a successful awareness campaign and an equally successful response from the Government.

5.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) for initiating the debate and for her leadership of it. I particularly commend her for tweeting a picture of herself breastfeeding to help launch and publicise the Breastfeeding Network and the campaign this week.

I commend the hon. Members for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for raising in a short time a number of very important issues. They include issues about the importance of breastfeeding and about women in the workplace; issues, which we had all hoped would become legacy issues, about prejudice and discrimination; and important issues about geographic variation and inequality, including the importance of cultural leadership in changing attitudes.

There were specific questions on policy, which I will try to come to in a moment. I just want to take this opportunity to celebrate and promote National Breastfeeding Week, which runs from 20 to 28 June. It is an excellent initiative and it is particularly good to see it so active on Twitter, which may be to the credit of the hon. Member for Glasgow Central, and to see the plethora of activities going on around the country and the sharing of good practice and experiences by women and health professionals in place-based and virtual networks. That is genuinely inspirational, and the Department and I look forward to seeing other activities organised by local groups around the country this week.

It will not have escaped your beady eye, Mr Bone, that I am, on a gender basis, the least qualified person in the room to be responding to the debate, but I am pleased that the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West, highlighted the fact that I am the Minister responsible for life and health sciences. This issue goes to the heart of our thinking more broadly about how we unleash the power of the NHS and our health system more generally to support and drive public health.

Before coming to the House, I worked in biomedical research. I had the great privilege of working at the Institute of Child Health, which is doing extraordinary work on the importance of pre and post-natal nutrition for long-term health outcomes. Extraordinary data are beginning to appear on the importance of early nutrition in determining our long-term health. As the Minister responsible for the National Institute for Health Research, as well as the whizzy high science of tomorrow's technologies, I can say that we also have at the heart of the NHS a commitment to ensure, through the institute, that we are constantly using the power of our health system to drive public health and to promote best practice.

The Department of Health is working closely with our partners at UNICEF, the Royal College of Midwives, the Institute of Health Visiting, NHS England and Public Health England to co-ordinate our awareness messaging this week. This debate provides an invaluable opportunity for Members of Parliament to discuss these important issues.

It may help if I begin by setting out the Department's view on breastfeeding in England, which is the only place for which I can speak. It is widely agreed that breastfeeding delivers significant health benefits for both the mother and her baby and is more cost-effective for mothers than other methods of infant feeding. A mother's milk provides a perfect balance of nutrients and vitamins for the first six months of a child's life. That is why the World Health Organisation and the Department of Health encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months.

The Department is aware, however, that infant feeding choices are complex and personal, based as they are on individual and family circumstances. That is right. Not all mothers choose to or are able to breastfeed. In line with UNICEF's "Baby Friendly" guidelines, all mothers should be supported to make informed decisions and to develop a close relationship with their babies soon after birth.

The evidence shows that, in addition to providing all the nutrients and vitamins that a baby needs, breast milk also protects him or her from infections and diseases. Breastfed babies are less likely to develop diarrhoea, vomiting and chest infections, leading to fewer hospital visits; and they are less likely to become obese both as children and in later life. Breastfeeding can also reduce the chances for some women of getting diseases such as breast or ovarian cancer later in life. The evidence and data also show that breastfeeding as soon as possible following birth helps to start the bonding process between a mother and her baby. We know that secure parent-child attachment results in better social and emotional wellbeing among children. Furthermore, evidence shows that that, in turn, has important implications in terms of life prospects for the infant.

I am pleased that the breastfeeding initiation rate in England has increased from about 62% in 2005-06 to 73.9% in the third quarter of 2014-15. The Office for National Statistics will publish the full-year figures in a couple of weeks. However, breastfeeding initiation rates vary widely across clinical commissioning group areas, from 43.9% in NHS South Sefton to 93.4% in NHS Lambeth.

While we understand that cultural differences exist in different areas, it is important that all new mothers receive the best quality of care no matter who they are or where they live. We encourage local commissioners and services to use their resources, and opportunities such as National Breastfeeding Week, to reduce such variations and increase overall breastfeeding rates.

Increased awareness of the health risks associated with not breastfeeding has brought about a drive in recent years to improve breastfeeding support and increase breastfeeding prevalence rates. Support and information is currently available to health professionals and parents through a range of channels such as the NHS Choices website under the Start4Life banner; the national breastfeeding helpline; the UNICEF UK "Baby Friendly" initiative; and local peer support programmes.

[George Freeman]

Parents-to-be and new mothers and fathers can also sign up to the Start4life information service for parents. Subscribers receive regular free emails, videos and text messages that offer high quality advice and information based on the stage of pregnancy and the age of the child. That service includes breastfeeding and signposts parents to other quality-assured information about parenting, relationship support and benefits advice.

In the past five years, I am delighted to say that we have recruited more than 2,100 more midwives into the NHS. We are training a further 6,400, who will provide women with the information, advice and support they need to breastfeed. In addition, appropriately trained and supervised maternity support workers play an important role in supporting women with breastfeeding and helping midwives to run parentcraft classes. In the past five years, 2,000 new health visitors have been recruited and we are on track to reach our target of 4,200 by the end of the year.

I will try to answer the important questions raised in the few minutes available; if I am beaten by the clock, perhaps I can write to hon. Members. The hon. Member for Glasgow Central mentioned the National Infant Feeding Network. In 2014, the Department of Health provided £30,000 to UNICEF UK to support the establishment of the network, which shares and promotes evidence-based practice on infant feeding and early childhood development to deliver optimum outcomes. It comprises 600 infant feeding specialists and supports 30,000 health professionals who, in turn, are responsible for caring for more than 650,000 mothers.

The network approached the Department for funding support in 2015. Unfortunately, its request could not be accommodated because it came in too late for the 2015-16 budget. However, we continue to work closely with the network co-ordinators on future funding.

The hon. Lady also raised the breastfeeding rights of women in the workplace. Specific health and safety requirements relating to new and expectant mothers at work are contained in regulations 16 to 18 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. A woman can ask her employer to provide a private, safe and healthy space to allow her to express milk and a fridge to store it in.

On the UNICEF UK “Baby Friendly” initiative, I repeat that we want to encourage more women to breastfeed. That is why we welcome the revised “Baby Friendly” standards that support feeding and relationship building. It is great to see that, across the UK, 91% of maternity services and 88% of health visiting services are working towards baby-friendly accreditation. In the UK, 49% of maternity services, 51% of health visiting services, 37% of university midwifery courses and 9% of health visiting courses currently have full “Baby Friendly” accreditation.

On the infant feeding survey, I am happy to confirm that the Government’s policy is to improve outcomes for women and their babies. To do that, we need current information to inform policy and service delivery. The statistics that NHS England regularly gathers capture data from all women using NHS services, rather than from the periodic survey samples. From 2016, the maternity and children’s dataset will, for the first time, link a mother’s health and behaviours during pregnancy and

post-natally to outcomes for herself. I will happily write with more details on that and on the issue of breast milk substitutes, since I am defeated by the clock.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): The Minister is certainly not defeated by the clock; it is at 5.44 pm that the debate will now finish.

George Freeman: Thank you, Mr Bone. I apologise; I was merely stretching my legs as I saw the clock hit the 5.30 button. I was not expecting the vote. I am delighted that I have more time to finish dealing with the two questions. There was an important question on breast milk substitutes.

For mothers who choose to use formula milk, it is important that measures are in place to protect babies’ health and that all the parents have the information they need to make the right choice. The Government provide advice for parents on maternal and infant nutrition via NHS Choices and the NHS Start4life information service.

The international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes is an international health policy framework to regulate the marketing of breast milk substitutes. In view of the vulnerability of babies in the early months of life and the risks involved in inappropriate feeding, the marketing of breast milk substitutes requires special treatment. “Baby Friendly” accreditation requires services to implement the requirements of the code, which goes further than UK law in regulating marketing activity. To meet the “Baby Friendly” standards, services must ensure that there is no promotion of breast milk substitutes, bottles, teats or dummies in any part of the facility or by any of the staff.

The Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula (England) Regulations 2007 are designed to ensure that all types of infant formulae meet the nutritional needs of babies, while ensuring that breastfeeding is not undermined by the advertising, marketing and promotion of such products. The regulations include strict controls on the promotion, labelling and composition of infant and follow-on formula and set out clear guidance for infant formula manufacturers on how the regulations should be implemented.

Finally, there was a question about the National Infant Feeding Network, which I think I have dealt with. If there are any other issues, I will happily respond by letter. I shall leave enough time for the hon. Member for Glasgow Central to close the debate.

5.32 pm

Alison Thewliss: I thank the Minister and all the Members who have spoken today; the fact that they came along and participated is very much appreciated. I can see from Twitter that the debate has been getting a good and interesting response. I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for her contribution and for her support for the organisations in her area that clearly need it at this time. Where we have instances of good practice in breastfeeding in this country, we must absolutely support services in every way we can. It is absolutely true that if we lose the expertise and the service, that will set breastfeeding back hugely and it will be difficult to re-establish.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) spoke passionately about the support required, about the importance of the consistency of a

network and about the importance of having experienced midwife support. Experienced professional advice must be given, and it can be given only, whatever the circumstances, by seeing somebody physically. The answer cannot always be to do things online.

The Minister made the point about follow-on milk, commercialisation and the implementation of the code. I still think that we have issues. We can go further to implement the code; it is clear that the implication of some of the adverts for follow-on milk is that if women breastfeed for a year or two, their milk might not contain enough nutrients for their child. The opposite is true—it contains all the nutrients that are needed. That is exactly and specifically how nature has designed it for the healthy development of children.

I thank the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) for her contribution. She is hugely experienced and clearly very passionate about the subject, which is great. There are lots of obstacles in the way, not least women returning to work, and we need to be mindful of that and how best we can offer support. We need to make breastfeeding a normal process so that women do not feel embarrassed about asking to nip out to express milk or going to visit the nursery to feed their child.

I had a strange experience last summer as a volunteer at the Commonwealth games in Glasgow. It was the longest time I had been away from my baby at that point. I found it very difficult to explain to a room of strangers that I was nipping out for a couple of minutes to express milk and to ask whether I could hide it in the fridge somewhere. The situation is difficult and awkward; we need to be aware of that. Employers need to be aware of their obligations and how to make it easy for people, so that there is a private space where they will not be interrupted. People should not be offered a corner of a busy lunchroom and certainly never a toilet, because that is disgusting, frankly. We would not eat our lunch in the toilet, so we should not expect anyone else to.

The point about images and showing the world what breastfeeding looks like was interesting. The Minister commented that I had tweeted a picture at the weekend; someone came up to me yesterday and said, “That’s very daring of you!” and “That’s very brave of you!” To be honest, I did not think about it. I was holding a baby; there was nothing particularly to see in the picture other than me feeding my daughter. I thought, “What a strange reaction.” To me, it is completely natural; I do it almost without thinking.

I put the picture up to publicise the importance of the debate and National Breastfeeding Week. If we look at

the hashtag, we will see women doing similar across the internet just now. It is a process of normalising the activity—perhaps making a breastfeeding selfie something that people do, rather than draw back from. The issue is about making breastfeeding part of everyday life that people see all the time. If people do not see women breastfeeding, do not know anyone who breastfeeds and all they see are women feeding children with bottles, they will think that breastfeeding is odd and may not feel brave enough—because it will feel brave—to attempt it themselves.

We need to think carefully about how we normalise breastfeeding and how families, extended families and friends can best support women when they are doing it. My neighbours in Glasgow were keen to help their daughters and daughters-in-law by taking their babies overnight when they were tiny to give the mother a break. Although that is a wonderful thing to do to help, it will not help breastfeeding at all and will make it all the more difficult. We all need to think about our roles as part of families, the things we say and the way in which we say them—not say, “You must be exhausted”, but rather, “Can I make you a wee cup of tea?” It is about finding ways to support people rather than passing comment or using phrases that almost feel undermining at every turn. We need to think about that as much as we can.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. We are all finding our way with the new system that we have only just implemented in Westminster Hall. The wind-up speech should really be very brief—probably about two minutes. I think the hon. Lady has been going for more than five minutes, so she might want to bring her contribution to an end.

Alison Thewliss: Thank you, Mr Bone. I have found it difficult because the time is not what I expected it to be, so I was unsure about whether I was running out of time and how long I had. I thank the Minister for his contribution. I still think that there are lots of issues that we, as individual Members, ought to take up in this Parliament to support mothers in any way we can. I thank hon. Members again for attending.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered National Breastfeeding Week.

5.38 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Wednesday 24 June 2015

DEFENCE

NATO Assurance and Deterrence Efforts: UK Contributions

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):

Last year the UK was at the forefront of NATO's response to the deteriorating security situation in Europe, and since the summit in Wales last September, the UK has taken forward NATO's work to develop the readiness action plan. As part of NATO assurance measures the UK deployed 3,000 personnel during 2014 on exercise with eastern allies; we also based four RAF Typhoons in Lithuania as our contribution to NATO Baltic air policing mission. In 2015, we will deploy over 4,000 personnel on exercises with eastern allies and UK Typhoons will again undertake a Baltic air policing deployment.

In addition to our significant support to NATO assurance measures, we are also making a major contribution towards the very high readiness joint task

force (VJTF). The UK will lead NATO's VJTF in 2017 with a UK contribution numbering up to 3,000 personnel. This will include the brigade headquarters, armoured infantry and light role infantry battle groups plus communications, reconnaissance, intelligence capabilities, as well as combat support and logistic elements, which will ensure that the multi-national brigade can operate as a rapidly deployable and effective fighting force.

In addition to this, we are now offering two additional UK contributions.

First, I have offered a battle group of 1,000 personnel to the Polish-led VJTF in 2020. Our commitment demonstrates the leading role the UK is taking at the heart of NATO and it will assist in deepening our defence relationship with a key NATO ally. We expect a matched Polish contribution to be part of the UK-led VJTF in 2017.

Second, I have offered a deployment of a further four RAF Typhoon aircraft to enhance NATO Baltic air policing mission next year; 2016 will be the third year running that the UK has made such an offer, which demonstrates the importance of the longstanding Baltic air policing mission.

[HCWS53]

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WRITTEN STATEMENT

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